### Commentary for the REV

John W. Schoenheit

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Introduction

Many times I have been reading a verse in some version of the Bible and asked myself, “Why did they translate it that way?” The vast majority of the time, there is no way to know. Generally speaking, translators of the Bible are recognized scholars, and they translate without giving explanations for what their translation says. That is not our intention in the REV. There are different types of commentaries, but this commentary has two purposes: to give an explanation of why we translated as we did in the REV, and to explain biblical passages so the reader can better understand them.

Our multi-year goal is to produce a commentary that will be very helpful in Bible Study both from a text-critical standpoint (the transmission and meaning of the Greek text) and from an exegetical standpoint (setting forth major points of meaning in the biblical text). Our general pattern of commentary is that if our translation can be documented easily by logic or by looking at standard resources such as interlinear Bibles or Greek or Hebrew lexicons, then we do not take the time to comment on the verse. We comment when we feel that the translation would not be understood, or the understanding of a verse can be significantly clarified by commentary about it. If we feel that something has been adequately explained in another source, we often simply refer the reader to that source. I have found that when one understands the Bible, it becomes more fun to read and is easier to live by, and becomes a much more integral part of the person’s relationship with God.

John W. Schoenheit (August 15, 2009)

General Notes on the Translation Theory of the REV

1. We started by using the ASV (American Standard Version of 1901) as a base text, so that we would have a version for Christians to read as the REV develops. This is different from the developmental process for most translations, which are generally not available to the public until they are finished. We are modifying the ASV when we feel we have logical, grammatical, lexical, or textual reasons to do so. As the REV translation develops, we will rely more completely on our own translation of the Greek and Hebrew texts.

2. We intend to produce a version that is more literal, such as the KJV or NASB, and not produce a “dynamic equivalent” version, paraphrased version, etc. There will be times when a literal translation of the Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic will not make sense, and we will do our best to represent the meaning of the original in our translation.

3. We are willing to use multi-word phrases if we feel they are needed to carry the accurate sense of a word in the Greek or Hebrew text. For example, we translate the Greek word musterion as “sacred secret.”
4. We will ordinarily use the 27th edition of *Novum Testamentum Graece* edited by Nestle and Aland, and *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* as the Greek and Hebrew texts underlying our translation. However, we believe there are times when those works do not read as the original autograph did. A good example is John 1:18, where we believe that the Western text family, which reads, “only begotten son,” is original, not “only begotten God,” as the Alexandrian text family and *Novum Testamentum Graece* read.

5. Our mode of operation is to translate the text first, and as we translate to build a general lexical base that will influence other verses having the same vocabulary as the one we are working in. We do not build the lexical base first, but will build that base as we translate. We fully expect there to be some “back and forth” correction, i.e., as we translate verses through the years there will no doubt be a modification of some verses we have already translated.

6. We represent the same Greek (or Hebrew) words by the same English words whenever that makes the best sense. However, we recognize the existence of semantic range, homonymic usage, and linguistic sense, as well as the fact that case, gender, etc., often influences the meaning of the word. We do not intend to produce an awkward English version just to maintain an artificial relation to the Greek or Hebrew text. There will be cases when the same Greek or Hebrew word is translated different ways, and there will be cases where different Greek and Hebrew words will be translated by the same English word.

7. It is our philosophy that God wrote the original in a way that pleased Him, and we do best if we stick as close as possible to that. There are many versions of the Bible available on the market today, and each serves a purpose. The Version of the New Testament that we of Spirit & Truth Fellowship International are producing is a more literal version of the New Testament. The Bible is easy to understand in some parts (i.e., “do not steal;” Rom. 13:9), while other parts are much more complicated and require a broader knowledge of language, customs, history, etc. While many translators work to translate difficult material out of their versions to make them easier for beginning Christians, we intend to produce a more literal version and allowing the student to learn customs, culture, etc., directly from the text. That is also why we desire to produce this commentary. The commentary provides an explanation of the meaning of difficult verses.

• Many modern versions paraphrase the biblical text. We will do our best to avoid paraphrasing, fully realizing that the reader will have to be more educated in biblical language, figures of speech and customs to read and understand our version, but also realizing that same knowledge would be required to read the original text.

• Many modern versions simplify the vocabulary for easier reading. Our intention is to attempt to bring out the richness of the original, even if that means using a vocabulary that challenges some people. Understanding the Bible means growing in knowledge of many things, and vocabulary is one of them.

• Many modern versions make the Bible gender-neutralized. The Bible reflects the culture of the biblical times, which was much more male centered than our modern culture. Gender neutralizing removes the “feel” of the Biblical culture
from the biblical text. It is our belief that this eventually leads to a loss of understanding of the Bible itself. We intend to represent the gender that is in the original text, believing that, because it is God-breathed, there is value in translating the text as it was written.

- **Yahweh**, the name of God, has been translated “LORD” in many modern versions. We correct this back to **Yahweh**. There are many words that can be, and are, legitimately translated “lord.” To us, something is lost when the personal name of God is replaced with a title. Historically, God is always trying to get close to people, and people are always trying to push him away or distance themselves from him. Many examples of this exist in the Bible, from Moses being afraid at the burning bush, to the Israelites telling Moses that they did not want God speaking with them, to Peter telling Jesus to depart from him. The idea that Yahweh is too holy to speak is not from God, but from men, and it originated late in the history of Israel. In the end, it adds further distance between us and God. We intend to restore Yahweh to the text.

- There are some words in the Hebrew and Greek that have no English equivalent, and we believe that it best serves the interests of the Bible student to simply transliterate them from the Hebrew or Greek itself. An example is “Tartarus” in 2 Peter 2:4. Tartarus, a word taken from Greek mythology, was a prison for gods who displeased greater gods. As such, Tartarus is a fitting word to describe where God put the demons who sinned against Him at the time of the Flood. Translating it “hell” (KJV, NIV, NASB, ESV, etc.) misses the point, because many Christians believe that demons rule hell, they are not prisoners in it, and they come and go from it as they please. We say “Tartarus” and let the reader become educated, giving a wonderful look at the Bible and God’s truth.

8. We put in bold print the quotations of the Old Testament that appear in the New Testament, as the Companion Bible does. Commentators do not always agree on exactly what is a quotation from the Old Testament and what is not. And there are times when some commentators, E. W. Bullinger being one, call something a quotation when it is actually only a reference to the OT. We tried to be conservative, and call something a quotation only if we could reasonably document it as such.

9. We put in italics words that are not in the Greek text, as do the KJV, NASB, and original ASV. In the Greek language, certain omitted words are understood. For example, in a simple sentence the verb “is” is sometimes omitted, being understood by Greek speakers. We often put that verb in without putting it in italics. Similarly, Greek includes the gender in the noun, so we may say “he” or “she” in our version without a stand-alone pronoun in the Greek, drawing the gender clue from the context.

10. We put in brackets words or verses that were probably not in the original text, but the evidence about them is not completely conclusive at this time.

11. Prepositions: It is very difficult to maintain any consistency when translating prepositions due to their extremely flexible use. This is true in English also. For example, it is common for someone at a fast-food, drive-through restaurant such as McDonald’s to
hear the teller say, “Drive up to the next window.” Of course, cars do not drive “up,” and the next window is “forward,” not “up.” However, “forward” has become one of the uses of “up” in English. This is also true in Greek, and not recognizing the flexible nature of prepositions results in actually mistranslating and misunderstanding the text. The difficulty of maintaining constancy is exemplified by the word “wherefore” in the ASV, which is the translation of many Greek words; including tis, hopos, hothen, hoste, diate, dioper, dia touto, charin tinos, etc.
Matthew

Chapter 1

1:1. “a scroll.” For why there are four Gospels, see commentary on Mark 1:1, “gospel.”
1:6. The parenthesis is the figure of speech *epitrechon*, a form of parenthesis where the statement is not itself a complete thought (Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*).
1:16. “father.” The Greek is *anēr* (#435 ἀνήρ), and means “an adult human male.” *Anēr* is generally assumed to mean “husband” in this verse, but that cannot be the case. For one thing, the list of the three sets of 14 generations that go from Abraham to Christ (vs. 2-16), makes this impossible. If Joseph is the husband of Mary, there would only be 13 generations in the last list of “14 generations.” Also, the Aramaic text reads differently in this verse than it does in verse 19, and in verse 19 Joseph is unmistakably referred to as the “husband” of Mary. The difference in the vocabulary indicates a difference in the relationship.

The Gospel of Matthew contains the genealogy from David to Jesus via his mother Mary. In contrast, the Gospel of Luke contains the genealogy from David to Jesus via his adopted father, Joseph. There has been a lot of controversy about the genealogy of Jesus because at first reading, both Matthew 1:16 and Luke 3:23 seem to indicate a genealogy that comes through Joseph, which is confusing. For one thing, Joseph ends up with two different fathers, “Jacob” (Matt. 1:16) and “Heli” (Luke 3:23), and Mary, who is the blood link between David and Jesus, ends up having no genealogy in the Bible.

Different scholars have tried to explain how both genealogies can be Joseph’s. For example, some say that Joseph himself was adopted as a child, and thus had both a “natural” genealogy and an “adopted” genealogy. Others say that both genealogies are Joseph’s, but the contradictions between them are simply a matter of poor record keeping in those days. Other scholars assert that both genealogies are about Joseph, but the people in them had multiple names, so that the two genealogies actually refer to the same people. All these theories, and more, have been set forth to explain why Joseph seems to have two genealogies in the Bible, but they all have serious problems, which is why there are so many different theories and why none of them have been widely accepted.

As we study the genealogies, it becomes clear that Luke contains that of Joseph. Luke’s genealogy shows the ancestry of Jesus coming through King David via his son Nathan (Luke 3:31). Nathan, who is not as well known as Solomon, was one of the four children that David fathered by Bathsheba (1 Chron. 3:5). Nothing is known about Nathan’s life except that he did have children and descendants who then multiplied in Israel, and so he is mentioned in Zechariah 12:12 as having a clan. The genealogy in Luke reads in a straightforward manner from God through Adam to Joseph the supposed father of Jesus, ending with Jesus. More evidence that Luke contains Joseph’s genealogy is that Mary is never mentioned, but the name “Joseph” appears in it three times. It often happened in the biblical culture (and modern cultures as well) that children were named after an ancestor (which was why Zachariah’s relatives wanted to name his child after him; Luke 1:59), so the fact that two ancestors in Luke’s genealogy have the name “Joseph,” but none do in the genealogy in Matthew is good support for Luke containing Joseph’s genealogy.
In spite of the fact that Luke seems to give the genealogy of Joseph in a very clear and straightforward manner, some scholars assert that the genealogy in Luke is Mary’s, not Joseph’s. The main reason they say Luke has Mary’s genealogy is that they believe, and rightly so, that Mary should have a genealogy in the Bible. They then assert that because Luke says that Joseph “was thought” to be the father of Jesus (Luke 3:23), Mary is in the genealogy in Luke even though she is never named in it. But the fact is that Mary is not named in Luke, and arbitrarily trying to make Luke contain Mary’s genealogy just so Mary will have a genealogy in the Bible is not the way to solve a biblical problem. Scholars recognize this, which is why that “solution” to the genealogical problem is not widely accepted. It seems clear that if Luke did have Mary’s genealogy, as many believe, that Luke would mention Mary and not have a cryptic statement that Joseph was the supposed father of Jesus. We believe that the Gospel of Luke can be taken at face value, and that it records the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph.

Mary does have a genealogy in the Bible, and it is in the Gospel of Matthew. However, it can seem like Matthew records the genealogy of Joseph. However, if Matthew’s genealogy is about Joseph, then there are some significant problems in the biblical text. One is that Joseph would then have two contradictory genealogies in the Bible while Mary had no genealogy. An even larger problem, however, would a mathematical one. If Joseph is counted as the “husband” of Mary (Matt. 1:16), there are only 13 generations from the carrying away to Babylon to Christ, and not 14 generations, as Matthew 1:17 says there are: “So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, and from David to the carrying away to Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the carrying away to Babylon to the Christ are fourteen generations.”

The first set of 14 generations, from Abraham to David, are: 1) Abraham, 2) Isaac, 3) Jacob, 4) Judah, 5) Perez, 6) Hezron, 7) Ram, 8) Amminadab, 9) Nahshon, 10) Salmon, 11) Boaz, 12) Obed, 13) Jesse, 14) David.

The second set of 14 generations, from David to the carrying away to Babylon, are:

When it come to the last list of 14 generations, however, if we count the generations as they are translated in most Bibles, there are only 13 generations although Scripture says there are 14 generations. 1) Shealtiel, 2) Zerubbabel, 3) Abiud, 4) Eliakim, 5) Azor, 6) Zadok, 7) Akim, 8) Eliud, 9) Eleazar, 10) Mattan, 11) Jacob, 12) Joseph (the husband of Mary), 13) Jesus.

The problem with the list is obvious and has been pointed out by many commentators: it has only 13 generations, not 14 like Scripture says. Some scholars have tried to solve the problem by doing such things as counting names twice, but that hardly does justice to the text.

It was very important that Matthew portray a pattern of three sets of 14 generations. We know that because if we count the actual generations, there were more than just 42 people (3 times 14) from Abraham to Christ. To make the pattern fit, some people had to be left out of the Matthew’s list. When the genealogy in Matthew is compared with the other genealogies in the Bible, it is clear that there are people missing from Matthew’s genealogy. For example, in Matthew 1:8, between Jehoram and Uzziah, there are actually three unmentioned generations. Jehoram begat Ahaziah (2 Kings 8:25),
Matthew 9

who begat Joash (also called Jehoash; 2 Kings 11:2, 21), who begat Amaziah (2 Kings 12:21). These three names do not appear in Matthew, and there are some other unmentioned names as well.

Although there are some names missing from Matthew’s list, it was not essential to give every name in a biblical genealogy of kings. Many genealogical lists in the Bible have names missing for various reasons. What was important to Matthew is that he set forth the genealogy of Jesus in a pattern of three sets of fourteen generations from Abraham to Christ. Therefore, to have only 13 names in the last set of 14 tells us something is very wrong. But if we closely examine the list, we see that it does have 14 names, and thus 14 generations if each name represents a generation.

Mary is not usually counted in the list of 14 because she and Joseph are usually thought of as husband and wife and thus in the same generation. However, there is good evidence that “Joseph” is not only the name of Mary’s husband, but also the name of her father as well. That would not be unusual in the biblical culture, because Joseph was a common name. For example, in the Roman Catholic Bible, which includes the Apocrypha, there are 16 different people named Joseph, not counting Mary’s father, who would make 17.

If the “Joseph” in Matthew 1:16 was the father of Mary, not her husband, then there would be 14 generations from Babylon to Christ, just like Scripture says there is: 1) Shealtiel, 2) Zerubbabel, 3) Abiud, 4) Eliakim, 5) Azor, 6) Zadok, 7) Akim, 8) Eliud, 9) Eleazar, 10) Mattan, 11) Jacob, 12) Joseph (the father of Mary), 13) Mary, 14) Jesus.

That Matthew contains Mary’s genealogy and Luke contains Joseph’s genealogy makes sense because Mary’s genealogy in Matthew does not mention Joseph, her husband, who was not part of her genealogy anyway, nor does Joseph’s genealogy in Luke mention Mary, who had nothing to do with his genealogy. In Mary’s genealogy in Matthew, four other women are mentioned, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and “Uriah’s wife,” emphasizing the role that women play in a genealogy. Joseph’s genealogy in Luke does not include any women, but does include two of his ancestors who were also named Joseph.

There is still one important thing to resolve. Most versions translate Matthew 1:16 to say that Joseph was the “husband” of Mary, not the “father” of Mary. However, we believe that “husband” is a mistranslation. The Greek word translated “husband” is aner, and means an adult male. Usually when aner is used with the phrase “of [a woman’s name], such as in “Joseph, the aner of Mary,” it refers to the woman’s husband. But there is good evidence that in this verse aner should be translated “father.” First, translating it “husband” creates a contradiction in the Word of God because then there are not 14 generations from Babylon to Christ. Second, it creates a confusing situation in the Word because both Matthew and Luke then refer to Joseph’s genealogy, such that Joseph ends up with two different fathers.

Thankfully, the Aramaic text of Matthew has good evidence that Matthew 1:16 should read “father.” In the Greek text, both Matthew 1:16 and 1:19 use the word aner (“man” or “husband”). Matthew 1:19 clearly refers to Joseph as the “husband” of Mary because it speaks of Joseph thinking of divorcing her. However, the Aramaic text of Matthew does not use the same word in Matthew 1:16 and 1:19, but has two different words, and thus makes a distinction between the two men. In Matthew 1:16, the Aramaic word is gavra, which means “mighty man,” “father,” or “husband,” while in Matthew
Matthew 1:19 the word is *bala*, which is “man” or “husband.” Thus the Aramaic text preserves the truth that there is a difference between the “Joseph” of verse 16, the “mighty man” of Mary, and the “Joseph” of verse 19, the “husband” of Mary.

Once we realize that “Joseph” is the name of both the father and the husband of Mary, the Word of God fits together perfectly. Both the genealogies of Mary and Joseph are in the Bible so that everyone could see they were both descendants of David and thus Jesus was indeed, “the Son of David.” Scripture also shows in other places that both Joseph and Mary are from David (Joseph: Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:27; 2:4. Mary: Acts 2:30; Rom. 1:3). Luke contains the genealogy of Jesus via his adopted father, Joseph, and never mentions Mary, who was not part of Joseph’s genealogy. Matthew contains the genealogy of Jesus through his mother Mary, and never mentions her husband Joseph. Joseph has two ancestors also named Joseph in his genealogy, while four other women are included in Mary’s genealogy. Last but not least, the three sets of fourteen generations mentioned in Matthew are all complete when we realize Joseph in Matthew 1:16 is Mary’s father.

In closing, it should be mentioned that each of the Four Gospels emphasizes a different aspect of Christ’s life. Matthew portrays Jesus as the King, Mark as the Servant, Luke as the Man, and John as the Son of God. Thus it perfectly fits that Matthew traces Jesus’ royal bloodline and emphasizes Abraham who was promised the land and David the king, continuing the royal line down through David’s son Solomon. Luke, on the other hand, emphasizes the human side of Jesus, including being adopted by Joseph, and records his genealogy all the way back to Adam, the first human being.

“Mary.” The first time her name occurs in the NT. Here she is said to be of royal birth, and her father’s (and thus her) line is traced from none other than King David himself. Yet there is another, unspoken truth that needs to be weighed. Her “relative” was Elizabeth, who was a daughter of Aaron, the Priest (Luke 1:5). Elizabeth had to be related to Mary through Mary’s mother, who may have even been the sister of Elizabeth’s father (Edersheim, *Life and Times*, book II, p. 149). Thus, in Mary we see the meeting of the King and the Priest, Jesus himself being the ultimate fulfillment of those offices.

1:18. “birth.” The Greek noun is *genesis* (#1078 γένεσις), and strictly speaking it means “origin, source, or beginning” (*Liddell and Scott Greek-English Lexicon*). It is from the verb, *ginomai* (#1096 γίνομαι; pronounced gin’-o-may), which means to become, to come into existence, begin to be. We get our English word “genesis” from *genesis*. *Genesis* also became used for that which flows from what is begun, hence it was used to express the concept of “nature,” or “natural” (cp. James 1:23; 3:6). Since we usually think of the birth of a person as his or her “beginning,” *genesis* was used by the Greeks of birth. However, there is a much more accurate Greek verb for “birth,” and that is *gennaō* (#1080 γεννάω; pronounced ghenn-ah’-o), and the nouns associated with it are *gennētos* (#1084 γεννητός; pronounced ghenn-nay-tos’, meaning “born”) and *gennēsis* (#1083 γέννησις; pronounced ghenn’-nay-sis; meaning, “a birth”). The two words, *genesis* and *gennēsis*, are very similar, which has led to some confusion in Matthew 1:18, because although the earliest and best Greek texts have *genēsis*, origin, some later manuscripts, have *gennēsis*, birth.

Textual scholars have concluded that the most original reading of the Greek text of Matthew 1:18 is *genesis*, meaning, origin or birth. Bruce Metzger writes:
“Both γένεσις [genesis] and γέννησις [gennēsis] mean “birth,” but the former also means “creation,” “generation,” and “genealogy” (compare 1.1), whereas the latter means more strictly “engendering”… In the present passage not only do the earlier representatives of several text-types support γένεσις [genesis], but the tendency of copyists would have been to substitute a word of more specialized meaning for one that had been used in a different sense in verse 1, particularly since γέννησις [gennēsis] corresponds more nearly with the verb γεννᾶν [gennan] used so frequently in the previous genealogy.” (A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament).

Although the substitution of gennēsis for genesis in some Greek texts (which led to genesis being the Greek word in the text from which the King James Version was translated) may have been completely accidental, it might also have been purposeful. Trinitarian scribes may have been uncomfortable with the idea that Jesus’ “origin” was when God impregnated Mary, and so might have substituted what was to them a much clearer word, gennēsis, which would then clearly make only Jesus’ birth, not his real “beginning,” be the subject of Matthew 1:18. The word genesis points to the fact that God impregnating Mary not only led to Jesus’ birth, but was in fact his “origin” or “beginning” in the flesh. He had been in the mind of God from before the foundation of the world, but did not exist except as part of God’s plan. When God impregnated Mary, Jesus “began” in reality, not just in the mind of God.

“by the Holy Spirit.” The Greek reads literally, “of Holy Spirit,” which in this context is the genitive of origin, thus the translation “by.” Mary was impregnated “by” or “from” God. “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8.

The Bible has many names that refer to our One God, who is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of the Hebrew names for God are: Yahweh, Elohim, El, Elyon, Adonai, and Shaddai. In the New Testament He is referred to as Theos (God). Furthermore, the attributes that are used as names for God include: “the Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:18; Rev 1:8. Greek is pantokrator); “the Ancient of Days” (Dan. 7:9, 13, 22); “the Blessed” (Mark 14:61); “Father” (Ps. 68:5; Eph. 1:2); “Judge” (Judg. 11:27); “King” (Ps. 5:2; 47:6; 1 Tim. 1:17); “Lord of hosts” (1 Sam. 1:11; 17:45); “the Mighty One” (Gen. 49:24; Ps. 132:2; Isa. 1:24); and “the Rock” (Deut. 32:18; Isa. 30:29; Hab. 1:12). Moreover, God is holy (Isa. 6:3; John 17:11), so He was also known as “the Holy,” which is usually translated in English Bibles as “the Holy One” (2 Kings 19:22; Job 6:10; Ps. 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Isa. 1:4; 29:23; Luke 1:49; John 17:11). Sometimes “Spirit” is combined with “holy,” and God is called “the Holy Spirit,” pneuma hagion. In fact, holiness and “spirit” are so essential to God that it would be strange if “the Holy Spirit” were not one of His names. Thus, in Acts 5:3, Peter told Ananias, “You have lied to the Holy Spirit,” whom he identified in verse 4 as “God.”

Every name of God emphasizes a different aspect of His character. Calling God “the Ancient of Days” magnifies His age and timelessness; calling him “the Blessed” magnifies the blessings He gives and receives; calling Him “the Rock” magnifies His stability and invulnerability. Similarly, since “spirit” is used of invisible power, when God is called “the Spirit,” or “the Holy Spirit,” it emphasizes His invisible power at
work. The Gospels say that Mary was impregnated by “the Holy Spirit,” (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35), because that name emphasized God’s power at work. That “the Holy Spirit” is a name for God and not a separate being is why Jesus is always called “the Son of God” and never “the Son of the Holy Spirit.” There is no reason to make “the Holy Spirit” into a separate “Person.” We do not make any of the rest of God’s names into other “Persons,” and the Jews never made “the Spirit” in the Old Testament into another person. There is one God, and He has many names. Every use of “the Holy Spirit” can be explained as being a name for God without once making “the Holy Spirit” into another “Person” [we must, however, differentiate between “the Holy Spirit,” which is another name for God, and “the holy spirit,” which is the gift of God’s nature that He gives to believers; cp. Acts 2:38]. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: Usages of ‘Spirit’].

Here in Matthew 1:18 there is not a definite article before “Holy Spirit.” The preposition εκ is before the phrase. In Greek, if a preposition precedes a noun, the noun can be definite without specifically adding the definite article; the subject and context are the final arbiter. Daniel Wallace writes in Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics (p. 247): “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.” A. T. Robertson writes: “...the article is not the only means of showing that a word is definite. ...The context and history of the phrase in question must decide. ...[As for prepositional phrases], these were also considered definite enough without the article.” Robertson then cites some examples that use εκ (Grammar of the Greek New Testament, pp. 790-792).

1:19. “husband.” The Greek word is ἀνήρ (#435 ἀνήρ), and generally refers to an adult male. It can refer to a man in contrast to a woman (Acts 5:1; 8:12); a man in his role as a husband (Mark 10:12; Luke 2:36; Acts 5:9; thus sometimes the translation “husband” is acceptable); and a man in contrast to a boy (1 Cor. 13:11). Sometimes it was used universally when both men and women were present, “men” being inclusive of men and women because men were more visible in the culture and women were sheltered (Luke 11:31; James 1:20). Similarly, “man” was used in a way equivalent to “someone” or “a person” even if there was no specific need to refer to the sex of the person (Luke 9:38; John 1:30; Rom. 4:8). Matthew 1:19 is a case where culturally “man” (or “husband”) is used because in the conservative Eastern biblical culture to which Joseph and Mary belonged, a betrothal (engagement) was as strong as the marriage, so strong, in fact, that it had to be dissolved by divorce, as this verse makes clear. Thus, in the eyes of the people, Joseph was the “husband” of Mary, even though the two had not yet been through the marriage ceremony. This verse is a case where trying to translate ἀνήρ as “fiancée” or “betrothed” causes problems because then the reader is left wondering why a divorce was necessary to break the engagement. It is better to translate the Greek more literally and then learn the biblical culture, which promotes a better understanding of the entire Bible.

“and yet.” From Joseph’s point of view, his betrothed had unfaithfully slept with another man while still out of wedlock. He is now facing his legal options, out of his just nature desiring to fulfill the Law, and yet also desiring not to shame Mary. His options would be to either institute a lawsuit against Mary or issue her a certificate of divorce, dismissing her quietly. According to the Law, if a husband finds his new wife has had premarital sex, she should be stoned (Deut. 22:20-21). Joseph does not seem to be afraid that Mary will be stoned to death, however, instead he wished to save her from “public
disgrace.” The reason for this is that by this time, death by stoning could not be accomplished in court (cp. John 18:31: “It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death”). As Hendriksen explains: “This law had been modified by so many man-made restrictions that this possibility could be safely dismissed, [yet, instituting a lawsuit] would nevertheless have exposed Mary to public disgrace and scorn, the very thing which Joseph wanted by all means to avoid.” The only other option for Joseph is what is described in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. He could quietly issue her a certificate of divorce because he “found indecency” in her, and Mary could leave him and “become another man’s wife” (24:1, 2). Joseph wanted to allow her to go quietly and marry whom he presumed to be the man she had slept with. This would preserve her from public disgrace and, technically, fulfill the righteousness of the law prescribed in Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

1:20. “Look.” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού). The second-person singular aorist middle imperative of eidon (εἶδον; “to see, to look at, to perceive) is ἰδοῦ (note the special accent mark on the “u”). However, when idou has an acute accent (ἰδοῦ) as it does in this verse and many others in the New Testament, it is used as a demonstrative particle to draw our attention to something. To be strictly literal we would stick with translations that retain the meaning of seeing something (“Look!”; “Behold!”; “See!”). But ἰδοῦ was used more idiomatically than literally, and thus would be heard by anyone listening as an attention grabber appropriate to the context, not a command to actually look at something. We do the same thing in English. If someone is being accused of being somewhere he was not supposed to be, he may well say, “Look, I told you I was home, and I was.” In this case, the man does not expect us to see anything just because he said “Look.” In the same way, idou should be translated in ways that are appropriate to the context. Thus it is best translated “Look” if the context is visual, “Listen” if the context is audible, “Pay attention,” etc. It often introduces something new or unusual, or something that requires special attention. In that light, there are contexts in which “consider” would be an appropriate translation (cp. Matt. 10:16).

As with any exclamation meant to get people’s attention, the force and meaning of the exclamation idou would be expressed by the tone and volume of the way it was spoken. Thus there are times such as here in Matthew 1:20 when “Look!” is clearly meant to forcefully grab our attention—an angel just showed up with a message about the birth of the forerunner to the Messiah, and we had better pay attention. On the other hand there are times when the context dictates that it would have been used with less force but still deep meaning. For example, in Matthew 19:27, Peter is reminding the Lord that he and the other apostles have left everything to follow him. It is a gentle reminder, so a harsh attention grabber such as “Pay attention!” would not be an appropriate translation in that context, but perhaps “consider,” or even “remember” (cp. Matt. 28:20). Often the punctuation associated with idou can help express the meaning, there being a difference in force between, “Look,...” and “Look!”

Many translations of the English Bible (cp. NIV, NRSV, HCSB) omit the word, usually on the logic that it is based on an underlying Semitic expression and does not bring meaning to the subject. We disagree, and note that BDAG says that it is “frequently omitted in translation, but with some loss of meaning.” In fact, we agree with Bullinger (Figures of Speech Used in the Bible) that it is the figure asterisms (“indicating;” related to “asterisk”), and calls attention to the subject. This can be seen by simply noting that it
is not used in every speech or before every interesting or important event, but is carefully placed and when it does occur it always is appropriate.

“favorably accept.” At this point Joseph would naturally have presumed his wife had been unfaithful. Since Joseph was “just” (v. 19), he would be obligated to put her away and not take her to himself after she had been “defiled” (Deut. 24:4; see entry on “and yet” Matt. 1:19). In this context the angel appears and tells Joseph not to fear to paralambanō (παραλαμβάνω) his wife. This word is usually translated “take” or “receive,” but can also have the meaning of accept favorably: “Sometimes the emphasis lies not so much on receiving or taking over, as on the fact that the word implies agreement or approval, accept” (BDAG). Hence, the angel is assuring Joseph that he may accept his wife, not fearing any defilement. Additionally, the word would come with the strong connotation of “taking to one’s self” or receiving Mary into his house (as in v. 24).

“the Holy Spirit.” “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8. In this case, there is not a definite article before “Holy Spirit” due to the preposition ek is before the phrase making the definite article unnecessary. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: Usages of Spirit]

1:21. “Jesus.” The angel would have spoken to Mary in Aramaic, and thus would have said the Aramaic name of Jesus, “Yehoshua,” which means “Yahweh is salvation.” Thus the angel explains by saying, “for, he will save his people from their sins.”

“it is he.” This is emphatic in the Greek; “he” is put as the very last word in the sentence for emphasis. That would only be confusing in English, so we would have to use capital letters or bold letters. We might say, “Because HE will save his people from their sins.” We place a little more emphasis on it by saying, “it is he,” (cp. NASB).

1:22. “with the result that.” The Greek reads hina plerōthē (ἵνα πληρώθῃ), which is the conjunction hina followed by the verb for “fulfilled” in the subjunctive mood. Although the conjunction hina can have several different meanings, in general it either introduces a purpose clause (“so that,” “in order that”) or a result clause (“with the result that,” “resulting in”). The fact that the hina can be translated either way leaves the door wide open to the theology of the translator. If the translators believe that God is totally in control of what people do and the events of history, then they use “so that” or “in order that.” Thus the BBE (Bible in Basic English) says, “Now all this took place so that the word of the Lord by the prophet might come true.” In other words according to that translation, the events surrounding the birth of Christ happened the way they did “so that,” or for the purpose of, fulfilling the Old Testament prophecy. But we do not believe that is the correct way to think about history and man’s freewill decisions.

To us, God works with our free will and in history such that what we do by our free will fulfills what He foretold. No person is forced to act in such a way that Scripture is fulfilled, rather God is so knowledgeable and skillful that what happens fulfills what He has written, not the opposite. God is so skillful and knowledgeable that what happens results in His Word being fulfilled, not that He writes and then forces events to occur “so that” His Word is fulfilled.

“Yahweh.” “Yahweh” is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote a Gospel in
Hebrew and used the name Yahweh, so we have put it in the REV [See commentary on Matthew 3:3).

1:23. Quoted from Isaiah 7:14. This quotation is closer to the Septuagint than the Hebrew text. The word in the Hebrew text which gets translated “virgin” means “young woman,” not specifically “virgin.” That is why even very spiritual Jews like Joseph and Mary were not expecting a virgin birth. When the angel told Mary that she was going to give birth to the Messiah, she was very surprised that it was going to be a virgin birth. She said to the angel, “How will this be, seeing I am not knowing [not currently having sex with] a man” (Luke 1:34).

When the Hebrew text was translated into Greek about 250 BC, making the version we know as the Septuagint, the translators translated the Hebrew word almah (עַלְמָה #5959), “young woman,” as parthenos (#3933 παρθένος). The Hebrew word almah refers to a “young woman” but not necessarily a virgin. Similarly, there is good evidence in the Greek literature that the word parthenos does not specifically refer to the virginity of the woman or man. Rather it refers more to their age as being young (parthenos with the masculine pronoun refers to a young man). The Liddell & Scott Greek-English Lexicon gives references when parthenos was used of young married women. Also, some scholars say that if strictly “virgin” was meant, then parthenois would have been used instead of parthenos (see note in The Source New Testament by A. Nyland). That the Septuagint read parthenos in Isaiah 7:14, but the Jewish people did not think their Messiah would be born of a virgin, is quite conclusive evidence that the word parthenos did not have to refer to a virgin, even though it could refer to one.

Mary was certainly a young woman, thus an almah and a parthenos, and she was also a virgin. We know she was a virgin, not from the meaning of the word parthenos, but from the clear statements in both Matthew and Luke, and Mary is referred to as a parthenos in both Matthew and Luke.

Many commentators have written about Isaiah 7:14 and how the vocabulary and the context are not about a virgin birth but about a birth that would occur in Isaiah’s time, and that is true. Easily available commentaries include J. P. Lange’s Commentary and the commentary on the Old Testament by Keil and Delitzsch. English versions such as the Revised Standard Version read “young woman” instead of “virgin” in Isaiah 7:14, and that is the proper way to translate the Hebrew text (other versions that read “young woman” include: The Complete Bible: An American Translation; the Complete Jewish Bible; the Moffatt Bible; NEB; and NET).

We can tell from Matthew that the prophecy in Isaiah, which referred to a young woman, had a second fulfillment in Jesus Christ. We must remember that it is God who prophetically tells the future, and God can shape His prophecies so that they fit multiple situations, even if unbelievers or over-zealous Christians deny a double fulfillment. Interestingly, unbelievers usually agree that the prophecy was fulfilled in Isaiah’s time and deny the fulfillment in Matthew, while over-zealous Christians deny the fulfillment in Isaiah’s time and invent reasons why the only fulfillment is with the birth of Christ.

When it comes to Isaiah 7:14, it is like Hosea 11:1 in that it involved two fulfillments. What we should be aware of when it comes to prophecies that are fulfilled twice, is that once it is fulfilled the first time, the only way people can see a second fulfillment is if God tells them about it, like He does with Isaiah 7:14 or Hosea 11:1. A

It fits perfectly within the scope and purpose of the Book of Isaiah that the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 would have a second fulfillment in the birth of Jesus Christ, because Isaiah and his children are specifically said to be “signs” (Isa. 8:18). Just as the prophet Isaiah foretold the birth of a son who would be born in his own time and be associated with the deliverance of Judah, so the prophecy also was fulfilled by a son who would be born centuries later who was associated with the ultimate deliverance of Judah.

As the New Testament makes clear in Matthew and Luke, Mary was impregnated by God. In fact, the very reason Isaiah is quoted in this context is because it is the second and ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah. That is why Matthew 1:22 opens with, “Now all this happened to fulfill” the words of Isaiah. If Mary’s having a son did not fulfill Isaiah, then it would not have been appropriate to quote it as Matthew quoted it. Matthew 1:22 shows that Mary’s being impregnated by God fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14.

“Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδοὺ), and it is used to get our attention. Although the literal meaning of *idou* relates to visual perception (seeing), it was used idiomatically, and thus should be translated in ways appropriate to the context, such as “look,” “listen,” “pay attention,” “consider,” “remember,” etc. Many translations of the English Bible (cp. NIV, NRSV, HCSB) do not translate *idou*, but in doing so miss the meaning that it is bringing to the context. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 ("Look!).

“Immanuel.” One of the names of Jesus Christ is “Immanuel,” which can be translated as, “God with us” or “God is with us.” We know that God was with us in Jesus Christ, and Jesus himself said that if one had seen him, he had seen the Father. Names are often symbolic, the meaning of the name importing some characteristic that God wants us to know. When Jesus is called the Lion of Judah, the Lamb, or the tent peg (Zech. 10:4), God is importing characteristics about Jesus that He wants us to know. When it comes to Immanuel, God wants us to know that through Jesus Christ, God was with us. Not with us literally, but acting powerfully through His Son, just as 2 Corinthians 5:19 indicates: “That God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself.” It is important to read exactly what was written: God was in Christ, not God was Christ.

Symbolism in names can be seen throughout the Bible, it is not something that is unique to Jesus Christ. Many people were given names that would cause great problems if they were believed literally. Are we to believe that Elijah was “God Jehovah,” or that Bithiah, a daughter of Pharaoh, was the sister of Jesus because her name is “daughter of Jehovah”? Are we to believe that Dibri, not Jesus, was the “Promise of Jehovah,” or that Eliab was the real Messiah since his name means “My God [is my] father?” Of course not. It would be a great mistake to claim that the meaning of a name proves a literal truth. We know that Jesus’ name is very significant—it communicates the truth that, as the Son of God and as the image of God, God is with us in Jesus, but the name does not make Jesus God. For more on this point, see Graezer, Lynn, and Schoenheit, *One God & One Lord*, and the website: BiblicalUnitarian.com. Also, A. Buzzard and C. Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*; Patrick Navas, *Divine Truth or Human Tradition*; D. Snedeker, *Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals.*
(which translated, means, “God with us”). The parenthesis is the figure of speech *epitrechon*, a form of parenthesis where the statement is not itself a complete thought (Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*).

1:24. “took to himself.” The word is *paralambanō* (#3880 παραλαμβάνω), and here the emphasis is on Joseph receiving Mary into his home, taking her as his wife. However, see also the entry on “favorably accept” in Matthew 1:20. The phrase, “and took to himself his wife” does not mean that Joseph married Mary that very morning. It simply means that he immediately started the process by which he would be married.

Chapter 2

2:1. “Now after Jesus was born.” This phrase should have done away with any thought that the magi belong in any manger scene, or are associated with the night of the birth of Christ in any way. The Magi did not even arrive in Jerusalem, much less Bethlehem, until after Jesus was born. They were not present with Joseph, Mary, and the shepherds the night of Jesus’ birth. The verb “born” is *gennaō* (#1080 γεννάω) and it is an aorist participle in the Greek text, meaning, “having been born,” which is how Young’s Literal Translation of the Bible translates it. In English we would usually not say, “Jesus, having been born,” but would more likely say, “after Jesus was born” as does the HCSB, ESV, NASB, NET, NIV, NKJ, and NRSV. We learn from history and Herod’s killing the children up to 2 years old that the “after” is likely close to a year and a half after.

“Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. Although the literal meaning of *idou* relates to visual perception (seeing), it was used idiomatically, and thus should be translated in ways appropriate to the context, such as “look,” “listen,” “pay attention,” “take notice,” “consider,” “remember,” etc. Many translations of the English Bible (cp. NIV, NRSV, HCSB) do not translate *idou*, but in doing so miss the meaning that it is bringing to the context. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“Magi.” The Greek word *magoi*, correctly translated as “Magi,” (Matt. 2:1, NIV) is a plural proper noun referring to people of a specific religious group that existed in the Ancient Near East, most specifically the area of ancient Media and Persia. By the time of Christ, that area was the country of Parthia, which is north and east of Israel. Much has been written in encyclopedias and Bible dictionaries about their origin, history, and beliefs, so that need not be repeated here, however, it is important to know that at least some Magi were looking for a Messiah who would conquer darkness and restore justice in the world.

The NASB and NIV are two modern versions that say “Magi,” while other modern versions retain the designation “Wise Men” (KJV, ESV, NRSV), came from the East to see Jesus after he was born. Magi, especially their leaders and priests, were considered to be wise and even to have occult powers, so the translation “Wise Men” might at first seem to be a fitting translation, but it is far too broad a term to communicate the meaning of the word “magoi.” After all, there were many wise men in the ancient world, just as there are today, whereas the Magi were a specific group. A good comparison might be if Catholic Cardinals from Rome came to visit Jesus but we only knew them as, “Good Men from the West.” The designation might be true, but it would
not give us important and accurate information about them. The title “Wise Men” does not tell us who the Magi were, but their proper title does. Similarly, calling them “kings,” as in the song verse, “We three kings from orient are…,” only confuses the record. They were not kings.

Perhaps the most important reason to refer to these men by the name “Magi” is so we can see their relation to the religious group that was at one time led and instructed by Daniel. In the late 500’s BC (Jerusalem was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, and Daniel was made ruler shortly after that) Daniel was made ruler over the Magi, although this is not as clear as it could be because the Book of Daniel says “Magicians,” and Daniel is referred to as “chief of the Magicians” (Dan. 4:9; 5:11; cp. 2:48; NIV). Although there is no proof for it outside the Bible, it seems certain that Daniel instructed the leaders of the Magi about the Jewish origin of the true Messiah.

As the centuries passed after the birth of Christ, the true knowledge about the Magi was replaced by superstition and tradition, and this has persisted in spite of the fact that it contradicts what is clearly written in Scripture. For example, the Magi did not follow a star to Bethlehem. No super-bright, westward traveling celestial phenomena appeared in the sky and went from Parthia to Bethlehem. The “star” they saw was not an unusual celestial object, but a unique occurrence of planetary conjunctions and appearances that, viewed by themselves and considered individually, would not have grabbed anyone’s attention—which explains why only the Magi, diligent observers of the heavens, showed up in Judea asking where the new king had been born. We have to keep in mind that in a culture in which a substantial part of the population lived in tents or spent a lot of time out of doors, any unusual event in the heavens got a lot of attention. The fact that there was no such attention at the time of Christ is good evidence that to an untrained observer, the heavenly events were normal.

These Magi were astronomers, and it seems quite certain that the “star” they saw was a series of celestial events, including stars, planets, and conjunctions, especially involving the “king planet” Jupiter (cp. The Star that Astonished the World by Earnest Martin, and Jesus Christ Our Promised Seed by Victor Wierwille). Before telescopes were invented, planets, stars, novas, and comets were all called “stars,” and before the invention of modern devices for measuring their movement, ancient astronomers tracked the timing and position of the stars by when they were first visible over the horizon. We know the Magi used this technique because it was a usual procedure, and also by what they said when they reached Jerusalem: “For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him” (Matt. 2:2 ESV). The ESV does a superb job of translating the phrase “when it rose.” The Magi were watching the stars and noting their relation to points on the horizon, to each other, and to the constellations in which they appeared. Eventually they saw patterns that convinced them the Messiah had been born (see, “in its rising” below).

It is almost certain that the Magi traveled to Jerusalem by joining a trading caravan that was heading in that direction. It was unsafe to travel in small groups, especially carrying valuables across the international border between the enemy countries of Rome and Parthia. We do not know how long the journey took, but it would have taken at least a month and maybe several (Parthia itself is hundreds of miles across, and we do not know exactly where they started their journey).
Also, the Bible does not say how many Magi came to see Jesus. Tradition says three, but that idea comes from the three kinds of gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These gifts were all fitting for a king, and each could easily be sold or bartered, so they would greatly help Joseph and his new family. It is not likely that each Magi individually brought “a gift,” like we would bring “a gift” to a birthday party. The three gifts would have been presented as a collective offering from the Magi who made the journey and from the people they represented back in Parthia, who put together the gift. There were almost certainly many more than three Magi who made the trip. For one thing, the purpose of the trip was to pay homage to the long-awaited Messiah, and many devout people would have wanted to be part of that event. Furthermore, the trip was long and dangerous, and it was standard procedure in those days to travel with a large number of people for protection.

Another good reason to believe there were more than three Magi is that when they arrived in Jerusalem, King Herod and “all Jerusalem” were disturbed at their coming (Matt. 2:3). To fully appreciate this, we need to remember that Herod and Jerusalem were not disturbed when, about a year and a half earlier, shepherds announced that they had seen angels and that the Messiah had been born (the chronology of the year and a half is explained in the books by Martin and Wierwille mentioned earlier, and is why Herod killed all the babies two years old and under). When, however, a group of Magi arrived from Parthia and wanted to know where the Messiah was born, that got the attention of Herod and Jerusalem, and upset them greatly.

When the Magi arrived in Jerusalem, neither they nor King Herod knew where to find the young Messiah. However, Micah 5:2 foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, so that is where King Herod sent them (Matt. 2:4-8). Bethlehem is seven miles (11.2 km) south of Jerusalem, and the Magi did not travel there the day they got an audience with King Herod. Even at two miles per hour, the journey would have only taken three and a half hours, and we can conclude from the biblical record that they returned to where they were staying and prepared to make the journey the next day. It was usual for caravans to get started very early in the morning, while it is still dark, and that is what they did.

When the Magi headed out for Bethlehem, the “star” they had observed back in Parthia “went before them” (Matt. 2:9; KJV, ESV). It is important to remember that these Magi did not follow the star to Bethlehem, they were already going there. Thus the “star” did not lead them to Bethlehem. They rejoiced at seeing it because it seemed a confirmation of the godly purpose of their journey, to meet and pay homage to the new king. The evidence is that the star that seemed to go in front of them was the planet Jupiter, which at that time was in the southern sky (The Star that Astonished the World). As it rose in the sky, it became more and more directly south, the very direction they were heading, and thus appeared to be “going before them.” Finally, as it reached its zenith (high point) in the sky south of them, it “stood” directly over Bethlehem, which was also south of them (by the way, astronomers still use the same language today, saying stars “rise,” “stand” and “set”).

Seeing Jupiter going before them caused great joy among the group. Although they certainly would have known Jupiter was visible in the sky, they did not know where the Messiah was to be born, or where Bethlehem was, and thus would not have known the star would also seem to go before them. To the untrained eye, there was nothing in
the sky that morning that would have been a cause for rejoicing, which accounts for the fact that there were not large crowds of people traveling south along with the Magi.

Bethlehem was a small village, and houses in such villages of the Ancient Near East were all crowded together, so nothing in the sky could point out an individual house. This is more evidence that the star did not lead the Magi to the Messiah. Nevertheless, the Messiah would be easy to locate in Bethlehem, thanks to the shepherds, who had not only told the whole town about him, but all the surrounding area as well. All the Magi had to do was ask, and everyone would remember the baby who the shepherds had announced so joyfully was the promised Messiah and whose parents were both of the line of David.

Upon finding the “child” (Jesus was not a “baby” anymore; Matt. 2:11), the Magi paid homage to him and presented their gifts. The Magi were not stupid, and Herod had a reputation for killing potential rivals, so they asked God for guidance as to what to do after they found the Messiah. This fact is not clearly stated in most English Bibles, but the Greek word translated “warned” in most of them was usually used of a divine instruction or warning that came to people who asked for guidance from an oracle. The Magi asked God what to do, and He warned them not to go back to Herod, so they went home by another route (Matt. 2:12).

Likely right after the Magi left, Joseph was also warned by God to flee the area, which he did, going down to Egypt (Matt. 2:13, 14). This is another piece of evidence that shows the Magi were not present at the birth of Jesus, but long after. Herod and the powers in Jerusalem had ignored the shepherds, and after the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary stayed in the area and completed the forty days of cleaning and the sacrifice required by the Law of Moses (Luke 2:22-24; Lev. 12:1-8). However, after the Magi left Judea, Herod was furious and would have moved very quickly to do away with this new potential rival for his throne. There is no way that Joseph and Mary could have then stayed around for forty days without Herod finding and killing both them and Jesus. This accounts for the urgency in the angel’s message to Joseph: “Get up…take the child and…escape to Egypt.” “Take” and “escape” are in the imperative mood; they are firm commands, and Joseph acted on them immediately (Matt. 2:13; NIV).

The truth about the Magi teaches us a lot. We see the great patience and faithfulness they had, passing down the information about the Messiah generation after generation, waiting over 500 years for him. That should remind us to pass on our knowledge of God’s Word to the next generation. We see the great risk the Magi were willing to take, carrying valuables hundreds of miles across an international border to pay homage to the Messiah, and the value of the gifts they brought indicates how thankful they were for him. They remind us that living a godly life often involves risk, and also that prayer, Bible study, worship, and financial support of the Church may not be easy or convenient, but the same Lord who was worthy of the sacrifice the Magi made is worthy of our sacrifice of time, money, and energy.

“east.” The Greek is anatolōn (ἀνατολόν), the plural of anatolē (ἀνατολή), which is translated “in its rising” in the next verse, verse 3. Anatolē is one of the words that usually changes its meaning from singular to plural. In the singular, as in verse 3, it usually refers to the “rising,” but when plural it usually refers to the direction, “east.” [For more information, see commentary on “in its rising,” Matthew 2:3].

“arrived.” Using this particular word and employing it in the aorist tense emphasizes the arrival of the Magi. If the text were going to emphasize the travel it would have used...
the word for “came” in the imperfect tense. But here we have the word paraginomai (#3854 παραγίνομαι) in the aorist, the word for an arrival or making a public appearance (BDAG). Holman captures the sense of the emphasis and translates it “arrived unexpectedly,” which makes the point, but perhaps too strongly. We felt the translation “arrived” was the best choice.

“of Judea.” The ancient tribal territories of the twelve tribes had given way to the kingdom of Herod, and other kingdoms before that. Nevertheless, Bethlehem was in the tribal territory of Judea, and thus the prophecy that Christ would be from the tribe of Judah was important to emphasize.

2:2. “in its rising.” Most Bible versions say the Magi saw the star, “in the east,” instead of “when it rose.” However, studies have shown that when the Greek reads like it does in the Bible, en tē anatolē (ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ) in the singular, it has a special astrological meaning, that is, “when it rose” or “at its rising,” referring to a heliacal rising, that is, when a star appears on the horizon in the early dawn before sunrise. The reason it was important to be able to see a star when it first rose was that the horizon line gave a point of demarcation that made it easier to see where it was in relation to other stars, as well as how far north or south it was when it rose in relation to other times it appeared. When the Greek reads en tē anatolai (in the plural), then it means “in the east,” but in the Bible the phrase is singular, referring to a heliacal rising.

Although “in the east” is not the most accurate translation of the Greek text, it does tell us that most English Bibles give enough information to dispel some of the traditional mythology that has arisen about the Magi. In other words, if we would just read the Bible carefully, many traditions could be dispelled. For example, the Magi did not see the star in the western or southwestern sky—the direction of Jerusalem from where they lived. If they did see the star “in the East” and followed it, they would have traveled to India. Also, there is no verse that says they “followed” the star to get anywhere. The idea that they “followed” the star comes from tradition that was popularized by Christmas music. The Magi saw celestial events that led them to conclude that the Jewish Messiah had been born in Israel. Therefore, they made a decision based upon logic and knowledge, and went to Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, and asked the king where to find this new Messiah. Matthew 2:1 makes it clear they came to “Jerusalem,” not to Bethlehem. There they got an audience with King Herod, who directed them to go to Bethlehem.

“pay homage to him.” This phrase is usually translated “worship him,” and the reason for translating it “pay homage to him” is detailed below. The Greek verb is proskuneō (#4352 προσκυνέω; pronounced prōs-cue-nay’-ō, a compound word built from the preposition pros, “to, toward,” and the verb kuneō, κυνέω, ‘to kiss’). The BDAG Greek-English lexicon has this to say about the verb proskuneō:

It is “frequently used to designate the custom of prostrating oneself before a person or persons and kissing their feet or the hem of their garment, the ground, etc.; the Persians did this in the presence of their deified king, and the Greeks before a divinity or something holy. It is to express in attitude or gesture one’s complete dependence on or submission to an authority figure, (fall down and) worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself before, do reverence to, welcome respectfully” (BDAG).
The act of prostrating oneself, or at least bowing low, is very ancient and goes all the way back to Genesis. In the Old Testament the act of prostration or bowing low is often described by the word *shachah* (שׁחָה), which is often translated by the Greek word *proskuneō* in the Septuagint. A study of *shachah* in the Hebrew Old Testament will reveal dozens of times people fell prostrate before God or others.

Jesus understood the custom of falling prostrate before rulers, men of God, and other great people (cp. 1 Sam. 25:24; 2 Kings 4:37; Esther 8:3; Matt. 18:29; Mark 5:22; 7:25; Luke 5:12; 17:16; John 11:32; Acts 10:35; Rev. 1:17; 19:10; 22:8), and he accepted that public display of homage and respect when people fell before him (cp. Mark 5:22; 7:25, Luke 5:12; etc.).

The problem with always translating *proskuneō* as “worship” is due to the fact that the act and meaning of “worship” has changed through the ages. In the Eastern world in general, falling prostrate was an expected and expected act of honor, respect, and worship. Among the Greeks, as noted above, prostration was much more limited, but was done before gods and things considered holy. Among the Romans, prostration was even more limited than that, but still could occur.

As we can see from the Bible, the words *shachah* and *proskuneō* were both used to represent a physical act, the act of kneeling on the ground before someone and placing the forehead on the ground, or falling full length on the ground before someone, or at least bowing low before someone (the Latin and Latin Vulgate would use *adoro* (cp. “adore”) and *veneror* (cp. “venerate”) to represent that act. Prostration or kneeling then touching the forehead to the ground was an act of respect and honor, and was supposed to represent an attitude of the heart, but often it was just done because otherwise the ruler would be offended and angry, just as Haman was angry when Mordecai would not get down on his knees and bow before him (Esther 3:5).

In 1611, when the KJV was written, the English word “worship” was used of the worship of deity, but it was still also used of bowing down before men of higher rank, which was an expected act of respect and deference at that time. Kings and nobles expected people to bow before them. Thus, it was expected at the time of Jesus and in the 1600’s as well, that someone would prostrate themselves or bow down before a superior, especially someone such as a king. It should be noted that kneeling and touching the forehead to the ground is still seen among the Moslems when they pray, prostrating themselves before Allah.

The act of bowing before a king or dignitary then led to some rulers being designated as “Your Worship,” taking the act of worship they received and making it into a title. Because the act of bowing to rulers was still common in 1611, translating *proskuneō* as “worship” worked very well and was not confusing to the average reader, who still connected “worship” with a physical act of some kind (this also fits with the liturgy of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Church, which considers “worship” to be a form of prescribed action, not “just” a subjective act of the heart). However, in the four centuries since the King James Version, the meaning of “worship” has changed. For one thing, we stopped bowing and prostrating ourselves (worshipping) before those of higher rank. In fact, the idea of “worship” as deeply bowing or falling in prostration before a person of higher status has completely left modern English vocabulary (as per Merriam-Webster’s 11th edition Collegiate Dictionary). Also, today people think of “worship” as an attitude of the heart that can be accompanied by a physical action, but does not have to
be. Today “worship,” in many cultures, is basically a mental act, so much so that if someone does something without “meaning it,” it would not be called “worship.” Also, today most people only use the word “worship” when speaking of God, never people with the exception of those few instances when we use it in a hyperbolic and idiomatic sense, such as “He worships that new car,” or, “She worships the ground he walks on.” Even in those cases, however, “worship” it is used as a term of extravagant respect that occurs in the heart, not something that is necessarily connected to a specific action. The shift in meaning of “worship” causes problems for translators, because if we talk about biblical people “worshipping” Jesus, people reading the Bible can be confused as to exactly what that worship entailed, and think it means Jesus is God.

Thus, while it was appropriate to translate proskuneō as “worship” in 1611, if we today translate proskuneō as “worship,” it often makes the verse take on a meaning that is not in the biblical text at all. For example, the Magi did not think of Jesus as God, and did not “worship” him as they would a deity. Rather, they paid homage to him as they would have to another king, understanding, of course, that they realized he was a very special king.

The meaning of “worship” has shifted from being represented by physical act to being a mental act, but that does not mean that proskuneō should never be translated “worship.” For example, the Devil asked Jesus to fall down and “worship” him. The Devil wanted Jesus to prostrate himself before him with the same adoration Jesus would have had for God, and therefore it seems the best way to portray that is to translate proskuneō as “worship.” The Devil wanted Jesus’ full devotion, not just the act of falling prostrate.

The homage and “worship” that the Magi paid to Jesus Christ is still appropriate for us today, although we would not tend to express our homage the same way. The honor we pay to Jesus also fits with Hebrews 1:6, which says that when the Son came into the world God said, “And let all the angels of God worship Him” (Heb. 1:6 NASB). Hebrews 1:4-7 is about angels, but God wants people to worship the Son too. We can see this because Philippians 2:10 and 11 tell of a time when “every” tongue will confess and every knee will bow (i.e., in worship or as an act of submission), willingly or unwillingly, but it seems clear that God would much prefer that everyone bow willingly, and sooner rather than later. The honor we pay to Christ fits the “worship” he accepted when he walked the earth.

We have seen that proskuneō properly means “kiss toward” and the ancient act of worship often involved actually kissing the ground, or feet of the one being honored, or the hem of his garment. Psalm 2:12 is to be understood as a part of the act of worship. It says:

“Kiss his son, or he will be angry and your way will lead to your destruction, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him” (NIV2011).

The Psalmist is saying that the person who prostrates himself before the Son in respect and homage, including kissing the feet or robe, will be blessed, while those who refuse to honor the Son will be destroyed in their selfishness and rebellion.

2:4. “high priests.” In Old Testament times the High Priest served for life. However, that custom had been changed for political reasons, such that at the time of Herod (and at the
time of Christ’s crucifixion) there was more than one High Priest. Furthermore, it seems that members of the High Priest’s family also could be called a high priest (See Lenski).

“the People.” The Greek is ho laos, (ὁ λαὸς). The word “people” can mean different things in the Bible, depending on the context. It can refer to a specific group, and often refers to the Jews, the “people” of God (BDAG). When it is used of the people of Israel, it becomes a specific designation of the Jews and as such can be capitalized. Many Scriptures use “people” as a designation of the Jews (cp. Matt. 2:4; 21:23; 26:3, 47; Mark 14:2; Luke 19:47; 22:66; John 11:50; Acts 3:23; 4:8, 25; 7:17; 26:17, 23; Rom. 15:11; 2 Pet. 2:1). In many cases the REV translation has capitalized “People” to make it clear to readers that the Jews as a specific group are being referred to. However, there are also many scriptures that use “the people” that do not clearly refer to Israel, and when the exact designation is in doubt, we have left “people” in lower case.

2:6. Quoted from Micah 5:2. Some translations read “Bethlehem, in the land of Judah” (e.g., ESV, NIV) and some read, “Bethlehem, land of Judah” (e.g., ASV, NASB). The Greek word for “land,” gē (#1093 γῆ), has the same form for the dative (“in the land”) and vocative (“O land” [direct address]) cases. The dative, “Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,” is correct; for “Bethlehem, land of Judah” does not make sense.

2:7. “exactly.” The word “exactly” is part of the verb “learned.”

“the chronology of the appearing of the star.” Herod wanted to know the timing of the star, in order to ascertain how old the child must be (cp. verse 16). In this verse we find evidence for the view that the star was a prolonged astronomical event(s), rather than a one-time past appearance seen in the east, then miraculously appearing again to lead the Magi in 2:9. The text uses the word chronos (#5550 χρόνος) to describe the timing of the star. This word refers to “an indefinite period of time during which some activity or event takes place, time, period of time” (BDAG). Literally, the verse reads, Herod “determined from them the period of time of the appearing star.” Appearing is in the present tense, indicating a continual action; the star was “continuously shining” (phainō [#5316 φαίνω]) over an indefinite period of time. Hence, the way most translations go, “the time the star had appeared,” captures the sense of what Herod wanted to know (when the star first appeared), but unfortunately misses the fact that the star appeared over a period of time, and was still appearing when Herod spoke to the Magi.

2:8. “as soon as.” Cp. NIV translation. The word epan (#1875 ἐπάν) can mean “when” or “as soon as,” (BDAG). Herod’s eagerness to get rid of the competition to his throne makes us favor “as soon as.”

“pay homage.” See commentary on Matthew 2:2.

2:9. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδοὺ), and it is used to get our attention. Although the literal meaning of idou relates to visual perception (seeing), it was used idiomatically, and thus should be translated in ways appropriate to the context, such as “look,” “listen,” “pay attention,” “take notice,” “consider,” “remember,” etc. Many translations of the English Bible (cp. NIV, NRSV, HCSB) do not translate idou, but in doing so miss the meaning that it is bringing to the context. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

2:10. “rejoiced with great joy.” This is the figure of speech polypototon, the repetition of the same word, appearing in different parts of speech. Here it is “joy” in both verb and noun forms, emphasizing the great joy of the Magi (Bullinger, Figures of Speech). They were excited to see the star. When they had come to Jerusalem, they did not know where
the Messiah was born, so they had no preconceived idea they would see the “star” in front of them as they traveled.

2:11. “house.” The Magi were not at the birth of Christ. They came over a year later. Joseph and Mary were in a “house,” but the Scripture does not tell us whether they were staying with someone else or had their own dwelling.

“child.” The Greek is paidion (#3813 παιδίον), which means “young child.” Jesus was no longer a “baby,” which is the Greek brephos (#1025 βρέφος), as he was in Luke 2:12 and 16. Now, at over 1 year old, he is a young boy.

“paid homage.” See commentary on Matthew 2:2.

2:12. “divinely instructed.” This is a fascinating word—chrematizo (#5537 χρηματίζω). Its basic meaning is “to make known a divine revelation from God” (Louw-Nida). The word is usually translated “warn,” yet its full meaning is much richer than this. We have translated the term “divine instruction,” in accordance with the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: “In the NT the verb denotes divine instruction by revelation.” The translation of the NT done by Nelson Darby also has “divinely instructed.”

Outside the New Testament it is used as a response of those seeking an oracle—it therefore designates the response given one who seeks a divine answer. Thayer defines the word: “to give a response to those consulting an oracle… to give a divine command or admonition, to teach from heaven.” Likewise Bullinger writes in his lexicon, “spoken of a divine response, to give response, to speak as an oracle, speak or warn from God.” The only example of the noun form in the New Testament follows this definition. In Romans 11:2-4, Elijah makes intercession to God about Israel (Rom. 11:2) and God gives back a “divine answer” (Rom. 11:4); it is not meant as a warning, but an answer from God to Elijah’s appeal.

The word is used nine times in scripture: four times to indicate the divine instruction given in response to an implied seeking of God (Matt. 2:12; 2:22; Luke 2:26; Acts 10:22), three times to indicate the message from God with emphasis on warning (Heb. 8:5; 11:7; 12:25), and twice it is used in its second definition, “to be called, designated as” (Acts 11:26; Rom. 7:3).

When applied here in Matthew 2:12, this word shows the Magi asked God what to do, and God instructed them to leave for home by another route and not to go back to Jerusalem and speak with Herod. These men were godly and smart. They did not need to be “warned” that Herod was corrupt and evil—that was well known. The absurdity of Herod’s claim that he would come and worship the Christ would have been very apparent to them. Would Herod, who was so paranoid about losing his throne that he killed his own son, really prostrate himself before a would-be usurper of his throne? Never. The Magi did not need a warning; what they needed was divine instruction as to what to do about their situation, and that prompted them to seek advice from God. Concerning this verse Meier writes in his commentary, “the question that preceded [the dream] is presupposed” (Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament; Matt. p. 63). Similarly, Vincent writes, “The verb means to give a response to one who asks or consults… [it] therefore implies that the wise men had sought counsel of God” (Word Studies, p. 21).

This same reasoning can be applied in Matthew 2:22. Joseph already heard of Archelaus and was afraid to go to Judea, so to translate the verb “he was warned” does not fit the situation, but “divinely instructed” does. Joseph, along with the Magi (2:12),
Simeon (2:26), and Cornelius (Acts 10:22), were spiritually discerning and seeking council from God, and thus were divinely instructed in what path to take.

2:13. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“Yahweh.” “Yahweh” is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote a Gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh, so we have put it in the REV (see commentary on Matthew 3:3).

“get up... take the child and his mother... stay.” These exact words are used to describe what Joseph did in response to the command from the angel of the Lord. The angel says “get up,” so Joseph “got up” (v. 14); the angel says, “take the child and his mother,” so Joseph “took the child and his mother” (v. 14); the angel says “stay there until,” so Joseph “stays there until” (v. 15). This parallelism highlights Joseph’s obedience to the word of the Lord, by describing what Joseph did with the same words the angel used in his command. The same parallelism occurs in verses 20 and 21.

“stay.” For the word stay, the angel uses the verb “to be,” eimi (#1510 εἰμί), with the sense of “remain” or “stay;” Joseph is told to “be there” in Egypt until the angel tells him differently. Then in verse 15 we are told that Joseph “was there”—using the same verb and word for “there.”

2:14. “During the night” (see Douglas Interlinear and NIV).

2:15. Quoted from Hosea 11:1.


“resulting in...what was spoken being fulfilled.” In English there are several ways to communicate purpose or intention, just as there are several ways to indicate the results of an action. To communicate purpose we might say, “I read the Bible to grow closer to God,” using the word “to” to show our intention of growing closer to God by reading scripture. To communicate our emphasis on results we might use a participle, as the word “falling,” in the phrase, “he tripped, falling into the mud.”

There are also several ways Greek grammar communicates purpose and result clauses, and one such way is with the particle hina (#2443 ἵνα) occurring in conjunction with a verb in the subjunctive mood. When hina, usually translated, “that,” “so that,” or “in order that,” is used with a verb in the subjunctive mood, it can express either purpose, result, or purpose and result simultaneously. Furthermore, hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood can be used in command clauses (as well as substantival, epexegetical, and complementary clauses, which we will not cover here [Wallace, Greek Grammar, p. 471]). Since the Greek construction is the same for all these kinds of clauses, it is up to the translator or interpreter to discover the meaning of the phrase from the context and scope of Scripture. In what follows we will give examples showing how hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood can form a purpose clause, result clause, or purpose-result clause. After some discussion we will also consider command clauses.

These first three clauses all consist of a main verb, the particle hina, and a verb in the subjunctive. The explanations have the main verb underlined, the hina translation in italics, and the subjunctive verb in bold.

(1) A purpose clause expresses the intention of the main verb, so in these cases hina should be translated in order that, with the purpose that.
• (Matt. 19:13). “Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray…. The children were brought (main verb) with the purpose that (hina) Jesus might lay (subjunctive verb) his hands on them and pray.

• (Luke 9:12). “Send the multitude away, in order that they may go into the villages and surrounding countryside, and lodge and get provisions.” The apostles plead with Jesus to send the people away for the purpose of finding lodging and getting provisions. (Here the verbs in the subjunctive mood are “lodge” and “get provisions,” not “go”).

• (Rom. 1:11). “I long to see you, in order that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you.” Paul is expressing his purpose for seeing the Romans; he purposed to impart to them a spiritual gift of strengthening.

(2) A result clause expresses the resulting consequences of the main verb when the result is not intended to be the consequence of the main verb. In other words, this expresses when a person does something, or an event occurs, resulting in consequences that were not intended. The hina should be translated so that; with the result that.

• (John 9:2). “And his disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, with the result that he was born blind?’” The disciples assumed someone’s sin unintentionally resulted in this man’s blindness (cp. NET translation: “Rabbi, who committed the sin that caused him to be born blind?”).

• (Rom. 5:20). “The law came in with the result that the trespass increased.” God did not introduce the law with the intention of increasing sin. Nevertheless, this was the result of the law.

• (Gal. 5:17). “For [the spirit and the flesh] are opposed to each other, with the result that you are not doing what you want.” It is not the spirit’s intention in opposing the flesh to prohibit you from doing what you want, but is simply the result of the internal battle between our spirit and flesh.

(3) A Purpose-result clause expresses that the subjunctive verb is both the intention and result of the main verb. The hina should be translated, so that.

• (John 3:16). “He gave his only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” God gave his Son with the intention of saving believers from perishing and having eternal life; simultaneously, the giving of the son resulted in those who believe not perishing and having eternal life.

• (Rom. 3:19, ESV). “Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.” The hina with a verb in the subjunctive clause shows us that the law speaks with the purpose of stopping every mouth and making the world accountable to God; and furthermore, when it speaks, it results in this purpose being accomplished.

• (Matt. 1:22-23, NET). “This all happened so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled: ‘Look! The virgin will conceive
and bear a son....” God’s bringing about the virgin birth intentionally resulted in the fulfillment of what was spoken by the prophet.

In the REV we have attempted to remain as consistent as possible in the translation of the *hina* in these clauses. For purpose clauses we say, “in order that”; for result clauses, “with the result that”; and for purpose-result clauses, “so that.” The English translation “in order that” clearly indicates purpose; likewise, for result clauses, what could be more clear than, “with the result that?” “So that,” on the other hand is the best translation for a purpose-result clause precisely because it is ambiguous; it can be read to indicate either purpose or result. For example, the phrase, “he fell back into the snow so that an imprint was left,” could be read to mean he fell “so that” (purpose) he could make an imprint of himself, or it could be read to mean he just happened to fall “so that” (result) an imprint was left on the ground. The context would have to determine whether the “so that” speaks of purpose, result, or purpose-result. When we felt the biblical context demands a purpose-result clause we have rendered the *hina* “so that.”

That having been said, when reading the REV one must be careful not to assume every instance of “so that,” “in order that,” or “with the result that” is a *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive clause. For there are also uses of *hina* by itself that warrant the “so that” translation; likewise there are several other ways Greek can indicate purpose, hence, “in order that” could be due to another of these forms. The same can be said of the phrase, “with the result that,” which is often just a translation of *eis* (#1519 εἰς) or *hoste* (#5620 ὥστε) (Dana and Mantey, Grammar, pp. 282-86). The reader must consult the Greek text, or the commentary to ensure the translation represents the *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive construction.

Identifying these clauses correctly is of fundamental importance for properly understanding and translating the Bible. Thankfully, in a majority of instances the type of clause is abundantly clear from the context or the scope of scripture. Nevertheless, the danger of misidentification is always present, because the Greek form of each construction is precisely the same. This means that in the *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive form, a purpose, result, and purpose-result clause looks exactly the same in the Greek. If one calls a “purpose” or “purpose-result clause” what is actually a result clause, he attributes intention when God only meant to speak of what resulted, not what was purposed to happen. On the other hand, if one categorizes a passage as a “result clause,” when it is really a purpose clause, then he has missed the intention that is underlying the action.

For example, the first part of Romans 5:20 is often translated as though it were a purpose clause: “The Law came in so that the transgression would increase” (NASB). This translation ascribes the intention of increasing man’s transgression to the introduction of the law. But surely this is misguided. Can it really be that God introduced the law for the purpose of increasing sin? Why would God want sin to increase? This seems to go against Galatians 3:19-24 which indicates that the law came in precisely because there were already many transgressions (See also Rom. 3:19-20). Hence, this verse seems much better suited as a result clause: “But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied” (NRSV). In other words, God gave the Law to help mankind, but people disobeyed with the result that sin increased.
1 John 2:19 is another example of how translating a result clause as though purpose were intended can cause confusion. Speaking of the exodus of false believers from the Church, versions such as the HCSB and NASB translate the verse, “They went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us.” It seems clear that false believers did not leave the Christian fellowship “so that” it would be clear they were not true to the Faith. In contrast, seeing the hina clause as a result clause makes sense of the passage: “Their going showed that none of them belonged to us” (NIV).

Lastly, we must also consider how hina with the subjunctive can form a command clause. It is vital to properly distinguish purpose clauses from command clauses. A purpose clause indicates why something happened, it shows the intention behind the action: e.g., “Children were being brought to him in order that he might lay [Greek=hina with a verb in the subjunctive] his hands on them and pray” (Matt. 19:13). A command clause, on the other hand, issues an order or command: e.g., “Come and lay [Greek=hina with a verb in the subjunctive] your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live” (Mark 5:23).

Because the same Greek form of hina with the subjunctive can be a purpose, result, or command clause, people sometimes disagree as to which is meant. This disagreement shows up in the varying translations of Mark 5:12 for instance, when the demons plead to go into the herd of swine. Some versions translate the second part of their plea as purpose, “Send us into the pigs so that we may enter them” (cp. NASB; HCSB; KJV; ASV), while most modern versions translate it as a command: “Send us into the pigs. Let us enter them” (cp. ESV; NIV; NRSV; NET; NAB; NJB). Interestingly, we see precisely the same split between the translations with regard to Titus 3:13, “see that they lack nothing” (command: ESV; NIV; NRSV; NET; NAB; NJB) as opposed to “so that they lack nothing (purpose-result: NASB; HCSB; KJV; ASV). (See also Revelation 14:13 for similar disagreement between translations).

Understanding how the hina construction can indicate a command becomes important for passages such as John 9:3, about the man born blind. Because this verse has hina with the subjunctive, we must ask whether it is meant to be a purpose or command clause. It is rendered as a purpose clause in most translations, “He was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him” (NRSV); however, this translation has serious consequences to the meaning of the text. It means that the man’s blindness was intentional, so that he could not see for the better part of his life—simply for the purpose of being healed this day—that “God’s works” may be manifest by his healing. Such an interpretation goes against the teaching of scripture, that God is love (1 John 4:16), has plans not to harm us (Jer. 29:11), and that it is Satan who is our enemy, the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4) who has the power of death (Heb. 2:14). Jesus came to destroy the works of the Devil (1 John 3:8), his ministry was to heal those oppressed by Satan (Acts 10:38). The Gospels nowhere portray Jesus going around healing people oppressed by God (See Boyd, God at War, pp. 231-34).

In this way, the Greek in Matthew 2:15 is understood just like Ephesians 5:33, which has the same construction: “let [Greek=hina with a verb in the subjunctive] the wife see that she respects her husband.” [For more on hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood command clauses wrongly identified as purpose clauses, see commentary on John 9:3 and 13:18].

2:16. “Made a fool of.” From empaizo (#1702 ἐμπαίζω), “To trick someone so as to make a fool of the person” (BDAG); Lenski. It was more than just being “tricked” by the Magi. Herod reigned by fear and control, so having someone disobey a direct command, from his perspective, was to make a mockery of his reign. He would have expected the Magi back the next day, two at the most. He felt they made a fool of him by slipping away, and was furious.

“killed.” This was standard operating procedure for Herod. His reign was so filled with violent acts that this particular killing is not even noticed in the secular histories.

2:18. Quoted from Jeremiah 31:15.

“a sound was heard in Ramah.” Most translations read, “a voice was heard.” However, the Greek word phone (#5456 φωνή) can be used to mean just a sound (e.g., John 3:8; 1 Cor. 14:7; Rev. 8:5; 8:13 [“blasts”]). Though the sound would have been coming from a human voice, it would have been the sound of sobbing.

“sobbing.” Traditionally, this has been translated “weeping.” But we do not feel that “weeping” best captures the sense of the Greek word klauthmos (#2805 κλαυθμός). In English, weeping conjures up pictures of a weak and quiet, teary sadness. Klauthmos is more of a loud crying with obvious physical manifestations: “not merely with tears, but with every outward expression of grief” (Bullinger, Critical Lexicon, p. 862). Hence, we have rendered the word here “sobbing,” which gives a better sense of physical wailing than does the term “weeping;” after all, these mother’s babies had just been murdered. This is the noun form of the verb klaio (#2799 κλαίω) translated as “crying” in this verse.

“Rachael.” The favorite wife of Jacob, here representing Israel.

“crying.” The Greek verb is klaiō (#2799 κλαίω). We have translated it as “crying” rather than “weeping.” Kliaio is the verb form of klauthmos; see commentary on “sobbing” in this verse.

2:19. “after.” The phrase “after Herod died” is a Greek construction known as genitive absolute. Although there are no specific time words, a genitive absolute has a temporal sense, usually translated “while,” “when,” or “after.” Did the dream come “while,” “when,” or “after” Herod died? To say “after Herod died” is the most ambiguous translation (the dream could have come right after Herod died, or some time later). To say “while” or “when” would mean the dream occurred simultaneously with Herod’s death, which most likely would not have been the case. Political and social tension always accompanied regime change in ancient times; would there be a peaceful transfer of power, or a coup d’état? We have translated the genitive absolute with “after,” to allow for the possibility of some time elapsing for Archelaus—who had already begun reigning when Joseph arrived in Israel (v. 22)—to stabilize control and for things to settle down after the transfer of power.

“had come to the end of his life.” The Greek is teleutaō (#5053 τελευτάω), which is related to the word telos (#5056 τέλος), “end,” and means to finish, bring to an end, come to an end, close. It was used by the Greeks as a euphemism for death. God could have used a common word for death here, such as apothneskō (#599 ἀποθνῄσκω), so the fact
that he did not, but used the euphemism, should catch our attention. All of us will eventually, “come to the end,” so it behooves us to take our lives seriously, because after our end will come Judgment Day.

“Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδοὺ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“Yahweh.” “Yahweh” is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote a Gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh, so we have put it in the REV (see commentary on Matthew 3:3).

“saying.” The verse division of the Nestle-Aland text includes this word at the beginning of verse 20. However, many translations put it here at the end of verse 19 (cp. NASB; NRSV; RSV; ASV). We felt the cleaner division was to include it in verse 19.

2:20. “Get up...take the child and his mother.” For the significance of the parallelism between the angel’s command and Joseph’s response see commentary on Matthew 2:13.


2:23. “he will be called a Nazarene.” This phrase is not meant to be a quotation of any scripture, for the saying is not found in any of the biblical writings. So what does Matthew mean here? There are two possibilities. First, these words could be a prophecy that was “spoken” (rheō, #4483 ῥέω), but not written. Unlike any other such reference in Matthew, this was said to be spoken by the “prophets” (plural), rather than by the “prophet.” The fact the noun is plural tells us Matthew did not intend this to be taken as a reference to a particular prophetic writing, but the words of the “prophets.” Hence, there were some things God told his prophets regarding the Messiah that were spoken and preserved in oral tradition but never inspired as holy writ—that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene was one such orally preserved prophecy. In this case it is the figure of speech hysteresis, when an author gives added information not known in the historical narrative (Cp. Bullinger, Companion Bible).

The other option for understanding this phrase—the path taken by Lenski and Hendriksen, for instance—is that the expression “he will be called a Nazarene” is meant as a summary statement of what the prophets spoke about the messiah, that he would be considered lowly and rejected. We recall the words of Nathanael, who showed typical disdain for Nazarenes: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). In this case, Matthew combines the sense of several prophetic writings about the Messiah and describes them under his own heading, “He will be called a Nazarene.” But this view is unlikely. For why would Jesus have to literally move to Nazareth in order to fulfill this saying? If being called a Nazarene does not refer to actually living in Nazareth, then moving there would not fulfill the prophecy.

The Greek word hopōs (#3704 ὧπως), translated “in order to,” denotes purpose, showing that the physical move was intended to fulfill the word. If the phrase was meant as simply a derogative saying, “he’ll be called ‘a Nazarene,’” then there would be no
need for the Messiah to literally live there. Therefore, the first interpretation is to be preferred.

Chapter 3

3:3. “The voice of one crying in the desert, ‘Make ready the road of the Lord, make his paths straight.’” This quotation, which comes from Isaiah 40:3-5 (and the quotation in Luke 3:4 and Mark 1:3) is from the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament. For more on the Septuagint and the original NT texts being in Greek, see commentary on Luke 3:4).

“Yahweh.” “Yahweh” is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. As we will discuss below, there is evidence that Matthew wrote a Gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh, so we have put it in the REV.

In the fourteenth century a complete Hebrew text of Matthew appeared in the body of a Jewish polemical treatise entitled Even Bohan, “The Touchstone.” The manuscript was not all in one place, but when gathered together was the complete book of Matthew. The author of the treatise, and thus the one who copied Matthew into it, was Shem-Tob ben Isaac ben-Shaprut (sometimes called Ibn Shaprut; also, because his name was actually Shem-Tob, sometimes the manuscript is referred to as the Shem-Tov manuscript). The Shem-Tob manuscript is not well known, so it is important to say a few things about it.

The Even Bohan treatise contains the entire book of Matthew in Hebrew, but unfortunately Shem-Tob wrote his notes in Hebrew right into the Hebrew text, which means they have to be lifted out of the text of Matthew for it to be read without them.

For many years the Shem-Tob manuscript was ignored, even though there was historical evidence that Matthew wrote in Hebrew. It was ignored because it had been the opinion of most scholars that the Shem-Tob manuscript was a translation back into Hebrew from the Latin, or perhaps from Greek. However, recently interest in the Hebrew language has caused a reexamination of the text. There are now a number of scholars who, for a number of reasons, think that the Shem-Tob manuscript represents a Hebrew manuscript tradition that goes back to the Hebrew text Matthew wrote. One reason is that there seem to be too many verses that differ from any known Greek or Latin manuscript for the Shem-Tob manuscript to be a translation from either of those manuscript traditions. Another very important reason is that the Shem-Tov manuscript uses a rabbinic abbreviation for Yahweh, the only personal name of God (all His other “names” are actually titles). No Jew in the Middle Ages would have used “Yahweh,” and no scholarly Jew would ever have placed the holy name of God, which they would not even say out loud, into a Christian Bible. A third reason involves some of the commentary Shem-Tob wrote. For example, after Matthew 2:12 and the verse about Jesus being born in Bethlehem, he comments that the Hebrew text is wrong and the error is not in “Jerome’s version” (the Latin). From comments like these we can see that Shem-Tov was copying an earlier Hebrew text. He would not have created a unique, and incorrect, Latin text, and then criticized it.
It is too much to go into all the various reasons for believing that the Ben-Tov manuscript represents a Hebrew manuscript tradition that goes back to an original that Matthew wrote, and there are still many scholars who believe Matthew first wrote in Greek, but more information can be found in the work by George Howard, *The Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* (Mercer University Press, Macon, GA, 1995).

It is also important to remember that although there are quite a few places that the Ben-Tov manuscript differs from the Greek text, it will take thorough study before adopting any of its readings into the English Bible because the Ben-Tov manuscript was in the hands of Jews, not Christians and also, as with any other manuscript from centuries after Christ, would have been a copied several times before it existed as the Shem-Tob manuscript we have available today. However, when it comes to the name “Yahweh,” the evidence seems certain that it would have had to have been passed down from an original Hebrew text of Matthew, and hence we use it in the REV.

Until recently scholars believed that Hebrew was not spoken in Palestine in the first century, and that when the word “Hebrew” appeared in documents from the first or second century that “Aramaic” was actually meant. However, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other documents from around the time of Christ have revealed that Hebrew was both written and spoken in the first century. Given that, there is reason to believe that when the ancients said “Hebrew” they meant “Hebrew.”

A number of Church fathers said that Matthew wrote his gospel in Hebrew. Unfortunately, some of them are quoted in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* and we do not have their original surviving statements. Nevertheless it seems highly unlikely that Eusebius would have said they said Matthew wrote in Hebrew if that was not what they said. Eusebius was not trying to build a case that Matthew wrote in Hebrew; he was simply writing a history of the Church. Furthermore, the accuracy of Eusebius’ statements would have been much easier to check in his day than now.

- Papias. The Church Father Papias, who wrote in the first third of the 2nd century was a bishop of the early Church. According to Eusebius, Papias said: “Matthew collected the oracles [literally: “words”] in the Hebrew language, and each interpreted them as best he could.” (Quoted in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* (Lake Translation, p. 297). The statement, “each interpreted them as best he could” refers to the declining knowledge in Hebrew as the years went on and the Church became more Hellenized.

- Ireneus (pronounced I-ren-ā́–us). In about 170 AD, Ireneus wrote in *Against Heresies* (3:1): “Matthew also issued a written gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect.”

- Origen. Origen lived about 210 AD. He was cited by Eusebius in *Ecclesiastical History* (6:25) saying that Matthew wrote his gospel in Hebrew.

- Jerome. Jerome (347–420 AD) said Matthew originally wrote in Hebrew, and apparently had a Hebrew manuscript of Matthew, because he quotes from it. From Jerome, *Commentary on Psalm 135 (de Santos 22)*: “In the Hebraic gospel according to Matthew it has thus: Our bread for tomorrow give us this day, that is, the bread which you will give in your kingdom give us today.” Jerome also wrote, *On Famous Men 3 (de Santos 18)*: “Matthew, who is also Levi, the ex-publican apostle, first composed in Hebraic letters the gospel of Christ in Judea on account of those who had believed from among the
circumcision; [but those] who afterward translated it into Greek is not sufficiently certain. Furthermore, this Hebraic [text] is held even until today in the Caesarean library which Pamphilus the martyr studiously put together. There was an opportunity for me from the Nazaraeans to copy this volume, which is used in Beroea, a city of Syria. In which [gospel] it must be noted that, wherever the evangelist, whether from his own person or from the Lord and savior, makes use of testimonies of the old scriptures, he does not follow the authority of the seventy translators [the Septuagint version], but the Hebrew. From which things two are: From Egypt did I call my son, and: For he shall be called a Nazarene.” (These references are 2.15 and 2.23, respectively).

Jerome said in the Prologue of the Four Gospels: “First of all is Matthew, a publican with the cognomen of Levi, who published a gospel in Judea in the Hebrew speech, especially on account of those who had believed in Jesus from among the Jews, and with the shadow of the law in no way succeeding he served the truth of the gospel.”

3:4. “this John.” In the Greek text, the autos is demonstrative, “this John” (the one being discussed); it is not intensive, “John himself.” Cp. Robertson, Grammar, p. 686, and Lenski).

3:6. “confessing.” The Greek verb is exomologeo (ἐξοµολογέω), and it means to confess or admit openly or publicly. In this instance it is a plural participle, and indicates that the confession was connected with the baptism: they confessed their sin as they were being baptized, i.e., just before going under the water. The form of the verb indicates that they openly confessed their sin, not just whispered it to John. John Peter Lange writes: “The compound ἐξοµολογούµενον denotes public confession” (Lange’s Commentary; cp. Meyer, who points out that public confession is also indicated in Acts 19:18 and James 5:16).

The baptism of John thus showed the seriousness of the people after hearing the message that the Kingdom of Heaven was about to arrive (“the Kingdom of Heaven is near”). The “Kingsom of Heaven” was the kingdom promised in the Old Testament and ruled by Christ where no one was sick, the government was just, there was an abundance of food, and there was no war or crime. [For more on the Messianic Kingdom on earth, see commentary on Matthew 5:5, “inherit the earth”].

People wanted to get into that kingdom, and they set aside their reservations and, out in the water with John, openly confessed their sins. Their being immersed in the waters of the Jordan then symbolized the death of the old ways and rebirth or resurrection into a new life, which they would then have to live out in the flesh day after day. For more on John’s baptism, see the commentary on baptism at Ephesians 4:5.

3:7. “The wrath that is about to come.” This is the wrath associated with the Day of the Lord (see commentary on Revelation 6:17). The wrath did not come quickly, and still has not come. John the Baptist did not know that God would interpose the Administration of the Sacred Secret, which we are in today, between the resurrection of Christ and his coming in Judgment. He thought since the Messiah was on earth, Armageddon would come soon. [For a more complete understanding of the Administration of the Sacred Secret, and an explanation of administrations in the Bible, see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be like Christ, Appendix A “The Administration of the Sacred Secret.” Also, see commentary on Ephesians 3:2.]

3:9. “these stones.” The Jews claimed salvation in large part due to their being descendants of Abraham, and John was repudiating that belief. His sharp rebuke was made even sharper by his reference to “these stones.” If anything is common in Israel it is stones, and the Bible has many, many references to them. Solomon’s wealth was described by saying that he made silver to be in Jerusalem as “stones” (1 Kings 10:27). Dashing one’s foot against a stone was common and painful (Ps. 91:12). When a dignitary would come through the area, the roads would have to be cleared of stones (Isa. 62:10), and to plant one would have to get the stones out of the vineyard (Isa. 5:1, 2).

3:10. “will be cut down.” Although the present tense verb is used, the cutting will be done in the future. This is the idiom some scholars refer to as the “prophetic present,” and it takes an event that is future but certain to happen and coming soon, and treats it as if it is present. [For more on the prophetic present, see commentary on Luke 3:9.]

3:11. “as a symbol of your repentance.” The Greek can be expressed that way, even if it is not the predominant way eis and the accusative is translated. D. A. Carson expresses the situation well:

> The phrase “for repentance” (εἰς μετανοίαν) is difficult: εἰς plus the accusative frequently suggests purpose (“I baptize you in order that you will repent”). Contextually (v. 6), this is unlikely, even in the telic sense suggested by Broadus: “I baptize you with a view to continued repentance.” But causal εἰς, of something very close to it, is not unknown in the NT (cf. Turner, Syntax, pp. 266–67): “I baptize you because of your repentance.” (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary; F. Gaebelein, general editor).

We assert the scope of Scripture shows that John did baptize people because of their repentance, and indeed, it was because of their repentance that the people came to John to be baptized by him. Indeed, Luke 7:29 and 30 make it clear that the sinners came to John to be baptized while the religious leaders rejected God’s purpose for themselves by not allowing themselves to be baptized by John, which would have involved their publicly confessing their sins.

The water baptism was a symbol, an outward demonstration, of the inward repentance that had happened in the heart of the people who came to be baptized. Many scholars and translators recognize this, and Daniel Wallace expresses it well: “Water baptism is not a cause of salvation, but a picture; and as such it serves both as a public acknowledgment (by those present) and a public confession (by the convert).…” (Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics).

Scholars and translators express how water baptism is a symbol or picture of the inner work of God in different ways in their writings. For example, Charles Williams translates the Matthew 1:11: “I am baptizing you in water to picture your repentance” (The NT in the Language of the People). Ann Nyland has: “I baptize you in water to show that you have changed your minds” (The Source NT). J. B. Phillips says: “I baptize you with water as a sign of your repentance” (NT in Modern English). Goodspeed’s New Testament reads: “I am baptizing you in water in token of your repentance.” Davies and Allison, after examining other possible interpretations, conclude: “It is, however, better to endorse a more nuanced position: baptism presupposes and expresses repentance” (International Critical Commentary: Matthew). Robert Mounce (New International
Matthew Commentary) writes as if John is speaking in the first person: “My baptism’ he might say, ‘indicates you have repented.”’ See commentary on Mark 1:4.

“in holy spirit.” No articles in the Greek. This is the gift of holy spirit. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: Usages of ‘Spirit’]

3:12. “wheat...chaff.” This is the figure of speech hypocatastasis; the wheat and chaff represent people. For more on hypocatastasis, see commentary on Revelation 20:2, “dragon.”

3:16. “as he stepped away from the water.” The heavens did not open and the holy spirit descend while Jesus was standing in the Jordan River, but as he came “away” (apo) from the river and stepped up onto the bank. This fact becomes especially clear when Matthew is read in harmony with Mark. Here in Matthew 3:16, “away from” is from the Greek preposition apo (away from). The only way to be “away from” the water is to be out of it. Leon Morris (The Gospel According to Matthew) writes:

Matthew does not describe the baptism, but takes up his narrative from the time when it was completed...He uses the preposition apo (which he uses 113 times) whereas Mark uses ek (Mark 1:10). But Matthew has no dislike for ek, for he uses it 82 times, so he is not simply avoiding Mark’s preposition. He may, of course, use apo to indicate “more clearly Jesus’ complete departure from the waters of the Jordan” than does Mark’s ek....

Robert Gundry writes: “[Matthew] makes Jesus go up from the water immediately after the baptism, i.e., clamber up on the riverbank...Matthew’s apo does not negate the thought of emergence contained in Mark’s ek, but it indicates more clearly Jesus’ complete departure from the waters of the Jordan” (Matthew: A Commentary).

Other commentators make note of the fact that by leaving John and stepping out of the Jordan River, Jesus is shown to be starting his own new ministry, not connected with John the Baptist. Davies and Allison (The International Critical Commentary) make that point: “Jesus’ emerging from the water and climbing the bank...connects the heavenly vision and voice not with an action of John but with an action of Jesus.” They further state that it brings to mind at least two strong images that are imbedded in the Jewish mind: the creation of order from watery chaos (Gen. 1:3), and Israel’s new beginning as it came up and out of the Red Sea. Jesus’ coming up out of the Jordan marked the start of something new. [For more on Jesus’ baptism, see commentary on Mark 1:10].

“Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

3:17. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

Chapter 4

4:1. “led up.” The Greek is anagō (#321 ἀνάγω) and means, to lead or bring from a lower to a higher point; thus, lead up, bring up. This shows us conclusively that Jesus was led into the desert of Judea immediately after his baptism in Matthew 3. The Jordan River is the low point in that area, being around 900 or so feet below sea level, and the Judean
desert was above it to the west, with some mountain summits approaching 1,500 or more, and over 2,000 as one gets close to Jerusalem.

“by the spirit.” The Greek text reads, *hupo tou pneumatos* (ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος), using the preposition *hypo* followed by “the spirit,” in the genitive case. Thus here, *hupo* denotes agency, and tells us that Jesus was led “by” the spirit. It is difficult to decide whether we should say “by the Spirit,” i.e. “by God;” or “by the spirit,” that is, by the gift of God that Jesus had just received 2 verses earlier. The ancient texts were all capital letters, so it was up to the reader to decide what *PNEUMATOS* (Spirit or spirit) meant. Because English forces the translator to choose between “Spirit” and “spirit,” modern translators have to make a decision for the reader, and hope to educate the reader via commentary.

Actually, in this case, it is likely that both “Spirit” and “spirit” are true, and this is an example of the figure of speech amphibologia, where there are two meanings, both of them true. God, the Spirit, led Jesus into the desert, communicating and leading him “by the spirit,” just as He had done for millennia with Moses, Joshua, David, and the prophets and prophetesses. What actually happened was that Jesus was led “by the Spirit by the spirit.”

“desert.” The Greek is *eremos* (#2048 ἔρημος), and it means a solitary, lonely, desolate, uninhabited place, a desert, a wilderness, a lonely region. However, the word *eremos* can refer to an uncultivated region fit for pasturage, even though that area may be right next to fields and houses, thus the title of Gertrude Bell’s book, *The Desert and the Sown*. Areas in the Middle East were thought of as being good for farming or pasture, and a valley used for farming might butt right up to a hillside used for pasture. This situation always produced the tension that existed between the shepherds and the farmers.

“to be tempted.” Here in Matthew the Greek text uses the infinitive tense of the verb *peirazō* (#3985 πειράζω), and so “to be tempted,” as the English translations say, is a good translation. The infinite clause expresses purpose. It is God who leads Jesus into the Judean wilderness “to be tempted,” but it is the Devil (Slanderer) who does the tempting. It can be confusing at first to see that God lead Jesus into the desert “to be tempted,” but there are good explanations for it.

For one thing, we must realize that both God and Jesus knew that a showdown between the Devil and Jesus was inevitable. For millennia the Devil had been aggressively trying to prevent the Messiah from even being born. Then, when he was born, he tried to kill him as in infant through his evil servant, Herod the Great. So it was better for Jesus if he met the Devil head on and dealt with him personally at the beginning of his ministry. It accomplished many things.

One thing it accomplished is cemented in Jesus’ mind who the Devil was and what he wanted: to be in God’s place and to be worshipped. The Devil is like the Wizard of Oz. He makes himself look much larger and more powerful than he really is, and controls people by threats, fear, lies, etc. The prophet Isaiah tells us that when the Devil meets his doom and we get to see him for what he really is, we will say, “Is this the man who shook the earth and made kingdoms tremble, the man who made the world a desert, who overthrew its cities and would not let his captives go home?” (Isa. 14:16, 17). When the Devil met Jesus face to face, it gave Jesus a chance for him to see who he was really dealing with. And the Devil, for his part, revealed his crafty and evil nature perfectly for Jesus to see.
Another thing it did was make Jesus stronger in the spiritual battle. It is commonly said that what does not kill us makes us stronger, and successfully enduring temptation does make us stronger. Facing the Devil’s temptations cemented in Jesus’ mind that he did not need the world’s fame, or power, or even food. He could rely on God—on God’s provision and God’s timing. This was a huge lesson to learn. And even though Jesus had certainly learned to rely on God in the first 30 years of his life, talking to God via the gift of holy spirit would have bolstered his confidence, and things such as the angels coming to minister to him after the Devil left would have helped also (v.11).

Another thing it accomplished was to cement for Jesus, and show us, the absolute necessity to know and understand the Word of God, and to use it in our lives to fight the spiritual battle. Jesus resisted each of the temptations by saying, “It is written,” and quoting Scripture. This set the tone for how he would deal with opposition from that time forward, and it sets the tone for how we must act if we are going to be successful in the spiritual fight. Furthermore, it shows us how important it is to use Scripture as a “measuring tool” to determine good from evil. How did Jesus know what was right and what was wrong? Via Scripture, and anything contrary to the proper interpretation of Scripture must be resisted.

Another thing it accomplished, and continues to accomplish, is that it lets everyone know that just as Christ resisted the Devil and overcame his temptations, so we too can have victory in Christ. Believers do not have to be victims of the Devil, we stand against the Devil and win even as Christ did.

Also, although there is no way to know this for sure, Jesus made it clear to the Devil that he was not going to be simply fooled or led astray, and there are no more direct encounters between the Devil and Jesus mentioned in the Gospels. The Devil realized he would have to kill Jesus to get rid of him, and he tried in multiple ways to do that: from inciting mobs such as at Bethlehem, to trying to drown him via storms on the Sea of Galilee. He thought he won when he finally engineered his crucifixion, only to find like Haman in the book of Esther, that he had killed himself via his own stake.

“tempted.” The Greek word peirazō (#3985 πειραζω) can mean several different things depending on its context. It is used for (1) tempting and (2) testing (i.e., trying, examining, proving); its semantic range also includes (3) “attempting to do something,” like when Paul and Timothy tried to go into Bithynia but were prevented (Acts 16:7); and (4) trying to “entrap through a process of inquiry,” such as the Pharisees testing Jesus with questions (BDAG). The differences in meaning are found not in the word itself, but in the circumstance and especially the motive behind the one who is tempting, testing, attempting, etc. The distinction between testing and tempting, then, is this: testing comes from a desire to see the person prove himself true, to pass the test, and to gain confidence from the victory; temptation, on the other hand, is when evil is placed before someone in hope that he or she will fail. Thus God never tempts people (Jam. 1:13) but he does test people (Gen. 22:1; Heb. 11:17). Both temptation and testing are meant to see what is in a person, whether they will obey, but temptation is meant to make someone fall while testing is to raise them up. God always tests in order to reward or bring about good (Deut. 8:16). Hence, Jeremiah 17:10 says, “I the LORD test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings” (ESV).

“by the Slanderer.” The “Slanderer” is “the Devil.” The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and
that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer.”] The literal Greek of this verse is “of the Slanderer,” a genitive of origin, the Slanderer being the source of the temptation, so “by the Slanderer” is a good translation.

4:2. “forty days and forty nights.” Here Jesus is clearly being shown as a new Moses, who had twice spent 40 days and nights on Mount Sinai (First time: Exod. 24:18, which was retold in Deut. 9:9; Second time: Exod. 34:28). Jesus also spent 40 days fasting in the wilderness, and is now the new Lawgiver, superior to Moses. Jesus brings a “better hope” (Heb. 7:19); initiates a “better covenant” (Heb. 7:22; 8:6) that is based on “better promises (Heb. 8:6); and is a “better sacrifice” (Heb. 9:23).

4:3. “If you are.” The Devil did not doubt who Jesus was, and neither did Jesus. The Devil, called “the Tempter” in the verse, is goading Jesus, prodding and poking him in order to get him to act rashly. He was trying to get a reaction from Jesus like, “I am the Son of God, and I’ll prove it to you,” and then do something stupid. This event is historical fact, but we must learn from it because the Devil and those who follow him use the same tactic every day, poking at people until they get angry and do something stupid. We are to be peaceful and controlled and not be victims of the Devil’s tricks.

“the Tempter.” This is a name for the Slanderer (the Devil). The Greek is peirazō (#3985 πειράζω; pronounced, pay-rah’-zō), which means to tempt, to put through an ordeal. It can also be used in a good sense, to test with the idea of the one tested being successful, but that is not its meaning here. The Tempter is an apt name for the Slanderer, because he is constantly at work to set traps and temptations up so that people will fall. The Adversary comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), and often he sets the stage with a temptation so that we end up destroying ourselves. [For other names of the Slanderer and their meanings, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

4:4. “It is written, Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” Quoted from Deuteronomy. 8:3. Jesus’ quotation of Deuteronomy was not exact, but was very close. He never claimed to make an exact quotation.

4:5. “Slanderer.” The Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see commentary on Matthew 4:1.] [For this temptation actually being the last of the three temptations and Luke 4 having the correct order of temptations, see commentary on Matthew 4:8, “showed him all the kingdoms.”]

4:6. Quoted from Psalm 91:11, 12.
4:7. Quoted from Deuteronomy. 6:16.

“Yahweh.” “Yahweh” is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote a Gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh, so we have put it in the REV (see commentary on Matthew 3:3).

4:8. “Slanderer.” The Devil. [For more information on the characteristics inferred by the names and appellations of God’s archenemy, Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

“lofty.” The Greek adjective hupselos (#5308 ὑψηλός) has a basic meaning of “high” (as in Matt 17:1, Mk. 9:2, and Rev. 21:10). However, it can also have the connotation of
“proud” or “arrogant.” We see this in Romans 12:16 when we are told to “not mind high things” (μὴ τὰ υψηλὰ φρονοῦντες), i.e. not be proud. The LXX uses this sense in Isaiah 2:12-14: “the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty…against all the lofty mountains, and against all the uplifted hills.” It is possible that here in Matthew the adjective has this connotation implied; the Devil tempted Christ to ‘mind high things’ by taking him to a ‘proud’ mountain, showing him all the splendor of ruling the kingdoms of the world. In English the word “lofty” captures both the sense of altitude and arrogance.

“showed him all the kingdoms.” Matthew and Luke both record the 3 temptations that the Adversary tempted Jesus with, but worded slightly differently and in a different order. We believe Luke has the order correct because Luke says he recorded things “in order” (Luke 1:3). However, it makes sense that Matthew, which emphasizes Jesus’ role as the king, would have the temptation about ruling over the world as the last temptation because to a king, the domain and people over whom he rules is of primary importance.

Commentators differ as to whether Matthew or Luke has the order of events as they actually happened. We suggest that another reason that Luke has the correct order is that it makes sense that to the Devil, the most desirable outcome would be to have Jesus worship him, but if he could not accomplish that, to kill Jesus and be done with him. The order of temptations in Luke accomplishes that goal. The second temptation would result in Jesus worshipping the Devil, and if that failed the third temptation would have resulted in Jesus’ death.

4:9. “worship.” The Devil wanted Jesus to reverence him as he reverenced God. Thus “worship” is appropriate here. See commentary on “pay homage” in Matthew 2:2.

4:10. “For it is written, Worship Yahweh your God, and serve him only.” Quoted from Deuteronomy. 6:13. The quotation is not exact. Deuteronomy 6:13 says, “You shall fear Yahweh your God.” Jesus correctly gets the sense of “fear” in that context, and so brings it forward as “worship.” This is not a case where Jesus was quoting the Septuagint and it read “worship,” because both the Hebrew text and LXX read “fear.”

It is sometimes stated that since we are to worship only God, and, because we are also supposed to worship Jesus, therefore he must be God. That argument is not valid and is based on a false understanding of the word “worship.” While it is true that we are to worship God in a special way reserved only for Him, there is no Greek or Hebrew word that represents that fact. It is an issue of the heart and cannot be represented on the written page. The words for “worship” in both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament are used of both people and God. In fact the entire temptation of Christ by the Devil proves that Jesus was not God. God cannot be tempted (James 1:13). Also, if Jesus were God, the Devil would never have asked Jesus to worship him. God is worshipped, but there is no evidence He worships anything else at any time. It was for desiring to be like God (and thus be worshiped like God) that the Devil was thrown out of heaven in the first place (Isa. 14:12-15), and it is unreasonable to think that the Devil would have believed that God could now be persuaded to worship him.

In the biblical culture, the act of worship was not directed only to God. It was very common to worship (i.e., pay homage to) men of a higher status. Sadly, almost always this fact has been obscured by the translators of the Bible, and therefore is impossible to see in the English translations. The translators usually translate Hebrew or Greek words that relate to worship as “worship” when they refer to God or a pagan god, but as some other word, such as “bow before,” or “pay homage to,” when the worship
involves men. This double standard of translation does not allow the English reader to see what any person reading the Hebrew or Greek text can see: that “worship” is not just reserved for God. A few examples should make our point.

- Exodus 34:14 NIV84: “Do not worship [#7812 שָׁחָה shachah] any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.
- Genesis 19:1 NIV84: When Lot saw the two strangers, he got up to meet them “and bowed down [#7812 shachah] with his face to the ground.”
- Genesis 27:29 NIV84: Isaac said to Jacob: May…peoples bow down [#7812 shachah] to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down [#7812 shachah] to you.
- Exodus 18:7 NIV84 “So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down [#7812 shachah] and kissed him.
- 1 Samuel 1:19 NIV84 Early the next morning they arose and worshiped [#7812 shachah] before the LORD.
- 1 Samuel 2:36 Then everyone left in your family line will come and bow down before him [#7812 shachah] for a piece of silver and a crust of bread.
- 2 Samuel 1:2 On the third day a man arrived from Saul's camp... When he came to David, he fell to the ground to pay him honor [#7812 shachah].

The above list confirms what has already been pointed out—that the translators used the word “worship” when the worship was to God or pagan gods, but never used the word “worship” when people were “worshipping” other people, even though the Hebrew text used the same word for both types of worship. And the above list is only a tiny sampling of the examples that could be given, or of what one will see if he studies the subject for himself. “Worship,” usually expressed by bowing down before someone, was a part of the culture and a way of showing respect or reverence. However, because of the theological position that only God should be worshipped, translators have avoided the English word “worship” when people worship people, in spite of the fact that it is clearly in the original text. We assert that not translating into English what is clearly in the original text has created a false impression in the Christian community and supported the belief that “only God can be worshipped, so if Jesus is worshipped he must be God too.” It is very clear in the biblical text that people “worshipped” other people who deserved that worship, and no person deserved worship more than Jesus Christ.

There is a sense, of course, in which there is a very special worship (homage, allegiance, reverent love and devotion) to be given only to God, but there is no unique word that represents that special worship. Rather, it is a posture of the heart. Scripturally, this must be determined from context. Even words like proskuneō, which are almost always used of God, are occasionally used for showing respect to other men (Acts 10:25). And the word “serve” in Matthew 4:10 is latreuō, which is sometimes translated worship, but used of the worship of other things as well as of the true God (Acts 7:42 - KJV), “worship the host of heaven” and Romans 1:25, “served created things”). Thus, when Christ said, “You shall worship the Lord thy God and Him only shall you worship,” he was speaking of a special worship of God that comes from the heart, not using a special vocabulary word that is reserved for the worship of God only.

Once we understand that in the Bible both God and men are worshipped, we are forced to look, not at the specific word for “worship,” but rather at the heart of the one
doing the worship. It explains why God rejects the worship of those whose hearts are really not with Him. It also explains why there are occasions in the Bible when men reject the worship of other men. In Acts 10:26, Peter asks Cornelius to stand up. In Revelation 19:10, an angel stops John from worshipping him. In these cases it is not the “worship,” per se, that was wrong, or it would have been wrong in all the other places throughout the Bible. In the aforementioned accounts, the one about to be worshipped saw that it was inappropriate or felt uncomfortable in the situation. Actually, the example of John in Revelation is another strong proof that men did worship others beside God. If it were forbidden to worship anyone beside God, the great apostle John would never have even started to worship the angel. The fact that he did so actually proves the point that others beside God were worshipped in the biblical culture.

It is clear why people fell down and worshipped Jesus while he walked the earth and performed great miracles: people loved him and respected him greatly. It is also clear why we are to worship him now—he has earned our love and our highest reverence. He died to set us free, and God has honored him by seating him at His own right hand above all other powers and authorities. Just because we worship God and worship Jesus, does that mean they are the same or receive the same worship. No, it does not. We reserve a special place in our hearts for God, for Jesus, and frankly, for those other people who deserve our “worship” in the biblical sense of the word.

“Yahweh.” “Yahweh” is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote a Gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh, so we have put it in the REV (see commentary on Matthew 3:3).

“Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

4:11. “Slanderer.” This is the Devil. See commentary on 4:1.

“Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

4:12. “he withdrew into Galilee.” Herod Antipas imprisoned John at his palace fortress of Machaerus, which was in Perea, the area beyond Jordan where John had been baptizing according to John 1:28. When Jesus knew John was imprisoned there, he went north into Galilee.

4:13. “And leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum...” Jesus left Nazareth after the people there tried to kill him (Luke 4:28-31). He made Capernaum his home [For more information, see commentary on Mark 2:1].

4:15-16. Quoted from Isaiah 9:1, 2.

“The Road of the Sea.” This major traderoute that went right through Capernaum (there is a Roman mile marker now on display at Capernaum) is most often known by its more modern name that comes from the Latin, the Via Maris. The Via Maris is the ancient trade route linking Egypt with Damascus and all Syria, Anatolia (modern Turkey) and Mesopotamia. Its early name was “Way of the Philistines” (Exod. 13:17) because after leaving Egypt it ran north along the coast of Israel through the territory of the Philistines. The name “Via Maris” is much later and based on the Latin
Vulgate translation of Matthew 4:15. It means “the Way of the Sea,” or “the Road of the Sea.” The history of the Via Maris is long and the main road changed at different periods. For example, before the Roman period the Via Maris went from Capernaum north to Hazor and from Hazor it crossed the Jordan River at Jacob’s Ford then went over the Golan Heights to Damascus. This road still existed in the time of Christ, but recent archaeological evidence suggests that in Roman times the road left Capernaum and headed east to Bethsaida-Julius and then northeast to Damascus.

The Via Maris goes from Egypt across Sinai, through the Philistine Plain and the Plain of Sharon through the cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Joppa. At Dor it branches into two roads. One continues directly north along the Mediterranean coast, and the other follows an inland route by Megiddo, through the Jezreel Valley, then to Old Testament Beth-shean (which is New Testament Scythopolis, a city of the Decapolis). From there it branched, and one branch ran on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, passing through Tiberias, then continuing north through Migdal and Capernaum. The east branch crossed the Jordan south of the Sea of Galilee and ran along the east coast of the lake until Hyppos (Susita) when it turned northeast and climbed over the Golan and then continued down to Damascus. The fact that the Via Maris passed by Capernaum helps explain why that city had a tollhouse (Matt. 2:14) so revenue could be collected from the passing caravans. That money needed protection, so it was also a Roman outpost and had a centurion and troops (Matt. 8:5). Also, it shows us that when Jesus Christ chose Capernaum to be his home town after he left Nazareth, he chose a cosmopolitan town where there would be plenty of opportunity to share the Word and reach others, as well as opportunity for others to more easily reach him.

4:17. “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” Spoken by both John and Jesus. Neither knew about the Administration of the Sacred Secret. They did not know that the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven would be more than 2,000 years in the future. [For a more complete understanding of the Administration of the Sacred Secret, and an explanation of administrations in the Bible, see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be like Christ, Appendix 1 “The Administration of the Sacred Secret.”]

4:18. “Sea of Galilee.” The “sea” of Galilee is actually quite a small lake, only 7 miles (11.2 km) across and 12 miles (19.3 km) long, and the entire lake can be seen from the escarpments on both the east and west sides. The Greek word thalasso, lake, sea, or ocean, does not really refer to the size of the body of water, and thus has to be translated into the English “lake,” “sea,” or “ocean” by knowing the body of water that is being referred to. Because the body of water is historically known as, and called, “the Sea of Galilee” we leave that name intact when its proper name is mentioned. However, when it is not referred to by name, we refer to it like it actually is—a lake.

4:25. “Decapolis.” The Decapolis was a loosely associated league of ten cities (Deka means ten; polis means city), and is also the name of the area where these cities are located. By 200 B.C. the Greeks had occupied towns like Gadara and Philadelphia, and in 63 B.C. the Roman General Pompey liberated Hippos (Susita), Scythopolis (built on the ancient site of Beth-shean), and Pella from the Jews and gave them municipal freedom, allowing them to answer directly to the governor of Syria. About 1 B.C. they formed a league, even minting their own coins. Although the number of cities was probably ten at an early date, with time the number of cities changed. The Roman historian Pliny named the ten cities as Damascus, Philadelphia (modern Amman, Jordan), Canatha, Pella,
Hippos, Gadara, Dion, Raphana, Gerasa (modern Jerash), and Scythopolis (ancient Beth Shean and the only city west of the Jordan River). In the second century A.D., Ptolemy named eighteen cities in the Decapolis, and another source mentions fourteen cities. Hence the number of cities varied from time to time.

The original Decapolis was settled by Greeks who migrated into the area shortly after the conquest of Israel by Alexander the Great. For the most part they either founded a city or moved into a city that did not have a large population and became the dominant influence there. Jesus is never mentioned as going into any specific city of the Decapolis. Nevertheless, he did minister in the area of Tyre, Sidon, and the Decapolis, so he well may have been in a Decapolis city (Mark 7:31), even though primarily ministered to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24). Also, when word about Jesus and what he was doing reached the cities of the Decapolis, “large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him” (Matt. 4:25). Thus, the teachings and miracles of Jesus clearly caught the attention of the Greeks as well as the Jews.

“the region across the Jordan.” Since the list specifically mentions the Decapolis, the region across the Jordan River refers to Perea, the territory controlled by Herod Antipas, who was the son of Herod the Great by his wife Malthace (Herod had 5 wives in his lifetime). Herod Antipas married Herodias, who divorced his half-brother Herod Philip to marry him, and it was Herod Antipas who imprisoned John the Baptist in his castle at Machaerus when John confronted Herod Antipas and told him it was against the Law of Moses to marry his brother’s wife.

Chapter 5

5:3. “Blessed.” This verse is the first of what is called “The Beatitudes.” The word “beatitudes” means “supreme blessedness or happiness, perfect bliss,” so theologians named the first nine verses in the Sermon on the Mount, “The Beatitudes” because they each start with the phrase, “Blessed are.” The Beatitudes primarily refer to the future Kingdom on earth, not this life.

Jesus knew the value of having a true hope, as opposed to a false hope, and he spent the opening part of the Sermon on the Mount, which was his first major teaching recorded in the Word of God, rebuilding the Hope for Israel. Most Christians do not know that everything Jesus said in the Beatitudes, which is the opening of the Sermon on the Mount, relates primarily to the future hope. Most Christians also do not know that what he taught was not “new revelation.” It had already been stated in the Old Testament but had been almost forgotten by his time. What is commonly taught by Christians is that the Beatitudes refer to this life. For example, under “Beatitudes” in the Mercer Dictionary of the Bible, the following definition is provided:

Beatitudes. The term is used to designate the condition of individuals or groups who are faithful or righteous and who may therefore expect to enjoy the favor of God. Such blessings were expected to be realized in this life…” (Watson Mills, ed., *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*; Mercer University Press, Macon, GA, 1990, pp. 92–93).

It is a distortion of the text to interpret the Beatitudes as referring to this life. Although there are certain aspects that do apply today, such as a pure-hearted person
seeing God more clearly than someone with an impure heart, the primary emphasis is on the future. Students of the Bible must understand the difference between “interpretation” and “application.” “Interpretation” is what the verse is actually saying—what it means. “Application” is how a person can apply the verse or an insinuation from the verse in his own life. Someone may say he is “blessed” by God because he is “poor in spirit” (i.e., humble) and refer to Matthew 5:3. However, that is not the primary meaning of the verse, even though the person applies it to his life. A more accurate application (and interpretation) of his idea would come from his using 1 Peter 5:5.

How can “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” be accurately applied to this life when many people who mourn die without ever being comforted? Or, how can “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” be applied to this life? Many meek people never own land and most never “inherit” any land at all. These blessings relate to the future, and Christ was simply teaching what the prophets of long ago had taught. He was rebuilding the walls of doctrine that had been torn down by years of unbelief.

Some Christians try to apply the Beatitudes to this life by spiritualizing them, i.e., by making them something other than a strictly literal reading would say. For example, The New International Commentary expounds on the phrase “the meek shall inherit the earth” by saying that greedy, aggressive people are not able to enjoy what they have in this life, but the meek “have the capacity to enjoy in life all those things that provide genuine and lasting satisfaction.” The first and most obvious problem with this interpretation is that it does not deal with what the verse actually says. There is a world of difference between “inheriting the earth” and “enjoying what one has.” It is safe to assume that if Christ had wanted to communicate to his audience that only meek people can enjoy what they have, he would have said just that.

A second problem with the idea that the verse refers to enjoying things now is that such an interpretation does not provide the comfort and hope that many people need. Many of those in Christ’s audience were poor, hungry, sick, had lost children or relatives to premature death, and were terribly oppressed by the Romans and even their fellow Jews who had rulership over them. They owned little and life was very, very difficult. Would it really have comforted them if what Christ said had meant, “Don’t worry, those greedy people cannot really enjoy all the wealth they have, but you can enjoy what you have”? It would not have comforted them any more than it would comfort people who are poor, sick, and oppressed today. But having hope that things in the future will be better than they are now can be very comforting and encouraging. Furthermore, experience teaches that hope in a wonderful future is more important to people who are having difficulties in life than to those who are having an easy life. William Shakespeare, a brilliant writer and keen observer of human life, wrote, “The miserable have no other medicine, but only hope,” and the Beatitudes provide a wonderful hope for the future.

When a person understands that the subject of the Beatitudes is the future life, not this one, they are easy to understand, profound in their meaning, and powerful in their impact. Christ, the master teacher, garnered truth from the Old Testament and taught it, and as long as the Beatitudes are taken literally and applied to his future Kingdom, what is taught is simple and clear. The Beatitudes are recorded in both Matthew and Luke. There are significant differences between the two Gospels, so both should be examined carefully. In Matthew, Jesus was teaching to a crowd (Matt. 5:1), some of whom were his
disciples, but many were not. Not everyone in the crowd was a believer. Since he was teaching from a mountainside, the teaching is called, “The Sermon on the Mount.” In Luke, Christ was teaching on a plain (Luke 6:17) and although a crowd was listening, he spoke specifically to his disciples (Luke 6:20). Each of the Beatitudes should be studied in light of the Old Testament verses that teach the same basic truth.

“Poor in spirit.” This is the figure of speech “idiom,” and is an idiomatic way of saying “humble in their attitude.” To fully understand the idiom, we must examine both “poor” and “spirit.” The Greek word “poor” is ptochos (πτοχός), and it means poor in wealth, but can refer to being “poor” in other ways. For example, the people Christ addresses in Revelation 3:17 are technically wealthy in material goods, yet Jesus says: “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.” In this verse, “poor” refers to being poor in godliness and in the treasure that will be bestowed at the Judgment. Similarly, the word “poor” can refer to being poor or humble in one’s attitude. This is reflected in Isaiah 66:2, which mentions the person to whom God will pay attention: “but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” This verse mentions a “poor and contrite spirit” but many versions correctly understand that the word “poor” refers to “humble,” and translate it that way (ESV; HCSB; NASB, NIV, NRSV). Kenneth Bailey (Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes (IVP Academic, 2008, pp. 68, 69, 158, 159) does a good job in showing from the Old Testament, the Qumran texts, and even early Christian sources, that “poor” was used idiomatically for “humble.”

The word “spirit” is translated from the Greek word pneuma (πνεῦμα), which has many meanings. Furthermore, when pneuma is translated “spirit,” it can refer to many different things, including God (John 4:24); Jesus (2 Cor. 3:17); angels (Heb. 1:14); and demons (Matt. 10:1). It can also refer to “attitude,” which it does here. Other places it refers to attitude are Matthew 26:41 and Mark 14:38, when Peter and the other disciples were sleepy and Jesus told them, “The spirit [attitude] is willing, but the body is weak.” It is also “attitude” in Acts 18:25 when Apollos was called, “fervent in the spirit” (KJV), meaning that he had a fervent attitude, which is why the NRSV translates the phrase, “he spoke with burning enthusiasm.” Interestingly, English also uses “spirit” as “attitude.” For example, we speak of a person being “in good spirits,” or a school having good “school spirit.”

The “spirit” in Matthew 5:3 cannot refer to the gift of holy spirit, because before the day of Pentecost, holy spirit was only upon a select few people, not upon the crowds Jesus was speaking to. Also, before the Day of Pentecost God gave His holy spirit to whom He wanted and in the measure He wanted, so there was no way anyone could have been “poor” in holy spirit. [For more about the uses of pneuma (spirit) see Appendix 6, “Usages of ‘Spirit’”, and also Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit, The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be like Christ, Appendix B.]

It is important for us to understand that Jesus opened the Sermon on the Mount by teaching that those who were humble in their attitude were blessed. This was not a new teaching, but was an important teaching in the Old Testament as well. Being humble is the door to God’s further blessings. 1 Peter 5:5 says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” When we are humble we hear the voice of God and obey it. When we are not humble we do not get the blessings God would have poured out to us. In the context
of Matthew 5:5, which is the coming Kingdom of Heaven, those who are humble will obey God and thus receive everlasting life in the Kingdom, so they are blessed. References in the Old Testament that humble people would be blessed include Psalm 149:4; Isaiah 29:19; 66:2; and Zephaniah 3:12.

5:4. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” This truth was revealed in the Old Testament in verses such as Isaiah 61:3.

5:5. “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” From Psalm 37: The plain and simple meaning of this verse has been lost due to the traditional teaching that saved people live in heaven forever after they die. Actually, what the Bible teaches is that Jesus Christ will come down from heaven to the earth, fight and win the Battle of Armageddon, and set up his kingdom on earth, which will fill the whole earth (Dan. 2:35, 44; Rev. 19:11-21). He will set up his palace in the newly rebuilt Jerusalem, and for 1,000 years reign over all the earth. Many scholars refer to this 1,000 year kingdom as the “Millennial Kingdom.” It is the “Kingdom” that Jesus spoke about so often. After the 1,000 years are over there will be a great war (Rev. 20:7-10). Then there will be the second resurrection, and after that the Eternal City will come from heaven to earth, in which the saved will live forever (Rev. 21:1-4). [For more information on the future kingdom of earth, see Appendix 3, Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth].

“earth.” The Greek word ge (#1093 γῆ; pronounced “gay”), means 1. arable land; 2. the ground, the earth; 3. the mainland, opposed to sea or water; 4. the earth as a whole, the world; a. the earth as opposed to the heavens; 5. a country, land enclosed within fixed boundaries, a tract of land, territory, or region, when it is plain from the context what land is meant, as that of the Jews.

5:6. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.” Today we live in an evil age, and many people do experience much righteousness. Many are treated unrighteously until the day they die. But one of the great promises of the future kingdom of Christ is that there will be righteousness (Cp. Ps. 37:28, 29; Isa. 1:26; 11:4; Dan. 9:24). We can be spiritually righteous today because of the work of Christ, but Jesus taught this to people before Acts 2 when the holy spirit was poured out from heaven. But even we who are spiritually righteous in the eyes of God long for that promised time when “a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice,” (Isa. 32:1) and righteousness is on the earth (2 Pet. 3:13).

5:7. “Blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy.” This is one of the clear verses in the Beatitudes that shows they are about the future hope, not this life. There are many merciful people who never receive mercy in this life, but they will definitely be shown mercy by God at the Judgment and afterwards. In Matthew 25:31-46, Christ said that those who had fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, sheltered the outcast, clothed the naked, and visited those who were sick or in prison would be shown mercy at the Judgment and allowed into the Kingdom where they will enjoy everlasting life with Christ, while those who had not shown mercy would be excluded. Old Testament verses that show that people who are merciful will be shown mercy include Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:8; and Zechariah 7:9.

5:8. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” People who are pure in heart believe God, and thus will be saved, which is why Jesus said they would see God. In the future God will indeed live with His people (Rev. 21:3). That the pure in heart
would be saved and live forever, and thus get to see God, was a common teaching in the Old Testament.

5:9. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” This clearly refers to the future because the peacemakers on the earth today are often scoffed at and discounted as cowards and compromisers. This is the case whether the conflicts are inter-family, inter-racial, or international. Nevertheless, the Lord recognizes their efforts and they will be called “the sons of God” in the Kingdom, where they will live forever. That peacemakers would have everlasting life was stated in the Old Testament. Psalm 37:37 (NIV84) says, “there is a future for the man of peace.”

5:10. “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” Many of the people who have been persecuted died in the persecution, but they are promised “the Kingdom of Heaven,” i.e., everlasting life in Christ’s wonderful future kingdom on earth.

5:12. “reward.” The Greek is misthos (#3408 µισθός), and it refers to a payment made for work done; wages. As “wages” or “payment,” it can refer to either a reward (cp. Matt. 5:12; 10:41; Luke 6:35; 1 Cor. 3:14) or a punishment (2 Pet. 2:13), depending on what kind of “payment” is due. In the future Millennial Kingdom, when Jesus Christ rules as king on the earth, people will be repaid for what they have done in this life (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or worthless”). Some people might think they have done very little to support God’s work, but if anyone has helped accomplish God’s work on earth, he will be amply rewarded.

In Matthew 5:12 and some other verses, the reward is said to be “in heaven.” The Bible makes it clear that, with the exception of Christians, who are in the Rapture, believers from Old Testament times get up from the dead and live on the earth. Ezekiel 37:12 (KJV) says, “Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.” There is no verse in the Old Testament that states that people go to heaven to live forever. The OT states that when people are resurrected they live on earth.

The rewards that people would receive for their works were said to be “in heaven,” meaning, in God’s keeping. God is keeping a record of people’s deeds, and is thus said to be storing up either the reward, or the punishment, that the person deserves and will receive after the Day of Judgment when Jesus is reigning as king on the earth. It is understandable that Matthew 5:12 and other verses like it, which speak of rewards, treasures, or even a home in heaven, can be confusing and may lead one to believe that righteous people go to heaven when they die. These include verses such as Matthew 5:12 (“Great is your reward in heaven”), Matthew 6:20 (“store up for yourselves treasures in heaven”), Colossians 1:5 (“The hope that is stored up for you in heaven”) and 1 Peter 1:4 (“Kept in heaven for you”). However, Jesus was talking to Jews who knew (or should have known from the Old Testament scriptures) that they would inherit the earth when the Messiah sets up his kingdom on earth (see commentary on Matt. 5:5: “the meek will inherit the earth”). Therefore, the Jews understanding of these concepts would not be based on a literal use of the word heaven in the sense that these physical things, namely, rewards, treasures, and homes, were actually in heaven, but rather, that God, who is in heaven, is “storing” them or keeping record of them. The actual receipt of these things will occur in the future on earth.
God is keeping records of the behavior of each person, a fact that is clearly stated in the Old Testament.

- **Malachi 3:16**: Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name.
- **Ecclesiastes 12:14**: For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

The “record books” of God are also mentioned in the book of Revelation. At the Judgment, “The books were opened” and “The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books” (Rev. 20:12).

Because the Old Testament said that God in heaven was recording people’s deeds, it was a common (and true!) concept in Judaism that people could add to that treasure by their good deeds.

“The notion of a heavenly treasure, beyond the reach of corruption, was a common eschatological concept in Judaism. The righteous on earth do not yet possess it, for it belongs to the future; nevertheless they can now add to it” (J. Emerton, C. Cranfield, and G. Stanton, *The International Critical Commentary: Matthew*).

“An important concept in Jewish and Christian theology is the belief that sins and virtues accumulate and are “stored” the way money might be stored in a treasury. The Lord was believed to keep records of every sin and virtue and require the books be balanced from time to time” (George Wesley Buchanan, *The Anchor Bible: To the Hebrews*; p. xxv).

The Jews in Christ’s audience knew that God was keeping track of their deeds with the intention of rewarding them. They will receive what is rightfully theirs when the Messiah returns and establishes his Kingdom on earth.

**5:18. “not…will ever.”** This phrase is constructed in the Greek by *ou me*, an intensified form of “no.” Literally, it is composed of two words for no, “no not.”

Matthew 5:18 is an interesting study in translation. The ESV says, “For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. But what are an “iota” and a “dot.” An “iota,” is the smallest letter in the Greek alphabet, and the “dot” is from the Greek *keraia*, which means “little horn.” Of course, Jesus was speaking Hebrew or Aramaic to his audience, and the King James Version picked up on that and brought the Greek into Hebrew, using “jot,” which is more properly “yod,” the tenth and smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, and titlle, which are the little horns or ornaments on nicely drawn letters in the Hebrew text. Most modern translators do not want to force their readers to know details of Greek or Hebrew, and so translate the phrase something such as, “not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen,” as the NIV does. The point of what Jesus was saying was that nothing would pass from the Law until all was fulfilled.

**5:21.** Quoted from Exodus 20:13.

**5:22. “I myself.”** The addition of *egō* along with the first person singular verb, *legeō* (I say) is emphatic (BDAG). Jesus not only demonstrated his authority when he taught by doing signs and miracles, he taught with authority, i.e., he taught as one who had the authority to say what he was saying (cp. Matt. 7:29; Mark 1:29).
“Raca.” An insult, probably meaning “empty” with the idea of “empty-head” or “blockhead.”

“Gehenna” is Greek for the “Valley of Hinnom.” Gehenna is the Greek word that comes from the Hebrew words “ge,” meaning “valley,” and “Hinnom,” which was a man’s name. In the Old Testament, the valley is known both as the Valley of Hinnom (Neh. 11:30; some Hebrew texts of Josh. 15:8) and also as the “valley of the sons of Hinnom” (Josh. 18:16; 2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 7:31). It seems that Hinnom’s descendants eventually took over and controlled the valley, and thus “the valley of Hinnom” became “the valley of the sons of Hinnom.” The “Ge Hinnom,” the Valley of Hinnom, is first mentioned in the book of Joshua as part of the northern boundary of the tribal area assigned to Judah (Josh. 15:8). The “Ge Hinnom,” (“Valley of Hinnom”) was the valley immediately south of the city of Jerusalem. This geographical point is very important because the history of the Ge Hinnom is closely tied to Jerusalem.

In Old Testament times, the Valley of Hinnom became associated with pagan sacrifice and even child sacrifice. For example, Ahaz, king of Judah, offered his children as human sacrifices there (2 Chron. 28: 1-3). The prophet Jeremiah spoke out against these evils, and foretold that the Valley of Hinnom would be so full of buried bones that there would finally be no more room to bury anyone else (Jer. 7:31, 32). Although Jeremiah spoke of dead bodies and ashes being thrown there, he also mentioned that it would one day be clean, which will happen in the Millennial Reign of Christ (Jer. 31:40). The bones made the whole area a place to avoid, because if an Israelite touched a human bone, that person would be unclean for seven days (Num. 19:16). This could be a serious hindrance to worship, especially if someone came a long way to Jerusalem to worship but then became unclean and unable to worship for seven days because he or she accidentally touched a bone on the way into the city.

Because it was unclean, the Valley of Hinnom came to be used as the garbage dump by the people of Jerusalem. Of course this was very handy because, as anyone who has to take out the garbage knows, it is always nice if you can carry it downhill and not too far. The inhabitants of Jerusalem would just carry their garbage, including dead animals, bones and other waste, outside the south gate of the city (still to this day called “the dung gate”), down the hill and into the “Valley of Hinnom;” into Ge Hinnom. The waste that was dumped there was then either burned up in the fires that usually burned there, or it rotted away, being eaten by maggots and worms. The fire and maggots that continually consumed the garbage in the Valley of Hinnom is the reason Scripture says that after the Judgment, the fire will not be quenched, nor the worm die (Isa. 66:24; Mark 9:48). By the time of Christ, the Valley of Hinnom had been used for centuries by the inhabitants of Jerusalem as their local garbage dump.

When the Hebrew words, “Ge Hinnom” were translated into Greek in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the “Ge Hinnom” became the “pharagx Hennom,” because “pharagx” is the Greek word for “valley.” Then, by the time the New Testament was written, the Greek name for the valley had simply become “Gehenna.” The Greek word for “valley,” pharagx, dropped off and the Hebrew word for valley, “ge,” was brought directly from the Hebrew into the Greek even though it did not have a meaning in Greek. Of course, something got lost when that happened, and what got lost was that Gehenna was a real place and not some otherworldly fiery region.
Christ spoke in Aramaic or Hebrew, so his audience was never confused about the identity of the place he was talking about. Christ’s audience knew the Ge Hinnom very well, and a large percentage of them had probably thrown garbage there. They understood perfectly what Jesus was saying and the seriousness of his words: if someone purposely continues in flagrant sin, then at the judgment he would not be let into the kingdom, but like the garbage, would be thrown out and destroyed. These are hard words, but they are the truth, and Christ taught them.

Christ’s audience knew about the valley of Hinnom where the garbage was burned until it was gone, but they would have known nothing about a place where people are burned alive forever. The Old Testament certainly does not mention such a place. However, when Gehenna is translated “hell,” English readers are led to believe that when Christ spoke of Ge Hinnom he was speaking of a place of eternal torment. He was not. He was speaking of the simple concept that the wicked and unsaved will be destroyed. The wicked will, like the garbage, be totally consumed into nothingness. Their lives will end in every way—they will be annihilated.

The concept of “burning forever in hell” came into Christianity from the Greeks who believed in an “immortal soul.” It is important, however, to realize that the phrase “immortal soul” is not in the Bible. Eternal torment is not the teaching of Scripture. John 3:16, and many other verses, teach the simple truth that each person will either live forever or be destroyed and be totally gone (see commentary on Rev. 20:10).

Although many Christians believe that the unquenchable fire and worms that do not die refer to everlasting torment, that is not the case. No one in Christ’s audience thought the garbage thrown into Gehenna burned forever, they knew that the fire burned and the worms ate until the garbage was gone. The picture of Gehenna is one of the total destruction of the sinner. At the Judgment, sinners will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15), which Christ compared to the Valley of Hinnom (Gehenna). In the lake of fire sinners will burn until they are completely consumed. There will be no repentance accepted, and no restoration to life. The punishment is not for a specific time of repayment, as if the sinners were only in jail, after which they are restored to everlasting life. No, their death will be ultimate and final. The fire will not be “quenched,” it will burn until all the garbage is gone. The worms will not “die” and thus their work be interrupted, in Gehenna they eat until there is no more garbage to consume. Thus, the “punishment” of the sinners (not “punishing,” as if they were still alive) is eternal. The people whose bodies are burned in the Valley of Hinnom never receive eternal life. They die, and that punishment, their death, lasts forever.

5:26. “quadrans.” The Roman quadrans was the smallest Roman coin, and was worth ¼ of an assarion, which was 1/64 of a denarius. A denarius was a day’s wage for a common laborer, so if a laborer makes eight dollars an hour for eight hours, or sixty-four dollars a day, a quadrans was worth one dollar.

5:27. Quoted from Exodus 20:14

5:29. “cause you to fall.” We have gone with “cause you to fall” as a translation of skandalizō (σκανδαλίζω). “Offend you” misses the mark, because many people are not offended by sin, especially their own. You may or may not be offended by your own sin, but that is not the point of the verse. The idea is that if your hand causes you to fall away from obedience, then something has to be done. We felt that “cause you to stumble” was too weak, given that by definition stumble means “almost fall.” Christ is
not saying that if your hand almost makes you fall, then cut it off, but rather if your hand causes you to fall into sin and disobedience, do what it takes to stop the situation from happening.

“cut it off.” This is the figure of speech Hyperbole (exaggeration; Cp. Bullinger; Figures of Speech Used in the Bible). The people of the Eastern culture often use hyperbole to make a point, even as we Westerners do. We say, “I’m starved,” when we mean we are hungry, or “I’m freezing” when we are uncomfortably cold. In the same way, people in the biblical culture overstated points to make a point. In this case, Christ was saying that people need to take drastic action to keep from sinning. This is a lesson we all need to learn: many people make peace with their sin rather than deal with it and stop sinning.

“Gehenna.” For information on Gehenna and that people do not burn forever, see commentary note on Matthew 5:22. [For information on annihilation in the lake of fire, see Appendix 5, “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”.

5:30. “Gehenna.” See commentary on Matthew 5:22. [For information on annihilation in the lake of fire, see Appendix 5, “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”].


5:32. “Sexual immorality.” The Greek is porneia, (πορνεία,) Porne (4202) is traditionally a female prostitute, while pornos (4205) is the masculine and in the Greek culture, especially early on, referred to a male prostitute. However, especially in the New Testament, the words were used in a more general sense, though they still retained some of the gender overtones.

5:33. Quoted from Leviticus 19:12; Numbers 30:2.

“Yahweh.” “Yahweh” is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote a Gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh, so we have put it in the REV (see commentary on Matthew 3:3).

5:37. “Wicked One.” The Greek is ponēros, which the BDAG Greek-English Lexicon describes as, “pertaining to being morally or socially worthless; therefore, ‘wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, and degenerate.’” Ponēros is an adjective, but it is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun). A good example of a substantive in English is the adjectives in the well-known Clint Eastwood movie, “The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly.” The adjectives “good,” “bad,” and “ugly” refer to people (“good people,” “bad people,” “ugly people”), and thus they function as nouns even though they are adjectives. Similarly, “the wicked” here in Matthew 5:37 is a substantive and means, “the Wicked One,” which is the translation in most modern versions.

Other substantives in the Bible include: 1 John 5:19 where “the evil” also means “the evil one.”; Revelation 1:19, where “the Living” actually is “the Living One.”; Matthew 10:41, where “a righteous” actually refers to “a righteous one” (or someone righteous); Matthew 12:41, where “a greater” means “a greater one.”; Romans 8:28, where “called” refers to “the called ones” (although some versions translate “called” in that sentence as if it was a verb, which it is not); 1 Thessalonians 4:6, where “avenger” is “an avenging one.”

There are translators who do not believe that poneros is a substantive, but is only the word “evil.” However, evil does not just happen. The wording the Bible uses, that sin
is “from” evil, points to a source. “Evil” is not just floating around, it comes from somewhere. It seems that if the Lord simply meant to say that swearing oaths by Jerusalem, or by your hair, was evil, he would have simply said, “it is evil,” and not, it “is from the evil.”

The Slanderer is the fount and foundation of wickedness. It was in him that wickedness was first found, when he was lifted up with pride and decided to rebel against God. Ever since that time he has been true to his name, “the Wicked One,” and has been doing and causing wickedness wherever he can, which, since he is “the god of this age,” is a considerable amount of wickedness. [For more names of the Slanderer (the Devil) and their meanings, see Appendix 14, “Names of the Slanderer”].

5:43. Quoted from Leviticus 19:18.
5:44. “Love your enemies and pray.” The word “love” is the verb agapaō (#25 ἀγαπάω; the more familiar noun is agape). In this context, to love one’s enemy does not mean to “feel good” about them, but rather to act toward them in a loving manner. To better understand what God is telling us when He says, “love your enemies,” see the commentary on John 21:15, “I am your friend.”

The phrases, “bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you,” which appears in the KJV, NKJV, and YLT, and partially in Darby’s NT, were not in the original text of Matthew. They were added by scribes who took them from Luke 6:27 and 28. The early manuscript evidence from the Alexandrian, pre-Caesarean, and Western text families as well as evidence from some of the Coptic and Syriac texts, along with the evidence that some manuscripts do not have both phrases, which shows that in some cases the scribe was comfortable adding only one of them, is conclusive evidence that these two phrases were not in the original text of Matthew (see B. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament).

Chapter 6

6:1. “acts of righteousness.” This is the figure of speech, Metonymy (Cp. Bullinger; Figures of Speech Used in the Bible). The result, righteousness, is put instead of the action that produces it. A more literal rendition of the verse, without the figure, would read, “Take care that you do not do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them...”

“you have.” The Greek is in the present tense, “you have,” and it is making the point that God is storing up rewards now, and will dispense them later.

“no reward laid up with your Father.” This is a very strong warning for people to watch the motives that drive their actions. If a person does good deeds, which normally would be rewarded by God in the future Paradise, but he only does them to impress people, when people are impressed that is his payment. God will not pay us for work we do not do for His glory. Instead of “from your Father,” the more natural meaning of the Greek preposition para, translated “with” in the REV, is “beside,” but that is not as clear as “with” is to the average reader. If we have the translation as “with,” or even more literally, “beside,” combined with the present tense of “having” a reward, then the
translation is: “you have no reward laid up beside your Father.” The picture being painted by this verse is very biblical and very oriental: God is in heaven sitting on His throne, and he is watching what people are doing on earth and making up rewards and setting them beside Him so that He can give them out in the future. The biblical picture is that God makes the rewards as the people do the good deeds, He does not manufacture them in the future and distribute them at that time. Of course we learn from other verses, such as 2 John 1:8, that if we are not faithful, we can lose the rewards we have stored up for ourselves.

6:4. “repay you.” The word “openly,” which occurs in versions such as the King James, was added by scribes to some Greek texts, but it is not in the original text (See Metzger, Textual Commentary).


6:6. “inner room.” A room in the interior of the house. Calling it a “closet” misses the point, since most people think of closets as a place to store clothes. Jesus was saying to go into an inner room where no one would see, so your devotions could be private.

“repay you.” The word “openly” occurs in some versions but was added by scribes to some Greek texts. It was not in the original text (See commentary on Matthew 6:4).

6:7. “keep repeating the same phrases.” The Greek word is battologeō (βατταλογέω), and it means, use the same words again and again (BDAG), “to babble” in the sense of trying to achieve success in prayer by heaping up repetitions (Kittel, Theological Dictionary). Williams translates it as “keep on repeating set phrases.” That is what many religions do, repeat set prayers because “they think that they will be heard for their many words.”

6:9. “in the heavens.” Jesus would have been speaking Hebrew (possibly Aramaic), and in Hebrew, “heavens” is always plural. The Greek text accurately reflects Jesus words, and has heavens in the plural. It is always best to represent the idioms of the culture accurately if possible.

“may your name be treated as holy.” This is a reference to the coming kingdom when the people will “keep My name holy” (Isa. 29:23) and Cp. Ezekiel 36:23.

6:13. “Wicked One.” The Greek is poneros (πονηρός), which the BDAG Greek-English Lexicon describes as, “pertaining to being morally or socially worthless; therefore, ‘wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, and degenerate.’”

Poneros is an adjective, but it is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun). A good example of a substantive in English is the adjectives in the well-known Clint Eastwood movie, “The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly.” The adjectives “good,” “bad,” and “ugly” refer to people (“good people,” “bad people,” “ugly people”), and thus they function as nouns even though they are adjectives.

The Slanderer is the fount and foundation of wickedness. It was in him that wickedness was first found, when he was lifted up with pride and decided to rebel against God. Ever since that time he has been true to his name, “the Wicked One,” and has been doing and causing wickedness wherever he can, which, since he is “the god of this age,” is a considerable amount of wickedness. [For more on substantives, see the commentary on Matthew 5:37]. [For more on the names of the Slanderer (the Devil) and their meanings, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer.”]

6:18. “openly.” The word “openly” was added by scribes to some Greek texts, but it is clearly not in the original (Cp. Metzger, Textual Commentary).

Matthew 6:22. “single.” The Greek word translated “single” is haplous (#573 ἅπλος), and means “single,” therefore “unmixed.” The key to this saying about the “single” eye and the “evil eye,” in this context of wealth, is to realize they are Semitic idioms. In this context the “single eye” is the generous eye, it is unmixed with worldly desires for wealth and possessions, and is therefore generous towards others. In contrast, the “evil eye,” is used idiomatically in the Semitic languages for a person who is greedy, covetous, and envious. Not content with what he has, he casts his eye upon the things that others have, and desires them. The well-known Semitic scholar John Lightfoot writes that the saying about the single and evil eye is “From a very usual manner of speech of the [Jewish] nation. For a good eye, to the Jews, is the same with a bountiful mind; and an evil eye is the same with a covetous mind.” (Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica; Vol. 2, p. 156. Emphasis his).

Romans 12:8 says that the person who gives must give with “singleness” (haplotēs), again, idiomatically meaning “generously.” In James 1:5, the related word haplōs (simplicity, openness) is used idiomatically for “generously.”

It is easy to see how the words “good eye,” or “single eye,” became connected with generosity, and was used idiomatically for someone who was generous. The single eye was an eye that was unmixed with ulterior or selfish motives, and so the person was generous.

In Western cultures, the “evil eye” was a look or glance that meant harm and brought harm. Although this use of the “evil eye” may have existed in ancient Judaism, there is no reason to think it is used in Matthew or Luke. The Semitic idiom of the “good” or “single” eye being generous, and the “evil eye” being greedy, covetous, and stingy, holds true throughout the Bible. The “good eye” of Proverbs 22:9 is generous, and the “evil eye” of Deuteronomy 15:9; 28:54; Proverbs 23:6 and 28:22 refers to someone who is greedy and stingy.

Once we understand that the “single eye” is generous, and the “evil eye” is greedy and envious, we can see why Jesus used it in this context. Jesus starts in Matthew 6:19 talking about laying up treasures in heaven, not on earth, and to do that one must have a single eye and be generous, and not have an evil eye and be greedy. Then he explains that no one can have two masters: you cannot try to serve heaven and earth. You cannot effectively love both God and wealth. The dialogue develops from there: if you truly trying to serve God, then you cannot be worried about your earthly possessions. You must let go of your love for them and trust God to meet your needs.

Matthew 6:24. “two lords.” Matthew 6:24 has three difficult phrases, and to properly understand the verse we must understand its vocabulary and customs. Jesus told us plainly about what would happen if a person tried to serve two masters. One was that the person would love one master, and thus serve that one well, and “hate” the other, and thus not serve that one as well. It helps us make sense of the verse when we realize that in the Eastern mindset and vocabulary, “hate,” does not always mean “hate” as we generally use it today, in the sense of extreme hostility or intense dislike. Especially when used in contrast to “love,” in the biblical culture (both Hebrew and Greco-Roman) the word “hate” often means “love less.”

The second difficult phrase in the verse, in typical Eastern fashion of teaching, is an amplification and clarification of the first phrase. Jesus made sure we understood what
he meant by saying that a person trying to serve two masters would “hold to the one, and despise the other.” As in the first phrase about love and hate, we must understand the biblical vocabulary to understand this phrase. The first phrase, translated “hold to” in the KJV, is cleared up for us in most modern versions, which read, “be devoted to” (HCSB; ESV; NET; NIV). However, the use of “despise” in both the KJV and many modern versions, is less clear and needs to be properly understood.

It is surprising that many modern versions continue to use the word “despise,” even though it gives most readers the wrong impression. The Greek word translated “despise” is καταφρονέω (Strong’s #2706 καταφρονέω), and it has a range of meaning that encompasses looking down on someone or something with contempt or aversion; considering something not important and thus disregarding it; and not caring about, or ignoring, someone or something. In defense of the modern version’s use of “despise,” it is true that one of the primary meanings of the English word “despise” is to look down on with contempt or to regard as worthless (this is even the first definition in Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary). However, the much more well-known use of “despise” is one of its other definitions: an intense dislike and even loathing.

Jesus was not saying a person would be devoted to one master while intensely disliking or loathing the other master. Jesus was making the simple statement that if a person had two masters, he would often be devoted to one and end up ignoring the other.

There are other uses of the Greek word καταφρονέω that are translated “despise” in many versions, which can give us the wrong impression of what the verse is saying. One is when Paul writes to Timothy and says, “Let no one despise you for your youth” (1 Tim. 4:12 ESV). No one would hate someone who was young; the better way to understand the verse is just like Matthew 6:24 about the two masters; Paul told Timothy not to let anyone ignore him just because he was young. Similarly, in many versions Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus endured being crucified, “despising the shame.” It was indeed a shameful thing to be crucified, but Jesus did not “hate” it, he ignored it. In doing that he set a wonderful example for us to follow. Many times we will find that if we are to be a true follower of Jesus, we will have to ignore the shame and mistreatment we endure.

“Wealth.” The Greek is μαμμόνας (#3126 μαμμόνας). “Mammon” is an Aramaic term for wealth, property, or anything of value. “Mammon” was the Syrian god of riches. Thus, the idea is that you cannot serve both God and the idol of Wealth. In Luke 16:9, “mammon” is not compared to serving God, so simply “wealth” is a better translation there. Furthermore, “Wealth” is a better translation than “money.” There are Greek words that specifically mean “money,” and that would have been used in the verse if Jesus had meant only “money.” In contrast, “Mammon” refers to total “wealth,” including money, property, and possessions, any or all of which some people serve instead of God.

It should catch our attention that the Greek text does not say “wealth,” but rather retains the Aramaic term that is transliterated in the KJV as “Mammon.” The Young’s Literal Translation of the Bible has the right idea when it translates “Mammon” with a capital “M.” Jesus was speaking of “Mammon” as if it was a god. It was much easier to personify “Wealth” in the Greco-Roman world than it is today because the Greeks and Romans often personified concepts as gods and goddesses. For example, Abundantia was the divine personification of abundance and prosperity, Aequitas (Equity) was the divine personification of fairness, Bonus Eventus was the divine personification of “Good
Outcome,” and Mors was the personification of death (the Greek personification of death was Thanatos). Thus, to a person living at the time of Christ, it was clear that Jesus was making a kind of play on words, and saying in a very graphic and clever way, “You cannot serve God and the ‘god of Possessions’” (wealth, things, stuff).

6:25. “life” (2x). The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoc-kay'), and psuchē has a large number of meanings, often “soul” or “life.” Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. [For a more complete explanation of psuchē, “soul,” see Appendix 7, “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

6:33. “seek.” The Greek word is zēteō (#2212 ζητέω), and it means to seek, to search for, to crave. It is present tense, active voice, imperative mood, which means it is a command that we should be continually doing. “Be seeking first the Kingdom of God!” Charles Williams’ translation reads, “But as your first duty, keep on looking for….” Sadly, people do not “keep seeking first” the Kingdom, but get distracted. Sinners ignore God, and can appear to be doing better (or having more fun) than those who are obeying God, so God admonishes us: “Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the LORD all the day” (Prov. 23:17 ESV).

Chapter 7

7:1. “Do not judge.” The Greek word translated “judge” is krinō (#2919 κρίνω), and basically it means to make a selection, or express an opinion about something. It is used in many contexts, including meaning to separate, to select, to approve, to be of the opinion of, to determine, to judge, to rule, to contend together (of warriors and combatants), to dispute, or in a forensic sense to have a lawsuit with. So whether “judging” is a good thing or a bad thing, or even just a part of life, must be determined from the context in which the word is used. For example, in Romans 14:5, a person “judges” what days he considers special (we, for example, might judge Christmas Day to be a special day, but many people would not).

Here in Matthew 7:1, krinō means to pass an unjust judgment upon someone or something. Not just an unfavorable judgment, but an unjust judgment. There are times when an unfavorable judgment is a righteous judgment. For example, in this verse, “Do not judge so that you are not judged,” the last “judged” is the Final Judgment of God, and His judgment, even if it declares someone unrighteous, is a righteous judgment. God is not unrighteous for judging us, or even condemning the unrighteous.

Krino can also refer to judging that we do that is a righteous judgment. In fact, no one can live wisely without making judgments, and Christians are called to make correct judgments about others. If we do not make judgments about others, the Devil will take advantage of our weakness or indecisiveness and wreak havoc on the Church. In John 7:24, Jesus called upon us to “judge with righteous judgment.”

In 1 Corinthians 5:12, Paul told the Corinthians that it was their responsibility to judge other Christians. The Corinthians in Corinth had been blind and weak, too affected by the culture around them, which was very sexual. Corinth was a center of sexual profligacy in the Roman world, so much so that a common Latin slang term for a prostitute was a “Corinthian girl.” The Corinthians had allowed egregious adultery in
their congregation—a man having sex with his father’s wife. Paul told them he had judged that person (1 Cor. 5:3), and they were to throw him out of the Church.

Other uses of “judge” in the NT that show it is something we have to do include: in Luke 7:43, Jesus praised Peter for making a correct judgment about what he was teaching, and in 12:57 he reproved the religious leaders for correctly judging the weather, but not making a correct judgment about the times of the Messiah in which they lived. In Acts 20:16 Paul made a judgment while traveling not to stop at Ephesus. We are to judge the things of this life (1 Cor. 6:3). We are to judge what we hear people say (1 Cor. 10:15).

In the wider context of living life, we can see that it is impossible to live wisely without making judgments. We make judgments about everything we do and everyone we are with all day long. The judgments we make are expressed in words such as “test,” and “determine.” In 2 Corinthians 13:5 we are to test ourselves; in 1 John 4:1 we are to test the spirits, and in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 we are to “test everything. Hold fast to that which is good.”

Considering the wide range of meaning of “judge,” and the fact that Christians are called upon to judge others in the Church to keep the congregation godly, it is amazing that the Adversary has been so effective at using the phrase, “Do not judge, so that you will not be judged,” to keep people from standing against evil. In the first place, the context of this verse is verse 2, that we will be judged by the same standard we use to judge. We should correctly judge others because we want God to correctly (and graciously) judge us. But what if we will not make any judgments against others? Can we “opt out” of judging? No, we cannot. Opting out of judging was what the people of Corinth were trying to do in 1 Corinthians 5. There was evil in their midst, but rather than make a difficult judgment, they allowed the evil. Christians must accept the fact that living wisely means making judgments, and all judgment against evil is difficult and distasteful; no one wants to do it, even though it has to be done. Was it a blessing for the people in Corinth to be able to go before God and say, “Even though there was sin in our church, at least we did not judge anyone.”? No, instead they were reproved by God for their lack of making the kind of difficult judgment that protected the Church—a judgment Paul ended up having to make for them.

When Christ said for us not to judge here in Matthew 7:1 and in Luke 6:37, we can tell from the context that he meant for us not to condemn others unrighteously, like the religious leaders around Jesus were doing when they judged (condemned) him for healing on the Sabbath or telling someone his sins were forgiven. As Christians, we not only have to judge just so we can function in day-to-day life, but God expects us to judge others so our lives, and the Church, are not destroyed by the Devil.

7:4. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

7:6. “dogs…pigs.” In this verse “dogs” and “pigs” represent those things that are most unclean and vile to the Jew. Although in some contexts, “dogs” represent Gentiles, that is not the case here, for even Jesus gave pearls of wisdom to Gentiles (Cp. the Samaritan woman in John 4, for example). Here they refer to those who are unclean and ungodly in their thoughts and lifestyle. Those who reject the pearls of love and blessings that are given to them will not only reject what was said to them, but often use what was said to them against the one who spoke to them. The verse is a lesson in that we have to use
wisdom in what we say to whom. Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.”

“pearls.” Pearls were very expensive in the ancient world, and very highly valued. [For more on pearls, see commentary on Revelation 18:12].

7:7. “keep asking.” The verb for “ask” in this verse is in the active voice, present tense, and imperative mood. The present tense in this case is what is known as a broadband present, or continuous present (Cp. Wallace, Greek Grammar, pg. 519-25). This form indicates a continual action that takes place over a long time, rather than a one-time-event. We are not to just ask once for the things we seek from God, but to repeatedly ask, as the widow kept asked the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8). Wallace explains the present tense here in Matthew 7:7 this way: “The force of the present imperatives is ‘ask repeatedly, over and over again…seek repeatedly…knock continuously, over and over again’” (Wallace, Exegetical Syntax, 521). The imperative mood is the mood of command or of exhortation. Jesus is not just making a statement that we should ask, as if he thinks we can take it or leave it. He is making an impassioned plea, an earnest exhortation that believers ask for what they need.

One of the faults that Christians have is that they stop praying for things before they get an answer. Of course there are times when, during prayer, we learn that what we are praying for is not God’s will. In that case, of course we should stop. Also, there are times when we are praying that the circumstances change, such as if we are praying for a sick person to get healed but they die, which occasionally happens. In these cases, too, we should stop praying. But otherwise we need to be like the persistent widow in Luke 18 who keeps coming to the judge time after time. We need to pray and pray and pray. When Daniel wanted an answer from God about the revelation he received from God, he prayed for three weeks (Dan. 10:2) before he got an answer, and we do not know how much longer he would have prayed if an answer had not come to him when it did.

There are even some Christians who teach that is disrespectful of God, or shows a lack of trust (“faith”), if we pray more than one time for something. Their theology is that if you pray one time with trust, that is enough, and then just wait for the prayer to be answered. That sounds good and full of trust, but it is unbiblical. The Bible says keep praying, keep asking, and keep knocking. Cp. Luke 11:9, John 16:24, and commentary on 1 John 3:22.

7:13. “gate.” The Greek word translated “gate” is πύλη, (#4439 πύλη; pronounced poo'-lay), and it means “gate,” and is used just as we use the English word “gate,” usually referring to entering a city, yard, courtyard, or some other type of wide area like a park. In contrast, the Greek word θύρα (#2374 θύρα) is “door,” and usually referred to the door of a more enclosed or defined area, such as a house or a room. Thus Jesus called himself the “door” of the sheepfold (see commentary on John 10:1, “door”). The fact that it is a gate that leads to death and a gate that leads to life helps make the point that those are wide areas and can accommodate many people. Every person who has ever lived will enter either the wide gate to their death or the narrow gate to everlasting life.

In this teaching, the “road” and the “gate” are the figure of speech hypocatastasis (see commentary on Revelation 20:2). They illustrate in a way that is easy to understand that not many people will make the effort to live the lifestyle that will result in everlasting life, while lots of people will live an undisciplined life which results in everlasting death.

7:15. “destructive, greedy.” The Greek is *harpax* (#727 ἁρπαξ), an adjective, and it means, 1) vicious, ravenous, destructive, like a wild animal (Matt. 7:15) (2) violently greedy (Luke 18:11). When *harpax* is used substantively [when it is used as a noun], it means robber or swindler (1 Cor. 6:10) (Friberg’s Lexicon). Jesus, speaking of the false prophets, compared them to wolves, and used the adjective *harpax*, which means both destructive and greedy. Most versions chose one definition or the other so that the one word in the Greek text matches one word in the English translation, but we felt that the greedy and destructive nature of wolves and false prophets needed to be accurately represented in English. The one Greek word, *harpax*, carries both meanings, but two are necessary in the English translation. False prophets are very destructive, and greedy in that they never seem to be satisfied, pouring out their evil prophecies upon unsuspecting people.

7:21. “will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.” The Kingdom of Heaven will be the kingdom that Jesus will set up on the earth after he comes down from heaven and fights the Battle of Armageddon [Rev. 19:1ff. See Appendix 3, “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”]. People who get to enter the kingdom live forever, so in this context the phrase means having everlasting life and living in the kingdom, complete with all the kingdom blessings of perfect health, safety, no hunger, etc.

7:23. “Depart from me, you who work lawlessness.” This verse is written about people before the Day of Pentecost who acted as if they are walking with Christ and obeying God but were not. Today a Christian can turn from God and live lawlessly and selfishly without his everlasting life being in jeopardy, but before the Age of Grace that was not possible because there was no New Birth and no guarantee of salvation [For information on the permanence of salvation, see Appendix 1, “The Permanence of Christian Salvation”].

   It is very important that Christians understand this verse in Matthew, even though it was written to people who lived before the Administration of Grace. The general principle is that even if people do some good things or utilize the power of God, if their use of God’s power is outside the will of God such as being for their own aggrandizement or done without love, it is not pleasing to God. The phrase “depart from me” has to be taken in the context of verse 21, which speaks of entering into the Kingdom of Heaven and having everlasting life. Before the Day of Pentecost, those people who were not faithful to God will have to depart from Christ and will not receive everlasting life.

   We should ask the question, “When can we use the power of God and be outside the will of God?” The abilities, talents, and ministries that people have are given to them by God. In contrast to our God-given talents, which we naturally possess, is godly character, which takes a lot of effort to develop. Developing godly qualities such as the fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23) or the character that leaders are supposed to have (1 Tim. 3:3-12; Titus 1:6-9) is hard work. In the systems of the world that Satan sets up or oversees, talent is more valuable than character. If a person is a good singer and can pack an auditorium, the fact that he or she is a drunkard, sexually immoral, mean-spirited, etc., gets overlooked by the world. This attitude must never be allowed to leak over into the way believers do things.

   Every believer has God-given talents. There are believers who are great singers, administrators, teachers, businesspeople, etc., but their talent and their success are never as important as whether or not they exhibit the character of Christ. That was the case in
this section of Matthew. Jesus teaches us that at the Judgment men and women with ministries and abilities in prophecy, working miracles and discerning of spirits will come forward, proud of their “great accomplishments.” However, if these people did not develop the character of Christ and did not walk in obedience to God, then they “did their own thing,” and thus they are said to “work lawlessness,” i.e., do things in a way that does not follow the ways and laws of God. This is made clear by the last phrase in verse 21, which makes the point that these people did not do the will of God.

We must not be confused by the fact that the people Jesus was referring to here in Matthew had holy spirit and were casting out demons, and think because of that this was a reference to people who were born again, like Christians are today. The New Birth that we Christians have started on the Day of Pentecost, but God had given the gift of holy spirit to many people in the Old Testament. Many leaders of Israel had it (cp. Num. 11:17, 25), the prophets, the judges in the book of Judges, many kings like David and Solomon, and others, had the gift of holy spirit upon them.

“lawlessness.” The Greek word is anomia (#458 ἀνοµία), literally, “a,” without, and “nomos,” law, therefore “lawless, contempt for and violation of, the law (lawlessness can also be due to ignorance of the law). Although some English versions have “iniquity” (KJV), “evildoers” (NIV), or “you people who do wrong” (CEB), those translations are not as accurate as “lawlessness.” Usually casting out demons is a good thing, but these people were doing it “lawlessly,” meaning they were doing it outside the law of God, and therefore for their own purposes and self-aggrandizement, not for the furthering the Kingdom of God. Many people use the power of God to further their own cause, not God's cause. It has been said, “The gifts and talents we have are God's gift to us; the way we use them is our gift to God.” The people in Matthew 7 were not being faithful to God in their use of His power; they were being selfish and unloving. So Christ said he did not know them.

7:24. “will be like.” The Greek is homoioo (#3666 ὁμοιόω). The verb is in the future tense, passive voice, so “will be like” is a good translation. The future tense, “will be like,” is important here, although some English versions ignore it and say “is like.” The context is the future, i.e., Judgment Day (v. 21, 23). Today people who build their lives on “sand” may be rich and powerful, but deny and defy God and His laws. They are building on sand, but do not appear to be doing that as far as the world is concerned. Nevertheless, on Judgment Day, they “will be like” people who built on sand—their life’s work will be demolished and they will be destroyed. In a similar way, many people who are actually “wise” today seem foolish to the world; indeed, many people even lose their lives because of Christ. The true wisdom of these people will not be revealed until the Day of Judgment, when the words that Jesus spoke, that the one who will lose his life for Jesus will find his life (Matt. 10:39), will be seen to be true.

7:25. “beat violently upon.” In this parable Jesus shows the importance of a person building his “house,” his life, on a firm foundation. One of the important changes that is missed in many versions is that the wind did not just “beat upon” both houses (KJV), or “beat against” both houses (NIV). The Greek words are different. The Greek word we translate as “beat violently upon” is prospiptō (#4363 προσπίπτω) and its meaning in this context is to rush against, to move with force against. In contrast, the word “beat upon” in verse 27 is proskoptō (#4350 πρόσκοπτω) and it means to beat on in a violent manner, bruise, cause to stumble. It is clear that the way these two verbs are juxtaposed in this
parable that the second one, *proskoptō*, has less force than the first. Lenski addresses this well: *"[Proskoptō] is the weaker verb, “to stumble against,” “to strike the foot against,” while...[prospiptō] means “to fall upon suddenly,” “to strike.” The idea suggested is that the house on the rock withstood all the pounding of the winds and the waters while the house on the sand gave way as soon as the tempest stumbled against its foundation"* (Matthew; p. 313).

**Chapter 8**

8:2. “**Look!**” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“**bowed down before.**” See commentary on Matthew 2:2.

“**want to.**” The Greek is *thelō* (2309 θέλω), which means to want or to desire, or to have a willingness. However, when it comes to healing and miracles, someone usually has to be more than just “willing,” he must really want it. Similarly, the one doing the miracle must be more than just “willing,” he must want the miracle to occur. The force of Jesus’ energy and desire comes out in the way he says, “Be clean,” which is in the imperative mood in Greek (the mood of command), and which we translate with an exclamation point to alert the reader to that fact.

8:16. “**by his word.**” For people who have been involved in deliverance ministry, this seems so natural that it can escape our notice. We think, “Of course he cast out demons by his word, how else would he do it?” We have to remember that in the cultures of the biblical world, if there was deliverance from demons at all it usually involved complicated exorcism ceremonies. In stark contrast to those involved ceremonies, all Jesus did was command the demon to go and it left the person.

8:17. Quoted from Isaiah 53:4.

8:22. “**leave the dead to bury their own dead.**” This seems terribly harsh until we realize how the Eastern people live and understand it in its social context. The man’s father was not dead, and how long he might live—days, weeks, months, or even years—is not part of the context. In ancient Israel, people were buried the same day they died, and if someone was traveling he could easily miss the funeral. This man expressed an interest in following Jesus, but wanted it to be convenient, when all his family affairs were concluded and his responsibility to be at his father’s funeral was over. Jesus, in saying what he did, shows us that following him will not always be tidy and convenient, but that we will have to make sacrifices. Just as Jesus made a choice between his family and his followers (cp. Mark 3:31-34), he asks us to do the same (cp. Luke 14:26). If his father loved this son, he would understand that following Jesus was a call of God and came with the risk of him not being present when the father died.

8:24. “**Look!**” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

8:26. “**subdued.**” The Greek word translated “subdued” is *epitimaō* (#2008 ἐπιτιμάω). Usually *epitimaō* means to express strong disapproval of someone: rebuke, reprove, censure; or to speak seriously, and thus warn in order to prevent or end an action. It can also mean “punish” (cp. BDAG Lexicon).
In this context, *epitimaō* has a technical meaning: it is used in Greek religion of gaining control over a spirit, a demon. Robert Guelich (*Word Biblical Commentary: Mark*) *epitimaō* can mean “a commanding word uttered by God or by his spokesman, by which evil powers are brought into submission.” Jesus subdued the storm, which was no doubt caused by a demon, by the power of God that he wielded, which he expressed in words. The power came from God and was used by Jesus. Jesus did not gain control over the storm by some “magic words” or formula that he used. “It is not a magical incantation...it is powerful Word of the Son” (Gerhard Kittle, *Theological Dictionary*, ἐπιτιµάω Vol. 2, p. 626). This storm on the Sea of Galilee is recorded in Matthew, Mark 4:35-41, and Luke 8:22-25, and in every record, *epitimaō* is used. [For more on *epitimaō*, and Jesus’ use of the power of God, see the commentary on Mark 1:25.]

**8:29. “Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“*What do we have in common with you?*” The literal Greek is, “What is there to us and to you?” This is a Greek idiom, and its meaning is somewhat flexible, depending on the context in which it is used. Here, the essence is, “What do I have in common with you?” (Wuest, *Word Studies; Vincent’s Word Studies*). The message is “Leave me alone” (Lenski). However, the phrase is also used when Jesus was speaking to his mother about changing water to wine, and there the essence is more, “What is that to me and to you?” (see commentary note on John 2:4). This phrase is spoken by demons 5 times in the Four Gospels, but two are in the singular, as here, and three are in the plural. This is important and gives us a peek into how demons work. In this record in Matthew, while there are many demons in these men, Matthew has more than one speaking, while Mark and Luke are singular, as if only one demon was speaking. Thus, one is in charge, but others are chiming in.

The Word of God records several incidences of demons speaking to Jesus: In the Synagogue: Mark 1:24, Luke 4:34 (τί ἡμῖν καί σοι [both plural]); from the tombs: Matthew 8:29 (τί ἡμῖν καί σοί [plural]); and Mark 5:7, Luke 8:28 (τί ἐμοὶ καί σοί [singular]).

The slight difference in the Greek words in the record of the tombs shows that in the record of the tombs there was one demon who was the main speaker, but also that the demons spoke as a group. The Greek word *hemin* (ἡμῖν) is plural, “we,” while *emoi* (ἐμοί) is singular, “I.”

“*before the time.*” The Devil and the demons know that there is a time coming when they will be tormented in Gehenna and eventually destroyed. They understand God’s retributive justice, and they understand the meaning of the Flood, which was the destruction of the ungodly (2 Pet. 2:5); and the meaning of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, which was also an example of the destruction of the ungodly (Jude 1:7). They know they will be bound, tormented, then destroyed (Dan. 7:12; Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10). They knew, however, that the Messiah was to have his heel bruised before he bruised the head of the Serpent (Gen. 3:15), and so they asked if he had come to torment them before the proper time. There were demons who had caused the Nephilim (Gen. 6:4) during the days of Noah that led to the hardening of the human race and its eventual destruction. Genesis 6:5 describes how great mankind’s wickedness had become in the days of Noah by saying that “every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.” The demons who caused that hardening were now imprisoned in Tartarus,
“gloomy dungeons,” awaiting the Judgment (1 Pet. 3:19, 20; 2 Pet. 2:4). Although not the Gehenna, Tartarus must be very unpleasant, to say the least. These demons thought Jesus might send them to Tartarus too, so they asked if he had come to torment them before “the time,” i.e., their being bound in the Abyss (Rev. 20:1-3) and then eventually thrown into Gehenna (Rev. 20:10).

8:32. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

8:34. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

Chapter 9

9:1. “his own city.” Capernaum. Jesus moved to Capernaum after the people of his hometown, Nazareth, tried to kill him (Luke 4:29-31; cp. Matt. 4:13). Jesus either bought or rented a house in Capernaum, because John 2:12 indicates he even moved his family there (John 2:12). As we see in this verse, Capernaum became known as Jesus’ “own city.” One of the reasons Jesus likely picked to move to Capernaum was that it was on the Via Maris, the Road of the Sea, which was the great trade route from Egypt in the south to Damascus in Syria and on to Mesopotamia (see commentary on Matt. 4:15). [For more about Capernaum being Jesus’ hometown, see commentary on Mark 2:1].

“Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

9:3. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“speaks defaming words.” The religious leaders thought that by forgiving sins, Jesus was harming the reputation of God, who was alone thought to be able to forgive sins [For more on forgiving sins, see commentary on Mark 2:7].

Matthew 9:3 is the first use of the thirty-four uses of Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημέω; pronounced blas-fay-meh'-ō). The noun form of the word is blasphēmia (#988 βλασφημία; pronounced blas-fay-me'-ah), which occurs eighteen times. Both blasphēmeō and blasphēmia are transliterated (not translated) from the Greek into English as “blasphemy.” There is a problem with that, however, because “blasphemy” in English has a different meaning than blasphēmeō and blasphēmia do in Greek. In English, “blasphemy” is only used in reference to God. It is insulting God or a god, insulting something considered sacred (like defacing a cross or statue of Jesus), or claiming to be God or a god in some way. The BDAG Greek-English Lexicon correctly says that the English word blasphemy “has to some extent in English gone its own emotive way semantically and has in effect become a religious technical term, which is not the case with βλασφημέω.”

In Greek, blasphēmeō and blasphēmia did not have to refer to God or a god, but were common words that were used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning of blasphēmeō and blasphēmia as they were used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. In the honor/shame society of the biblical world, that was even more heinous an act that we would think of it today, because honor and reputation were at the very core of societal
status and were the basis of all social interaction. Perhaps a good comparable analogy is how horrible “losing face” is in the Asian society, which is an honor/shame society.

For the definition of blasphēmia, the Greek-English Lexicon by Louw and Nida says: “to speak against someone in such a way as to harm or injure his or her reputation (occurring in relation to persons as well as to divine beings) — ‘to revile, to defame, to blaspheme, reviling.’” The BDAG Greek-English Lexicon has: “speech that denigrates or defames,” hence “reviling, denigration, disrespect, slander.” Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon defines blasphēmia as, “speech injurious to another's good name” and lists railing, reviling, and slander, as some of the definitions. Thayer also points out that not only is “blasphemy” a loan word into English, but it is in Latin also, and is “blasphēmia” in the Latin Vulgate.

Blasphēmeō and blasphēmia are used in the Bible of blasphemous speech towards God (e.g., Rom. 2:24; Rev. 13:6), but also it is often used of people; for instance, in Titus 3:2, we are commanded not to speak in this way towards anyone. Other examples of blasphemy against humans can be found in Acts 18:6; Romans 3:8; 1 Peter 4:4; and Revelation 2:9. Besides God and humans, the Bible also refers to “blasphemous” speech towards angelic beings (2 Pet. 2:10-12; Jude 8-10; Rev. 13:6). Lastly, it is also possible to blaspheme against impersonal things, such as the Word of God (Titus 2:5), or the Way of Truth (2 Pet. 2:2).

Given that the essence of blasphēmeō and blasphēmia is speaking words that injure or harm the reputation of another, we felt that “defame” was generally the best definition of those words, although sometimes “insult” seemed to be a better fit, or “injurious speech,” which is not outside the general meaning and semantic range of the Greek word. Many English versions use the word “blasphemy” when the context is about God but then change it to “insult” or “slander” when the context is people, but we felt that did nothing to clarify the fact that the Greeks and Romans used blasphēmeō and blasphēmia of God, people, and things.

9:5. “Which is easier?” Which is easier to say and accomplish, declaring someone’s sins are forgiven, or divine healing? They are equally easy. See commentary on Luke 5:23.

9:8. “authority given to men.” Some of the teachers of the Law could not believe that a man could forgive sins. In a parallel account recorded in Mark they claim, “He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” [For more on the authority to forgive sin, see commentary on Mark 2:7].

9:10. “the house.” Luke 5:29 makes it clear that it is Matthew’s house (called Levi in Mark 2:13-17, and Luke 5:27-30). Matthew was a tax collector, and so it makes sense that his friends were tax collectors and “sinners,” which is why so many people like that were at the dinner. This is a very good model of how to spread the gospel. Matthew became a follower of Jesus, and instead of starting to spread the Gospel by speaking with strangers, started by inviting his friends to a huge dinner and making sure Jesus was there to speak with them.

“Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).


9:15. “and then they will fast.” People fasted for different reasons, but often for a disaster or difficult situation, and to get God’s help with it, or to procure the favor of God. Jesus’ presence in and of itself brought “the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke
4:19), and the grace and favor of his Father was upon him (Luke 2:40, 52; 4:19; John 1:14). This combined with the short duration of Jesus’ ministry on earth (likely just over a year; not the three years many people believe) in which he ate and drank with sinners, made physical fasting not the right choice. His disciples would fast after he left them.

9:16. “no one puts.” This is an expansion of what Jesus had said about fasting in verse 15. What Jesus was doing was so new and different that the “old system” of doing things would no longer be adequate. Jesus spoke of the “new commandment” he brought (John 13:34), but the truth is that he brought new light in many, many ways. Things like his approach to the Law, “you have heard it said…but I say to you” in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:21, 22, 27, 28, 31-34, 38, 39, 43, 44), or his way of dealing with sinners by being close to them, or his way of relating to women, were all new. The old way of doing things that was overseen by the likes of the Pharisees and Sadducees could not be just patched, it needed to be newly made.

9:17. “Neither do people put.” This is an expansion of what Jesus taught in verses 15 and 16 (see commentary there). Old wineskins get stiff and inflexible, and so when the new wine ferments and expands, the old skin cannot expand with it like a new wineskin can, and so it bursts. Occasionally the pressure of fermentation is so great that even sometimes our modern glass bottles burst if wine is incorrectly or prematurely bottled. The understanding and way of doing things that Jesus was bringing to Judaism was “new wine” that could not be put in the “old wineskins” of the religious understanding of the Law and Prophets that was held by the religious leaders of his time. They, and the generations before them, had so thoroughly perverted the true meaning of the Law that they had become “blind guides” (Matt. 15:14). Jesus said that if you put the new wine (the new commandments and the new understanding of the Law that Jesus brought) and put it in the “old wineskins,” they would burst. Indeed, that is exactly what happened. His death and resurrection fulfilled the Law in such a way that the Law, if it was alone and apart from the risen Messiah it pointed to, was considered a veil that blinded the eyes of the heart (2 Cor. 3:15-17).

9:18. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“bowed down before.” The synagogue leader did not think Jesus was God and likely did not even believe he was the Messiah, but rather was paying him homage, as he would to a superior, or to a prophet of God. See commentary on Matthew 2:2.

9:20. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).


9:28. “And after he had come into the house…” The blind men cried out to him as he was walking, but he ignored them until he got inside the house he was going to, leaving them to follow him as best they could, given their blind condition. This would be considered very unchristian behavior today, and be called “unloving,” and other such things. Nevertheless, Jesus did it, and it was to crystallize their trust (“faith”). They did not give up on asking him for healing, an act of trust.

9:30. “See here.” The Greek verb is horaō (#3708 ὁράω), and it means to see with the physical eye, or to see with the mental eye. It is a play on words, because Jesus just gave
sight to these two blind men, then told them to “see” (“make sure;” “be careful”) that no one knew about them getting their sight. Both the verb horāō, and the verb for “know” are in the imperative mood, and are stern commands, hence the exclamation point at the end of the sentence. Interestingly, in spite of Jesus’ stern command, the men who received their sight spread the news about him. This was likely due to a number of factors. In the honor-shame society of the biblical world, if someone did something great for you, it was socially expected that you would laud the person and thus increase his honor in society. Added to that was their obvious elation about being healed. The two things combined made it impossible for them to hide what had happened, and they freely spoke about it.

9:32. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

9:34. “By the prince of the demons he casts out demons.” Pure spiritual arrogance. They had no evidence except their displeasure.

9:38. “implore.” Implore = deomai (1189 δέομαι). (See R. Trench, Synonymes). Deomai is a specific request, not a general prayer. It is a petition.

Chapter 10

10:10. “nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staff.” This phrase catches our attention because, although it agrees with the Gospel of Luke (Luke 9:3), it seems to contradict what Jesus told his disciples according to the Gospel of Mark (Mark 6:8, 9). A quick reading of Matthew and Luke, makes it seem like in those Gospels Jesus told his disciples to take no staff, while in Mark, Jesus told them to take a staff. Also, in Mark, Jesus told the disciples to “tie on” sandals (Greek text), that is, wear them, but in Matthew, Jesus seemingly says to not take sandals (Luke says nothing about sandals). How do we resolve this problem?

Mark gives the essentials of the record, which make perfect sense in the culture: the disciples were to rely on help from people they met for their food and protection from the elements (hence, no need for money, food, or two tunics, which might be needed if they were going to sleep outdoors). However, they would need sandals if for no other reason than any extended journey that involved walking in unfamiliar territory and in cities would require sandals. But they would not need two pairs of sandals, and in Matthew the word “two” before “tunics,” immediately before “sandals” in the list must also refer to sandals, which is also plural, like “tunics.” Of course, “sandals” is always plural, but since the Gospel of Mark says take “sandals” and Matthew says not to, the most obvious way to explain the situation is that Jesus was saying not to take two pairs of sandals—if anything happened to the one pair, they would be helped to get another pair by people who were caring for them.

Like sandals, a staff was a necessity when traveling. It provided protection and support, so it makes perfect sense that Jesus would say to take the staff along, as the Gospel of Mark says. However, Matthew and Luke seem to say not to take a staff. Two ways to explain the apparent contradiction seem to be the most likely. One is that the word “two” in Matthew also governs the word staff, and that Jesus told the Apostles not to take two staffs, as if they might break or lose one. Although that is possible, it is not...
easy to make Luke read that way, and the chances of losing or breaking a staff are slim. Furthermore, if one was lost or broken, a new one could be acquired the same way new sandals could be.

The more likely explanation for the difference Matthew and Luke have with the Gospel of Mark is that the list in Matthew starts with the word “acquire,” (ktoumai; #2932 κτάομαι), which the KJV translates “provide,” the ESV “acquire.” However, there are many versions which open Matthew 10:9 with “take” or “take along,” which clouds the issue and makes the apparent contradiction between Matthew and Mark very difficult indeed. Jesus was telling his disciples not to “acquire” things for their journey (which they would then “take” with them, as Mark and Luke say). One of the things that the Apostles might want to “acquire” would be a walking stick that was more appropriate for someone who traveled a lot than the walking sticks they already owned, but as fishermen or men who mostly stayed in their local area, likely did not use much.

In summary, Jesus told the Apostles not to take with them things that a host family would provide: money, food, and shelter. However, they did need their sandals and walking stick. However, they were to guard against acquiring things they thought they might need, such as a new walking stick. If it turned out on the journey that something was needed, the same people who welcomed them in would no doubt provide it or help them acquire it, and be glad to do so.

10:13. “let your peace come upon it.” This is an idiom. If a person was worthy, the guest would bless the house, and that blessing would involve “shalom,” translated “peace” but really meaning “total well-being.” If the Apostles were well received and well treated, they were to bless the house with shalom. Jesus instructed his disciples to let their shalom fall on those who graciously took care of them.

10:16. “Take notice!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

10:25. “Beelzebul.” The Greek is Beelzeboul (#954 Βεελζεβούλ), which gets put into English as “Beelzebul.” He is called the “prince of demons” in Luke 12:10. “Beelzeboul” is “lord of the dunghill.” This comes from the Hebrew zebul (dung, a dunghill). [For more on the name Beelzebul and other names of the Slanderer (the Devil), see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

10:28. “destroy...soul.” The Greek word translated “destroy” is apollumi (#622 ἀπόλλυμι). Apollumi means “to cause or experience destruction” (BDAG). The concept of “burning forever in hell” came into Christianity from the Greeks (and Jews like the Pharisees who were influenced by Greek teaching going back to the time of Alexander the Great who conquered Palestine in 333 BC). The Greeks believed in an “immortal soul.” The phrase “immortal soul” is not in the Bible. Once we understand the soul is not eternal, it does not have to “go” to heaven or hell when a person dies. Eternal torment is not the teaching of Scripture, John 3:16, and many other verses, teach the simple truth that each person will either live forever or be destroyed, annihilated. [For information on “Gehenna” see commentary on Matthew 5:22. For information on annihilation in the lake of fire, see Appendix 5, “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more information on the soul, see Appendix 7: “Usesages of ‘Soul’”).

10:29. “assarion.” The Roman as or the Greek assarion (#787 ἀσσάριον). It was worth 1/16 of a denarius (or drachma), which was a day’s wage for a day laborer or soldier. If a
day laborer makes $8 per hour, or $64 per day, then an assarion would be worth about $4.

“apart from your father.” This phrase means “apart from your Father’s knowledge and care.” The phrase contains the figure of speech ellipsis (Cp. Bullinger; *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*); it is constructed in the Greek by the preposition aneu (#427 ἄνευ), which means “without” or “apart from,” and then the words for “your father” (patros humôn) functioning as the genitive of possession—the object of the father’s possession is elided. Literally, it would read, “apart from of your father,” with the involvement on God’s part omitted for emphasis. We have left the figure of speech in the translation, rather than supply the omitted word.

Many commentators who are zealous to bolster the position of divine sovereignty (that God is in control of everything that happens), have interpreted this verse to mean God has a specific will for the death of even every sparrow (cp. NIV, NET), and also that no sparrow can fall without God’s will and consent (cp. HCSB, CJB). But this is importing meaning into the text, because it goes beyond what the text says. The Greek simply reads “without your Father” (“without” is the Greek word aneu, #427 ἄνευ), which leaves open exactly how the Father is connected with the sparrow. Without His will (NET)? Without His consent (HCSB)? Without His knowledge (NAB, NLT)? Without His care (TNIV)? The text does not precisely tell us “without what,” which is why there are so many variations between the translations. The Greek text simply leaves the impression that the Father is present and caring in his relation to the bird.

To understand this passage properly we must interpret it in light of clear meaning that is given to us from other scriptures. As Louw and Nida (*Greek-English Lexicon*) write, “The particular manner or mode of involvement by God must depend upon the broader context and not upon the meaning of ἄνευ.” In this case we have a parallel account in Luke 12:6 that helps us understand what Jesus meant. In the account in Luke, Jesus does fill out the meaning for us, saying, “not one of them [sparrows] is forgotten before God.” The Greek word translated “forgotten” is epilanthanomai (#1950 ἐπιλανθάνομαι), which can have the meaning of “neglect,” “overlook,” or “care nothing about” (BDAG). More evidence that this verse is about care and concern rather than “God’s will” is supplied by the next verse in Matthew, which declares that, “the hairs of your head have been counted,” i.e. God knows how many there are. The verse about our hair is not about the will of God, as if it was somehow God’s will every time a hair of our head fell out, but rather it is about God’s love and concern for us.

Matthew 10:29 is not speaking of divine sovereignty, but rather divine benevolence and care. From reading Matthew in the greater context of the parallel account, then, we see that this passage teaches that God knows and cares even about sparrows. He has not forgotten about the sparrow, and its fall is not something overlooked or uncared for.

What a comfort this is, that God would have such care even for sparrows, and emphasizes how much He must care for us! What a greater comfort this biblical teaching is than the idea that no sparrow falls without God’s specific will and consent. If not even one sparrow can die without the will and consent of God, how are we to understand a cat torturing and killing a sparrow? Is that the will of a loving God? And if God wills that, does He really care if we are hurting? On the other hand, if the fallen state of the world is due to Adam and Eve’s freewill decision and sin, and if the world is now under the
control of Satan (1 John 5:19), and God is fighting for us in all situations (Rom. 8:28 REV; NIV), then it is a comfort to know that even though God cannot simply stop pain and problems, He knows and cares what is going on and is willing to bless and help as He can, without overstepping things such as people’s freewill decisions.

We conclude along with Robertson (Word Pictures in the New Testament), “There is comfort in this thought for us all. Our father who knows about the sparrows knows and cares about us.”

10:32. “will confess.” The verb is in the future tense and the context is people who testify of Jesus will be dragged before the authorities and interrogated and beaten (cp. 10:16-20). Those will be difficult times. People who continue to confess Christ as Lord will be tortured, imprisoned, and even killed. There will be great temptation to simply deny the Lord to be set free, but Jesus warns us to continue to confess him in those difficult times, and if we do, he will confess us before the Father.


10:37. “is attached to.” The Greek is *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω). (See commentary on John 21:15).

10:39. “life” (2x). The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and *psuchē* has a large number of meanings, often “soul” or “life.” Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. [For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Appendix 7, “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

10:41. “a righteous person.” The Greek word *dikaios* (#1342 δίκαιος) is an adjective, and in this case is a substantive, an adjective used as a noun, “a righteous” referring to a “righteous person.” Using the substantive instead of just supplying the noun and saying “righteous person,” places the emphasis on “righteous.” If we want the reward of the righteous, we must receive “the righteous.”

“reward.” The Greek is *misthos* (#3408 μισθός), and it refers to a payment made for work done; wages. As “wages” or “payment,” it can refer to either a reward (cp. Matt. 5:12; 10:41; Luke 6:35; 1 Cor. 3:14) or a punishment (2 Pet. 2:13), depending on the context and what kind of payment is due. In the future Millennial Kingdom, when Jesus Christ rules as king on the earth, people will be repaid for what they have done (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or worthless”). Some people might think they have done very little to support God’s work, but if anyone has helped accomplish God’s work on earth, he will be amply rewarded.


Chapter 11

11:3. “should we be looking for a different one.” John the Baptist sent his disciples to Christ with the question, “Are you the Coming One, or should we be looking for a different one?” (Matthew 3:11; Luke 7:19). The question is problematic because John was the one who identified Christ with the words: “Look, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” and “I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God” (John 1:29, 34). Had John developed doubts that Jesus was the Messiah? Considering that
a number of people close to Jesus, including his mother Mary and Peter, misunderstood him, that is possible, but we think not as likely as the other two possibilities stated below. Another reason for John’s question is given by Joseph Good in his book, Rosh HaShanah and the Messianic Kingdom to Come (Hatikva Ministries, P.O. Box 3125, Port Arthur, TX, 1989, p. 2). Good writes:

As the ancient Jewish scholars and Rabbis began to study the scriptural information about the Messiah, they encountered a serious problem: many of the passages seemed to contradict one another. Often the Messiah is seen as a conquering king…Other passages speak of a suffering servant. From this paradoxical description of the Messiah came a first-century Common Era (AD) rabbinical teaching of two Messiahs. Good goes on to say that the ancients called the conquering Messiah “Messiah Ben David,” and called the suffering Messiah “Messiah Ben Joseph.” The Talmud applied Zechariah 12:10, which says, “They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child,” to Messiah Ben Joseph (Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, book 2, p. 736). However, Edersheim writes that even on that point the Jewish rabbis were divided, some saying the mourning is caused by the death of the Messiah Ben Joseph, while others said it was due to evil concupiscence.

Good goes on to conclude:

This anticipation of two Messiahs by the Jewish people of the first century is the background for the question posed by Yochanan the Immerser (John the Baptist) to Yeshua [Jesus] as to whether He was the Messiah (indicating one, singular), or if they were to expect another. His question was specifically whether Yeshua would fulfill all of the prophecies concerning Messiah, or whether the Rabbis, who said there would be two Messiahs, were right. Yeshua’s answer is a paraphrase of various passages that Rabbis identified as referring partially to Messiah Ben Joseph and partially to Messiah Ben David. Therefore, Yeshua was expressing, in dramatic language that was clear to His listeners, that He would fulfill all of the messianic prophecies. Rather than send two Messiahs with two different roles, G-d would send one Messiah in two separate appearances or comings (Good, Rosh HaShanah, p. 5).

It is also possible that John was not confused about who Jesus was, but his disciples had doubts, and John, fairly certain that he was about to die, wanted his disciples to hear for themselves who Jesus was, so they would follow him when John was no longer alive.

“a different one.” The Greek word “different” is heteros (#2087 ἥτερος), in this case, referring to someone of a different quality. Another in number, another of the same kind, would have been the Greek word allos. The Emphasized Bible by Rotherham and The New Testament by Williams are versions that also use the word “different.” Was this gentle and loving man the Coming One, or was there another, different, conquering Messiah Ben David, who they should be looking for? Interestingly, the question that John’s disciples ask Jesus that is recorded in Luke 7:19 is not heteros, but allos. So there the emphasis is not on “another of a different kind or quality,” but just “another,” i.e., a second one.
11:7. “A reed shaken by the wind.” The area around the Jordan River where John was baptizing had very dense vegetation, including lots of reeds that grew close to the water. No one ever went to see them. Jesus was speaking to the people about John, whom the people had gone out to see. Was he “a reed shaken with the wind,” in other words, a man of weak character, easily swayed by circumstances and the opinions of others? Or was he a man of soft clothing, in other words, rich and politically connected? Or was he a prophet? Jesus testified that he was more than a prophet, but the very one Isaiah had referred to as a voice in the wilderness.

11:8. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).


“Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“road.” See commentary on Mark 1:3.

11:11. “least important person.” The Greek is mikros (#3398 µικρός). It can refer to being a limited size, measure, or quantity, or it can refer to being of little import, and thus means insignificant or unimportant. In this verse it is an adjective, and so the supplied noun “person” is understood. The grammarians argue about whether micros is used in a comparative sense (“the unimportant person”) or a superlative sense (the least important person) (cp. Lange’s Commentary). However, “least” seems to make sense in this context. The Kingdom of Heaven has not come yet, but will come when Christ sets it up on earth after he comes and fights the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19). At that time the dead people who are judged to be righteous are raised and get to live with Christ in his kingdom (Ezek. 37; Rev. 20:4-6). Thus, the “least” person in the Kingdom of Heaven is still in the Kingdom of Heaven, and has passed from death to everlasting life. No wonder the “least” in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than John! Also, that explains the next verse, in which Jesus speaks of how to attain the Kingdom of Heaven. No one can ignore the commands of God and expect to get in. Christ said at many times, and in many different ways, that getting into the Kingdom took work and focus. The way in was narrow and difficult (Matt. 7:13). God’s commands had to be obeyed (Matt. 19:16-19). A person had to take up his cross and follow Christ (Luke 9:23-26). In Matthew 11:12 Jesus taught the same message, that it took a violent effort, but the Kingdom of Heaven could indeed be seized as a prize. Surely the Kingdom of Heaven and everlasting life is available for those who really want it, and anyone there is greater than John, who was still in his fleshly body.

Some theologians teach that the one who is “least” is Jesus himself, because Jesus was younger than John by six months. However, that interpretation seems quite forced, because there is no reason in the context or culture that Jesus would point to the fact that although he was younger than John he would be greater. The Messiah was always assumed in all the prophecies and Scripture to be the greatest of all the prophets and indeed, the greatest person to ever live.

11:12. “advancing.” Matthew 11:12 has been an enigma for generations of Bible scholars for a couple reasons: the vocabulary in the Greek New Testament is unclear due to multiple possible definitions of some of the Greek words, and also the verb baizetai (“suffers” or “has been forcefully advancing”) can be either passive voice or middle
voice. Because of that the verse has been translated in two different ways, represented by the two versions below.

**ASV** “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force.”

**NIV** “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.”

There are two basic possible interpretations:

1. The passive voice of *baizetai* (i.e., “suffereth”) would indicate that the Kingdom of Heaven is being attacked. The context shows that John was in jail and Jesus was being persecuted. Furthermore, “violent” (the Greek word is usually used in a negative sense) men are trying to “take” it, i.e., trying to overcome it and stop it. (Cp. *New International Biblical Commentary* by Mounce; *The Gospel According to Matthew* by Morris).

2. The middle voice of *baizetai* would indicate that the Kingdom is “forcefully” (instead of violently) “advancing itself,” i.e., it is moving forward, and those men who are forceful and determined are the ones who will seize it. The context shows that the Gospel message is being preached and people have to make a decision about it. (St. Matthew’s Gospel by Lenski; *Companion Bible* by Bullinger).

The more likely interpretation of the verse is as we have in the REV, also represented in the NIV. The first interpretation, that the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence is less likely due to the qualifying phrase, “from the time of John the Baptist until now.” The Kingdom had always suffered violence, it had always been attacked. This is clear from the time when Cain killed his brother on down through the centuries, so it does not seem proper to say that it has suffered violence from the time of John. In contrast, with the appearance of John and Jesus the kingdom was forcefully advancing. Both John and Jesus were preaching that “the Kingdom is near.” John was ministering in the power and spirit of Elijah, even as Gabriel has said to Zechariah (Luke 1:17), and Jesus was ministering more powerfully than any prophet before him. There is a third possibility that is less likely, and also hard to represent fully in the English. Since the Greek can be legitimately translated both ways, it is possible that both interpretations are valid. In that case, this verse would be an example of the figure of speech *amphibologia*, literally, “a throwing in both directions” (Bullinger, *Figures*). However, in the REV we have gone with the translation we consider more likely.

**“are seizing it as a prize.”** The Greek is *harpazo* (#726 ἁρπάζω), and it means “to make off with someone’s property by attacking or seizing, steal, carry off, drag away, to grab or seize suddenly so as to remove or gain control, snatch/take away” (BDAG). It is commonly used with seizing or dragging off someone else’s property. Thus in this case the clear implication of the word is that forceful men grab hold of the kingdom as a prize for themselves, not just that they “seize it.” Lenski writes: “…the kingdom itself, with all its gifts, treasures, and blessings put power and courage into them “to snatch,” let us say “to grab” it all. Williams translates the last half of the verse: …those who take it by storm are seizing it as a precious prize.” This verse helps us to understand the effort it takes to walk in the blessings of the Kingdom. We must each make up our minds to “grab” the kingdom blessings, and that usually takes both desire and effort.

**11:14. “Elijah.”** [For information on John the Baptist being Elijah, see commentary on Matthew 17:10].

Matthew 73
11:15. “Anyone who has ears had better listen!” The word “listen” is *akouo* (#191 ἀκούω, pronounced “ah-koo-oh”), and it can mean “hear” (the opposite of deaf; i.e., hearing the sounds or words), or it can refer to listening and understanding what you hear (the English word “hear” is used the same way). In this verse it is third person, present tense, active voice, imperative mood, and is thus a command, not a suggestion.

The NET translation is quite literal and very good: “The one who has ears had better listen!” The NET translators explain their translation with the following note: “The translation, ‘had better listen!’ captures the force of the third person imperative [which is the conjugation of the Greek text] more effectively than the traditional, ‘let him hear,’ which sounds more like a permissive than an imperative to the modern English reader.” A. Nyland (*The Source NT*) is a little more casual, but catches the sense very well: “If you have ears, you had better listen!” Stern (*Complete Jewish Bible*) translates: “If you have ears, then hear!” Phillips translates: “The man who has ears to hear must use them!” (*NT in Modern English*).

The Interpreter’s Bible correctly notes that the way Jesus spoke the phrase was “urgent” and “sharp kindness.” Jesus sharply but kindly reminded his audience that God created them to hear and obey, and they better get about doing it. Lenski adds: “In ‘he that has ears’ lies the implication of willful guilt when those ears that were made to hear (and understand) are not used for this purpose.”

Some Greek manuscripts have “the one who has ears to hear,” instead of “the one who has ears.” However, the verb “to hear” was almost certainly added so that this verse matches other verses that do include it, such as Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8; 14:35. If it were original, there seems to be no reason it would have been omitted from early and important texts (cp. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*).

This phrase, or a very similar one, occurs here and in Matthew 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8; 14:35. It is important to ask, “Why is this phrase here” each time it occurs. In this case, Jesus was teaching about John the Baptist, and in verse 14 he made the point that John was Elijah. Malachi 4:5 made it clear that “Elijah” would come before the Messiah, and before the Day of the Lord. That Jesus (the Messiah) seemed to come before Elijah confused many, even the disciples (Matt. 17:10; Mark 9:11). In Matthew 11:14 Jesus points out that “Elijah” was John, which would have not only answered their questions, but would have awakened the people to the days in which they were living—the days of the Messiah. No wonder Jesus said, “‘Anyone who has ears better listen!’” [For more on John the Baptist being Elijah, see commentary on Matthew 17:10].

11:19. “See.” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

11:27. “All things.” Although the text does not say so, it is clear from the content of what Jesus is saying that he has stopped his prayer and has started speaking to his disciples.

“really knows...really know.” The Greek word is *epiginōskō* (#1921 ἐπιγινώσκω) an intensified form of *ginōskō* (#1097 γινώσκω). At that time in Jesus’ ministry, no one really understood the Son except the Father, and no one really knew and understood God but the Son and those people to whom the Son revealed Him, such as Jesus’ close disciples. All one has to do is look at the misguided doctrine and behavior of the Pharisees and Sadducees to know they did not “really know” God. They knew things
about Him, but they did not “really” know Him. That is still true today. Many people know some things about God, but do not “really know” Him.

“anyone to whom the Son determines to reveal him.” This verse is not saying that Jesus picks and chooses who gets to know about God, including some and excluding others apart from that person’s desires. God wants everyone to know Him, and calls them fools if they do not (Jer. 4:22). Jesus Christ came to make known the Father (John 1:18), and expended himself trying to get people to understand both him and his Father. Jesus went so far as to say that people could see the Father by seeing him (John 14:9). God also makes it clear that He wants everyone to fully know the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). Nevertheless, many people do not know God. They do not know Him because they do not want to know Him, something they express by both their words and actions. John 3:20 make it clear that people who practice evil will not come to the light. Also, we must keep in mind that when someone does not love God or want God in his life, God honors that. Similarly, when someone loves God, that is honored also, and Jesus says he will show himself to that kind of person (John 14:21).

“determines.” The Greek is boulomai (#1014 βούλομαι), and it means, to deliberately desire, will, or purpose something. To plan. Although it can be used of desire or want, it is somewhat different than thelō, “want, desire.” Thus, boulomai includes “the thought of ‘purpose, intention, not mere will, but will with premeditation’” (Moulton and Milligan, Vocabulary of Greek NT). This verse is very similar to Luke 10:22, but Luke uses ginōskō instead of epiginōskō for “know.”

11:29. “take my yoke.” In this phrase, the word “yoke” is referring to what Jesus is asking people to do: the sum total of his teachings, and he said it was gentle (not “easy”) and light. The word “yoke” is the figure of speech, hypocatastasis, a comparison by implication (see commentary on Rev. 20:2).

In the biblical culture, the literal yoke that was used to harness animals together for work was essential for survival: it was used so animals could plow, thresh grain, and pull loads such as carts. The yoke was not something animals liked to wear, because the loads they pulled were often heavy and difficult. Furthermore, many yokes rubbed sores on the animal’s necks because they were quickly and crudely made.

People also used the word “yoke” figuratively, and applied it to things that were heavy and unpleasant. The hard work that Solomon made his subjects do was called a “yoke” by his subjects (1 Kings 12:4). Enemies put a “yoke” on the people of Israel, placing various kinds of burdens on them (Deut. 28:48; Isa. 10:27; 47:6; Jer. 27:11). The word “yoke” was also used of being a slave, because it was usually burdensome (1 Tim. 6:1). It was foretold that when the Messiah came he would shatter the yoke that burdens people (Isa. 9:4).

The word “yoke” was also used for submission to a system of beliefs, and the expression, “the yoke of the Law” was common in rabbinic literature. “In Jewish literature a ‘yoke’ represents the sum-total of obligations which, according to the teaching of the rabbis, a person must take upon himself. This definition accounts for such terms as ‘yoke of the Torah,’ ‘yoke of the commandments,’ ‘yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, etc.” (Hendriksen: New Testament Commentary). In saying, “the yoke of the Law,” the rabbis were not so much emphasizing the “weight” of the Law, or the difficulty of keeping it (although that could easily be part of the meaning, depending on the context), but rather the fact of being submitted to the system of beliefs that constituted the
Law. The Law of Moses was considered a “yoke” because of the restraints it put on people and the amount of effort it took to keep it and obey its precepts.

Although the Law was a “yoke” upon people, whether they found it difficult or a blessing depended upon the attitude of the people. Romans 7:12 says the Law is holy, righteous, and good. The Apostle Peter used “yoke” to represent the teachings of the Law in Acts 15:10: “Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?” Peter did not mean to say the Law was in any way ungodly—he did not feel that way. However, even though he believed the Law was from God and was a good thing, he still recognized that it was a system that restrained and controlled people and no one, not even the Jews to whom God gave the Law, could obey it without sin.

As the Early Church continued, the figure “yoke” was even used for the teachings about grace in the New Testament. The Church Father Clement of Rome referred to Christians as those who come under the yoke of grace. Even the teachings about grace include restrictions and responsibilities that Christians need to heed. Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” The verbs “take” and “learn” are in the imperative mood, which in this context is an imperative of exhortation but has the overtone of a command. Jesus’ statement was a strong exhortation, made with love. Christ’s “yoke” is still a yoke. Jesus did not say, “I free you from religious bondage; go do whatever you want!” Jesus wants us under his yoke, his system of grace and love. It is easy and light, but it is still a yoke, and we must have desire and self-control to live under the yoke of Christ.

The yoke Jesus asks us to take was different than a yoke of religious bondage. The people in Jesus’ time had been burdened by the yoke of the religious leaders—their system of religious requirements. In fact, something that does not show up well in English is that in 11:28 (ESV), when Jesus says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden...,” the verb “are heavy laden” (one word in the Greek text), is in the passive voice. This means that the burdens had been placed upon the people (although it is possible, but less likely, that a burden had been placed on them because they picked them up themselves). Little has changed since the time of Christ. Many religious systems are full of man-made regulations that are a great burden, and there is as much need now as there ever was to “learn of me,” learn the truth about Christ and what he teaches, and then take his yoke.

“souls.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the person himself. The person will find rest within himself and be at peace [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7, “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

11:30. “kind.” The Greek word is the adjective chrestos (#5543 χρηστός), and it means “kind” (the noun form is chrestotes (#5544 χρηστότης), which in Galatians 5:22 is the fruit of the spirit, “kindness”). Christ’s yoke is “kind” (chrestotes, not “easy” as many translations have), because there is nothing harsh, sharp, or galling about it. You can put on Christ’s yoke without worrying about getting painful blisters, splinters, etc.

“light.” The load that Jesus asks us to carry is “light,” not heavy, but it is still a “load” we must make up our minds to carry. But sometimes the loads of life are not light
yet all, but very heavy, even for the most faithful believers, so how can it be that Jesus says his load is “light.” The load that Jesus asks us to carry is always light. It includes things like trust and obedience, and it lightens the heart and rests the soul. The confusion that many people have over this verse is they think that any burden we have in our lives is part of the yoke of Christ, but that is not true.

A person who believes God controls everything that happens in this world has trouble understanding the words of Jesus. If God is in control of the world and everything that happens is His will, then the burdens we carry are all due to the will of God and are all part of the yoke of Christ. But those burdens are often very heavy, so why did Jesus say his yoke was “light?” The truth is that God is not in control of everything that happens in our lives or in the world around us. The world is a battleground, where the forces of Good fight the forces of Evil. The Adversary is the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4) and “the whole world lies in the power of the Wicked One” (1 John 5:19). Satanic forces and evil people can make life very hard to bear. Also, the earth is a fallen world. Hunger, poverty, deterioration, and aging, are a part of the curse on the world. Added to that, we humans have freedom of will and make stupid decisions that cause problems for ourselves and others. None of these things are part of the yoke of Christ, even though we have to bear them and they make life difficult.

Jesus said his yoke was gentle and the load was light, and that is true of the yoke of Christ. As for the yoke that is put upon us by the Fallen World, thankfully, Isaiah foretold that when the Messiah came in his kingdom, which is still future, he would shatter the yoke that burdens people (Isa. 9:4). That is a wonderful hope to look forward to.

Chapter 12

12:2. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).
12:10. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).
12:16. “warned.” The Greek word translated “warned” is epitimaō (#2008 ἐπιτιµάω). Usually epitimaō means to express strong disapproval of someone: rebuke, reprove, censure; or to speak seriously, and thus warn in order to prevent an action or bring one to an end. It can also mean “punish” (cp. BDAG Lexicon). Epitimaō is also used in a technical sense in the NT, see commentary on Mark 1:25. Jesus “warned” his disciples, no doubt including some of what might happen if they ignored what he said.
“Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).
“my servant.” Matthew 12:18-21 is quoted from Isaiah 42:1-4 and are the first four verses of the first “Servant Song” in Isaiah (called a “song” because Isaiah wrote in Hebrew poetry). The “Servant Songs” are sections of Isaiah that are about the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and present him as the Servant of God. The four “Servant songs” are: Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12. The last Servant song is familiar to us because of
Matthew 78

Isaiah 53, but few people realize the song starts in chapter 52, and unfortunately is broken up by the chapter break of Isaiah 53. The chapter breaks were added to the Old Testament in the 13th century AD, some 2000 years after Isaiah wrote, and the song would have been much easier to see and understand had it not be interrupted by the chapter break. The fact that Matthew 12:17 says that Jesus fulfilled the Servant Song shows conclusively that Jesus is the “servant” of the Servant songs in Isaiah. The disciples understood this also, because in Acts 4:27 they prayed to God and referred to Jesus as “your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.” This is likely an illusion to Isaiah 42:1, which speaks of Jesus as the Servant of God and that he was given (thus “anointed with”) the holy spirit by God.

The Servant Songs are sections of Isaiah that are specifically about the Messiah, and would have enabled Jesus to more clearly understand his mission and what he would have to endure to accomplish it.

“my soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. We can tell that in this verse “my soul” is equivalent to “me” (including my thoughts, emotions, and feelings) because the “my” is God, and He is not a body powered by soul. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7, “Usages of ‘Soul’”]

12:20. Quoted from Isaiah 42:3, 4.

“A bruised reed he will not break.” In this verse, the “bruised (or broken) reed” and the “smoking flax” are the figure of speech hypocatastasis for afflicted and weak people [For an explanation of hypocatastasis, see commentary on Revelation 20:2]. In fact, the verse is a litotes (“meiosis”), because it is stating in the negative something that is really positive. It is not just that Jesus will not break a reed that is bruised, but he will heal the reed and cause it to stand upright. It is not just that Jesus will not put out a smoldering wick, he will trim that wick and make it burn brightly. Jesus will not oppress the oppressed. A “smoking flax” is a smoldering wick—the wicks of the oil lamps were made of flax

“leads justice to victory.” This is the figure of speech personification. “Justice” is portrayed as a person, and today justice is currently being thwarted and ignored. If we were to translate the verse without the personification, we might say something like: “until the Messiah’s victory brings justice.”

12:24. “Beelzebul.” The Greek is Beelzeboul (#954 Βεελζεβούλ), which gets put into English as “Beelzebul.” He is called the “prince of demons” in Luke 12:10. “Beelzeboul” is “lord of the dunghill.” This comes from the Hebrew zebul (dung, a dunghill). [For more on the name Beelzebul and other names of the Slanderer (the Devil), see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”] .

12:26. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

“How then….” This is the figure of speech Erotesis (rhetorical question).

“sons.” Here “sons” refers to disciples, not literal children. The Greek word is huios (#5207 υἱός), and means “son,” but the key to understanding what the verse is saying is recognizing that “son” was used in many ways in Semitic languages, just as we use it in several ways in English. In this case, the “sons” are the students, or disciples, of the Pharisees, in the same way that in the Old Testament, the disciples of the prophets were called “the sons of the prophets” (1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1, etc.).

Other meanings of the word “son” include: someone who was a person’s immediate child (John 9:19); a grandchild or descendant, such as a “son of David” (Matt. 1:20); a male heir that is adopted or taken into the family (Exod. 2:10); and a younger person for whom you have taken on a fatherly role or the role of a mentor/teacher and have special affection for (2 Chron. 29:11; 1 Pet. 5:13). The word “son” also refers to a person who is closely related or associated, especially in a group; thus all mankind is referred to as the “sons of men,” and Jesus referred to himself as “the son of man” which confused the religious leaders, because it could have been a simple way of saying “a man,” but was also a Messianic title due to Daniel 7:13. “Son” also was used to refer to a person who has the character, and even follows in the footsteps, of another (Acts 13:10 “son of the Devil”). Also, a person who has a certain specific characteristic is called a “son” of that characteristic (e.g., “sons of disobedience” are disobedient people, Eph. 2:2).

Just as someone’s disciples were called “sons,” a person who was a father figure, mentor, and guide, was called a “father.” Thus, Joseph said he had become a “father” to Pharaoh (Gen. 45:8). In the book of Judges, first Micah of Ephraim, and then people of the tribe of Dan, asked a Levite to be a “father” to them, that is, be their spiritual guide (Judg. 17:10; 18:19). The prophet Elisha referred to the elder prophet Elijah as his “father” (2 Kings 2:12), and the servants of the Syrian commander, Naaman, referred to him as “father” because he was a mentor and guide (2 Kings 5:13). The king of Israel referred to the prophet Elisha as his “father,” his spiritual mentor and guide (2 Kings 6:21).

In this verse, the “sons” of the Pharisees were the disciples of the Pharisees. This same use of “sons” or “children” can be found in Revelation 2:23, where the “children” of Jezebel were those people who were following in her footsteps and acting like she did.

12:28. “Spirit of God.” This is the gift of holy spirit that God put upon believer’s in the Old Testament so they could do the works of God. It is not a “person,” but the very nature of God; holy and spirit. It is referred to as the finger of God in Luke 11:20. See, Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to Be Like Christ.

12:29. “binds.” The Greek word “binds” is the common word deō (#1210 δέω), which means to bind or tie up. However, here it has a special meaning. The word was used in magic and spells for binding someone via a spell. The word was used to “to describe the ‘binding’ power of curses” (Moulton and Milligan, Vocabulary of the Greek NT). The context is the casting out of demons (v. 28), so the “binding” in this verse refers to binding a demon and making it powerless by the power of God.

12:30. “He who is not with me is against me.” This verse does away with the idea that people can somehow “sit on the fence” when it comes to God and the things of God. There are many people who fancy themselves “not religious,” who would say that they are not for Jesus but neither are they against him. Actually, that is an impossibility. We
are God’s creations, and as such we have a moral obligation to serve God. Furthermore, the Adversary is constantly attacking God, and one of the ways he does it is to get people to not commit to any religious belief. However, not being committed to a religious belief is being committed to the fact that there is nothing that deserves to be committed to. Thus these “uncommitted” people are committed to something, just not God. Furthermore, they are a part of the general “background noise” of the many people who are not committed to God, which helps encourage other people that being “uncommitted” is okay. In one of his sermons rabbi Shalom Lewis of Atlanta said, “Brutal acts of commission and yawning acts of omission both strengthen the hand of the devil.” Each person either scatters or gathers, there is no middle ground. This maxim is stated the opposite way in Mark 9:40, and for more information on it, see commentary on Mark 9:40.

12:31. “People will be forgiven for every sin and defaming word, but the defaming of the Spirit will not be forgiven.” These words of Jesus Christ are very direct: “every” sin and defaming word can be forgiven except one, a sin he referred to as “defaming” or to “speak against,” the Holy Spirit. The definition of “defaming” includes slander, speaking against God, or verbal abuse, and it is clear from comparing the above two verses that Christ is defining defaming as “speaking against” something.

Jesus said there is one form of defaming against God that will never be forgiven, and he was referring to a specific defaming, not just speaking against God in general. Many people have at some time been angry at God due to the horrific circumstances of this fallen world, and many have spoken very harshly about God, and to Him. In fact, it is safe to say that most people have even cursed at God, and yet, when they ask for forgiveness, He forgives them. But there is a defaming that will not be forgiven.

What we will learn in this study is that the defaming that cannot be forgiven is a person saying, and truly meaning in the depths of his heart, that Satan is the true God. The Bible reveals that the Devil can have “children,” that is, people who have a unique relationship with him that makes them different from other sinners whose sins can be forgiven. People who are children of the Devil have sinned in such a way that they are no longer redeemable, that is, they cannot be forgiven, and it is not possible for them to be saved.

The Bible has much evidence of the “unforgivable sin,” which leads to the everlasting death of the individual who commits it.

1 John 5:16 (KJV)

If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.

This verse reveals the same basic truth Jesus spoke about: there are sins that are “not unto death,” and there is a sin that is “unto death.” The Word of God directs us not to pray for those who have committed the sin unto death, and it does so because they cannot be forgiven.

Scripture shows a link between the unforgivable sin and those referred to as “children of the Devil.” When speaking to some of the religious leaders, Jesus said, “You are of your father the devil” (John 8:44 NASB). These leaders were in a different category than
“regular” sinners like the prostitutes and tax collectors, who Jesus never referred to as “children of the Devil.” Neither did he ever spurn them, but actively tried to win them to salvation and a life of righteousness. In contrast, there is no evidence Jesus attempted to evangelize those he referred to as being fathered by the Devil. Instead, he told his disciples, “Leave them; they are blind guides” (Matt. 15:14).

The Apostle Paul also encountered a child of the Devil. Confronting the false prophet Bar-Jesus, he said by revelation: “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything right” (Acts 13:10). Paul confronted many stubborn, sinful, hard-hearted people on his journeys, but this was the only man he called a child of the Devil. The fact that the text tells us that Paul was filled with holy spirit as he spoke alerts us to the fact that this was not just his opinion, but came from the Lord. Those people who commit the unforgivable sin become children of the Devil. [For more on the children of the Devil, see Appendix 14: Names of the Slanderer, under “Belial” and “Father.”]

Interestingly, there is a lot of folklore about people who “sell their soul to the Devil.” The folklore usually goes something like this: a person wants something really badly, like money, power, fame, or love. So the Devil comes to him and says something like, “I will give you what you want at a very reasonable price—your eternal soul.” The person, blinded by desire, makes the deal with the Devil and then at the end of his life has to go to “hell,” with no chance of “heaven.” Most such folklore has some basis of truth in it, and this folklore is no different. Some people so strongly lust for what they want that in their heart they make Satan, or one of his many fronts or idols, their “true” god and provider, and thus become his children (more will be said about this in a later section). These self-centered people turn to Satan’s ways in order to quickly gain their desires, and in so doing turn away from the true God, and His ways of love, self-discipline, and giving.

The Bible does not describe exactly how a person becomes a child of the Devil, but it gives us some important information. Because Christ categorized it as a form of blasphemy, we know it is something that is said, either audibly or by speaking to oneself. It cannot simply be saying, “I hate God” or “I love the Devil,” or something such as that. It has to be fully believed in the heart as well as in the mind. From what we see in Scripture, it occurs when someone completely turns away from God, and confesses and believes in his heart that Satan, or one of his many forms, is in fact his true “god,” his lord, sustainer, and provider.

In the context of the unforgivable sin, it is important that Christians understand “god” in its more basic meaning of sustainer, provider, something that is worshipped or idealized, and something considered of supreme value. To blaspheme God does not mean one has to believe that the Devil is actually the Christian God and Father, as if God was a fake who was pretending to be the Father of Jesus. Nor does it mean confessing the Devil, in his true form as the fallen angel who opposes God, as the true God, although one could commit the unforgivable sin by believing the Devil was god, as Cain did.

The unforgivable sin can be committed by believing and saying in your heart, that Satan or one of the forms he hides behind and supports, including idol gods, or things of worth and worship such as wealth, is the true sustainer, provider, or object of supreme value in one’s life. No doubt that was what Satan was asking Jesus to do when he offered him all the power of the world if he would worship him (Luke 4:6). The Devil was not asking Jesus to think that God did not exist or that Satan somehow was in fact God, but
rather that Satan would be Jesus’ true sustainer and provider, the true god of his life. The Devil wanted Jesus to become a child of his, which would have been the ultimate coup, but to do so Jesus would have had to “worship” the Devil, not just in form, but in the depths of his heart.

The evidence of Scripture is that a person can become a child of the Devil by choosing in his heart to totally commit himself to making money, attaining power and fame—any of Satan’s forms—his god. For example, it is unlikely that the Pharisees who were children of the Devil had taken “the Devil” per se as their god, but rather so highly valued their prestige, power, and position that they had in their hearts made that their god, and in doing so completely turned away from the true God.

Another thing that is not clarified in Scripture is what happens to a person spiritually, mentally, and physically when he becomes a child of the Devil such that he is unable to repent and be saved. We have no way of knowing what actually happens, but one possibility is that when one commits the unforgivable sin, a demon enters him and gains access to, or perhaps even takes control of, the portion of the brain that controls freedom of choice, and the demon continually blocks his ability to repent. [For more information on the Unforgivable Sin and the children of the Devil, see truthortradition.com and our article, “The Unforgivable Sin.”]

“defaming word...defaming” Greek noun blasphēmia (#988 βλασφημία; pronounced blas-fay-me’-ah), and the verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημέω; pronounced blas-fay-meh’-ō) are transliterated (not translated) from the Greek into English as “blasphemy.” There is a problem with that, however, because “blasphemy” in English has a different meaning than blasphēmeō and blasphēmia do in Greek. In English, “blasphemy” is only used in reference to God. It is insulting God or a god, insulting something considered sacred (like defacing a cross or statue of Jesus), or claiming to be God or a god in some way. However, in Greek, blasphēmia and blasphēmeō did not have to refer to God or a god, but were common words that were used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning of them as they were used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. In the honor/shame society of the biblical world, that was even more heinous an act that we would think of it today, because honor and reputation were at the very core of societal status and were the basis of all social interaction. [For more on blasphēmia and blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

12:32. “the Holy Spirit” Literally, “the Spirit, the Holy one.” A name of God. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: Usages of ‘Spirit’.]

12:33. “declare.” The Greek is poieō (#4160 ποιέω), which is properly “to do” or “to make,” and many versions read “make.” However, poieō can refer to what is made up in the mind, and thus what is thought, or in this case, as the context shows, what is declared or spoken. Examples of this include John 5:18; 8:53; and 10:33. The key to understanding this verse is realizing that Jesus is referring back to the evil and hypocritical judgment of the Pharisees, who said that when Jesus was delivering people by casting out demons, he was doing it by the prince of demons (Matt. 12:24). Jesus was telling the Pharisees that they could not rightly come to the conclusion that Jesus was evil when the result of his work was good. If they said the tree (i.e., Jesus) was evil, then his fruit would have to be evil too. But if they acknowledged that Jesus’ fruit was good, then they should acknowledge that he was good. The justification for the translation “declare” comes from
the context: what the Pharisees were saying (v. 24ff), and Christ’s reference to what is coming out of the mouth and idle words (v. 34-37). Cassirer’s translation of this verse reads: “Suppose a tree is good, then its fruit will be good; suppose a tree has fallen into decay, then its fruit will be worthless.” Jesus taught with great consistency when it came to people and the fruit they produced (Matt. 7:15-20).

12:38. “Teacher.” A respectful address spoken in hypocrisy

12:40. Quoted from Jonah 1:17.

“three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Jesus was in the “heart of the earth,” the grave, for three days and three nights. Tradition teaches that Jesus died on Friday and was up Sunday morning, but that would not fulfill the words of Christ. Tradition acts as if Jesus said he would be “three days” in the grave, treating a “day” as any part of a day. But that is not what Jesus said! He specifically said he would be “three days” and “three nights” in the grave. Before we get into the specifics of the tradition and the truth, we need to remember that the Jewish day started at sunset, not midnight. Thus the Jewish day is a “night and day,” not, as we normally say in English, “day and night.”

If we take the traditional position that Jesus was buried just before sunset on Friday evening, that little sliver of time between his being put in the tomb and sunset could be considered daytime Friday and thus the first “day” of the three days and nights. Then sunset would start Saturday, and Saturday night would be the first night, then Saturday day would be the second “day.” Then Saturday sunset would start Sunday night, which would be the second “night,” but Sunday would have no “daytime,” because it was still dark when Mary came to the tomb and found it empty (John 20:1). From that exact counting we can see that a Friday crucifixion and burial does not allow Christ to be in the grave three days and nights, which is what Jesus specifically said. Tradition only gives us two days and two nights in the grave (and that is generous since the time on Friday we are counting as a “day” was very likely less than an hour). In conclusion, the traditional teaching about Jesus dying on Friday does not fulfill the prophecy of Jesus Christ, and there are other problems as well, which we will see below.

The major reason tradition says Jesus was crucified on Friday is the Bible says he was crucified the day before the Sabbath (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31). However, John 19:31 says that Sabbath was a “high day,” a special Sabbath. It was not Saturday, the regular Sabbath. The Passover Lamb was always killed before a Sabbath because sunset after the Passover Lamb was killed started the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread which was always a Sabbath. So just because Jesus was crucified the day before a Sabbath does not mean he was crucified on Friday, and we will see below he was not.

The real truth of the situation is that Jesus was crucified on Wednesday, was buried just before sunset on Wednesday night, and got up Saturday night. Then when the women came to the tomb on Sunday morning they were told that he had already risen from the dead and was not there. To fulfill the prophecy Jesus gave, he had to be in the grave three days and three nights. Wednesday sunset to Thursday sunset is one full day and one full night. Thursday sunset to Friday sunset makes two full days and nights, and Friday Sunset to Saturday sunset makes three full days and nights. So Jesus got up around sunset Saturday night, three days and three nights after he was buried. Then, when the women came to the tomb on Sunday morning, the angel said he is not here. Most people assume that Jesus had just gotten up a few minutes before the women arrived, but the Bible never
Matthew 8:4 says that. The angel never tells the women when Jesus got up, we have to learn that from the prophecy of Jonah.

One of the keys to understanding the record of Jesus’ crucifixion is realizing that Jesus died on the cross on Golgotha as our true Passover Lamb at the same time the regular Passover Lamb was being slain in the Temple. Leviticus 23:5-7 (and Exodus 12:6-16) set forth the regulations of Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Passover Lamb was slain “between the evenings,” a phrase that has been interpreted to mean the time when it can be clearly seen the sun is starting to fall in sky, thus about 3 PM. The lamb is cooked before sunset, and the Passover meal is eaten after sunset, which, according to Jewish reckoning started the next day, the fourteenth of Nisan and the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was always a special Sabbath. Thus sunset after the Passover Lamb was killed began the special Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

The day the Passover Lamb was killed was known as “the preparation” or “the preparation day,” because preparations were being made for the special Sabbath that began at sunset. The Bible is clear that Jesus Christ was the true Passover Lamb who died for our sins (1 Corinthians 5:7), and all Four Gospels testify that Jesus was killed on “the preparation day” (cp. Matt. 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31, 42), so Jesus died on the cross at the same time the Passover Lamb was slain in the Temple. The day after the “preparation” day is the first day of Unleavened Bread and always a Sabbath, and John 19:31 correctly differentiates that Sabbath from the regular weekly Saturday Sabbath by saying the Sabbath after Jesus died was “the High Day” (REV); “a special day” (HCSB), and thus not the weekly Sabbath.

To find out what day Jesus was crucified and buried we have to fit together some basic facts. First, he had to be in the grave three days and three nights. Second, he was already up on Sunday morning when the women came to properly bury him. Third, he was placed in the grave by Joseph of Arimathea just before sunset, so to have three days and three nights he would most logically get up from the grave just before sunset. Fourth, the women bought and prepared spices before a Sabbath but brought them to the tomb after a Sabbath. Using these facts and working backwards in time from Sunday morning, we can see that Jesus had to get up Saturday night before sunset, and thus had to be crucified and buried on Wednesday. Thus, Wednesday was the “preparation” when the Passover Lamb and Jesus were slain, Thursday was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and a Special Sabbath, Friday was a regular work day, Saturday was the regular weekly Sabbath and by Sunday morning at dawn Jesus had already been raised.

We can now construct the chronology and make Jesus’ prophecy of being in the grave for three days and three nights work perfectly with him being the real Passover Lamb.

- Wednesday morning about 9 AM Jesus is crucified (Mark 15:25).
- Darkness comes over the land from 12 noon to 3 PM (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44)
- Jesus dies on the cross around 3 PM at the same time the Passover Lamb was being slain in the Temple (Matt. 27:46-50; Mark 15:34-37; Luke 23:44-46).
- Joseph of Arimathea goes to Pilate and gets permission to take the body of Jesus (Matt. 27:58; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:52; John 19:38). He wrapped the body in a
clean linen cloth, put it in the tomb, and went away (Matt. 27:59, 60; Mark 15:46; Luke 22:53).

- The women were watching Joseph and saw that he had laid Jesus’ body in the tomb without preparing it with spices according to the common custom (Matt. 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55).

- Nicodemus, who was likely late for some reason, came with his servants carrying seventy-five pounds of spices and gave Jesus a burial that was according to Jewish custom (John 19:39, 40). Nicodemus would have had servants with him to help him carry the spices and also as a guard because 75 pounds of spices would have been extremely valuable. However, the women had already left and did not see what Nicodemus had done because the Sabbath was beginning (Luke 23:54).

- Thursday, the 15th of Nisan and the Special Sabbath of the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread began at sunset, and everyone had a day of rest.

- Friday the 16th of Nisan. The women, not knowing about Nicodemus burying Jesus with spices, go and buy spices and prepare them to properly bury Jesus. It is after the Sabbath like Scripture says (Mark 16:1; after the Special Sabbath) and also before the Sabbath like Scripture says (Luke 23:56; the regular weekly Sabbath), but they cannot get to the tomb because of the guard (Matt. 27:63-66).

- Saturday: the women rest on Saturday the weekly Sabbath. Jesus gets up from the grave just before sunset.

- The women come to the tomb early Sunday morning, the first day of the week (Mark 16:2), bringing the spices. When they get to the tomb they find out Jesus has already risen from the dead.

There is an important proof that there were two Sabbaths during the time Jesus was in the grave. The two Sabbaths were Thursday the 15th of Nisan, the Special Sabbath that started the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and Saturday the 17th of Nisan, the regular weekly Sabbath. The Bible tells us that the women went and bought and prepared spices to properly bury Jesus (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56). But Mark says the women did this “when the Sabbath was over.” That in and of itself is problematic, because the Sabbath was not over until sundown Saturday and it is unlikely that the women would have been able to buy the spices after sunset on Saturday night. The merchants were likely closed. But even if they could have bought the spices at night, Luke contradicts Mark and says the women bought the spices before the Sabbath, not after it. Luke says, “having returned, they prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.” So did the women buy the spices before the Sabbath, like Luke says, or after it, like Mark says? The answer is “both.” The women bought and prepared the spices on Friday after the Special Sabbath on Thursday, but before the regular weekly Sabbath on Saturday. They could not take the spices to the tomb on Friday because of the guard, and they had to rest on Saturday which was the regular weekly Sabbath. They were able to take the spices to the tomb on Sunday, because it was the fourth day (Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday), and the soldiers were only going to guard the tomb for three days. Thus they thought the guard would be gone, and they went very early Sunday morning, only to find that Jesus did not need the spices because he had already risen from the dead.
[For more information on the events from Jesus’ arrest to his death, see commentary on John 18:13 and 19:14. For information on the events and chronology of Jesus’ death and resurrection and his being in the tomb from Wednesday night to Saturday night, see commentary on Luke 23:50. For more information on Nicodemus and that he came after Joseph of Arimathea left the tomb, see commentary on John 19:40].

12:41. “men of Nineveh.” The Greek word translated “men” is anēr (#435 ἀνήρ; pronounced an-air), meaning men; males. This verse is a window into the biblical culture. It would never have been considered in the biblical world that women would sit as judges, hence the men will rise up in judgment.

“Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“someone greater.” The adjective “greater,” pleiōn (#4119 πλείον) is being used as a substantive (BDAG). As such, it implies a greater something, which is in this case a person, so “someone” is an appropriate noun to use to complete the sense. This is another time when Jesus revealed that he was the Messiah to those who had ears to hear. He was not simply saying he was a greater person or a greater prophet than Jonah.

12:42. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“someone greater.” See commentary on 12:41.

12:43. “a resting place.” The Greek is anapausis (#372 ἀνάπαυσις), and it can either mean “rest” or “a resting place.” Here, the better translation is “a resting place,” that is a place to settle in and use as a base for causing trouble and harm. See commentary on Luke 11:24.

12:46. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

12:47. Brackets. This verse is omitted in many of the early and diverse manuscripts, including some manuscripts from the Majority Text, so it is omitted in some of the modern versions, such as CJB, ESV, RSV, and NJB. We put it in brackets to mark the fact that it is doubtful.

“Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“your mother.” There is no mention of Joseph; he had apparently died. See commentary on John 19:27.

12:49. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

Chapter 13

13:3. “The Sower.” The parable Jesus tells in verses 3-8 is almost universally referred to as “The Parable of the Sower.” However, it should more accurately be called, “The Parable of the Soils,” because the parable is not about the one who sows the seed; nor is it about the seed itself, which is the Word of God (Mark 4:14). The parable is about the people who hear the Word, and the kind of soil they are. Each person determines the kind of person he or she is: like the path (v. 4); like rocky places (v. 5); like thorny ground (v.
It is misreading this parable to read it and say, “we are what we are,” and we are stuck that way. Christ does not teach about the types of soils so we can then discover what soil we are. He teaches about them as a warning, so people can change.

Jesus’ explanation reveals the lesson.

• The person who is the path: If a person is hard hearted (like the soil on the path is hard), then he will not understand the Word, and/or not care about it. However, that should be obvious to him, even if he has to hear it from others. His challenge is to soften his heart and do things that cause him to grow in the Word so that his heart will receive it. If he does not care enough to do these things, the Devil will eventually snatch away the Word from his heart and mind and it will cease to matter to him at all. No one has to remain hard soil.

• The person who is rocky soil: This is the person who receives the Word with joy, but has no depth of understanding, so he abandons the Word when there is trouble or persecution. The key to understanding this soil (this kind of person) is realizing that when a person has no depth of knowledge or understanding, he knows it. We all know when we do not know or understand something, and when it comes to the things of God, that is unacceptable. After hearing the Word of Christ, each person has the responsibility to do what it takes to grow in the Word, both by quitting activities that are ungodly or detrimental, and by doing things that contribute to a complete and godly walk with the Lord. No one has to remain shallow soil.

• The person who is soil with thorns: This is the person who likes the Word of God, but never gets rid of his worldly attachments. He wants to be rich, or wants to have fun or be involved in his other worldly interests (Mark 4:19), and/or he is overly concerned about worldly things. The key to this soil (this person), is that anyone who hangs on to worldly desires realizes that fact. No one loves money, fame, sports, sex, alcohol, drugs, video games, etc., without realizing it. A man or woman knows if he or she has watched 20 hours of sports, soap operas or game shows, on TV in the week but has not read the Bible at all. Everyone can make the freewill choice to put away the things of the world and spend more time and energy with the things of God. No one has to remain thorny soil.

• The person who is good soil: This is the person who hears the Word and understands it and brings forth fruit. The mistake that people can make when reading about this soil is assuming that the soil (person) was always that way—somehow inherently godly and God-knowing. Nothing could be further from the truth. Christ is talking about soil in a kind of overview of the person’s life. The person who is good soil started out as everyone else started: ignorant of the deep things of God and with worldly loves and attachments. But he or she put aside the things of the world and focused on the things of God and grew in the Word. Eventually his or her life produced great fruit. Everyone can be good soil if they want to badly enough.

“Pay attention.” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. Ordinarily it would have been good to translate this as “Listen,” but since the
parable ends with a command to “listen” (v. 9), it would have seemed an undue emphasis to double up on that word, thus the translation here, “pay attention.” See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

13:9. “Anyone who has ears had better listen!” This is the same Greek phrase as Matthew 11:15 (see commentary on that verse). Jesus has just taught the Parable of the Sower (13:3-8), which shows that each person has the responsibility before God to do something godly with his life and bring forth fruit. Unfortunately, as the parable shows, many people will never do what it takes to bring forth fruit, but that does not absolve us from the responsibility to do so. Each person should heed the words of Jesus and strongly endeavor to bring forth fruit.

13:11. “sacred secrets”. We translate the Greek word musteron (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musteron actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

13:13. “neither do they understand.” Why do the listeners not understand? Is it because they have covered their own ears and closed their hearts, as Matthew’s record portrays (13:14-15), or because God has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts as John’s words could be read to say (John 12:38-40)? The answer comes only when we put these two records together and understand them in light of the entirety of scripture’s teaching on this subject.

Why did the Lord speak to the crowds with parables? To this question Christ could have responded that he takes his own advice, by not throwing his pearls before the swine. God says, “Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the good sense of your words” (Prov. 23:9). Parables are designed so that the hearers must think, seek, and even ask to understand. By speaking to the crowds in this way, the Lord separates those who have a will to listen and be healed from those who foolishly reject his teachings.

All three synoptic gospels record the parable of the Sower in the context of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah (Matt. 13:10-18; Mark 4:2-12; Luke 8:9-11). John does not relate the Sower parable but speaks of the prophecy of Isaiah: John 12:35-42. It is interesting that the Sower is related in this context, for this parable deals with how one’s heart is prepared to receive the Good News. In the parable of the Sower there is no indication that God decides what kind of soil one’s heart is. Rather, it is the own person’s responsibility to determine the nature of his heart’s soil. This is where the quotation from Isaiah comes in. Jesus says in Matthew the prophecy “is fulfilled” (3:14, present indicative), in that some of those listening had dull hearts and could barely hear, and further that they have chosen to close their eyes and ears lest they see, hear, understand, and turn. The Greek word for “lest,” mepote (#3379 μηποτε), is an indicator of negative purpose, showing they purposely intended to not see, hear, or understand. These Jews hardened their hearts against God.

John begins the record by pointing out even though Jesus had done so many signs before these people, they still did not believe in him (12:37). This “resulted in” another word of Isaiah being fulfilled regarding Israel’s unbelief: “Who has believed what he heard from us?” (12:38). The “resulted in” expression of this verse is a hina with a verb in the subjunctive result clause (see entry on Matt. 2:15, “resulting in...what was spoken being fulfilled”). John says it was “for this reason,” “on account of this,” (Greek: dia
tutto) that these people could not believe (12:39). That is to say, because they rejected Jesus and refused to believe, “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them” (12:40).

God is portrayed as doing the blinding and hardening in the passage in John. Yet we know from Matthew these people hardened their own hearts first by choosing not to believe. John tells us that it was because of this unbelief they were blinded. How are we to understand this blinding? It is not as though God actively hardens the hearts of those who close their eyes to the truth. Rather, he has allowed them to be blinded by setting in place a spiritual principal that while one is rejecting Jesus they are left in a state of spiritual blindness. It is the idiom of permission [See Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, Don’t Blame God, Ch. 4, and commentary on Romans 9:18]. Scripture teaches that in actuality, the Devil is the one who blinds these people: “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4); it is only when they turn to the Lord that the veil is taken away (2 Cor. 3:14-16). Unbelievers have dull hearts and ears that can barely hear, but whether they will turn to the Lord or decide to close their eyes is their free choice. If they turn to him, the veil is lifted off their hearts and they can see at last. But if they choose to reject Christ and close their eyes, as some did on this day, those people remain under Satan’s dominion of spiritual blindness. This is why Christ told these people, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you… While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light (John 12:35, 36).

Once someone rejects the light they are “overtaken” by darkness and God allows them to stay in this state until they turn to the Lord and are healed—so that Christ may be the only means of spiritual enlightenment. Only in the sense of this permission can it be said that God blinds them and hardens their hearts. Thus we can get to the proper understanding of these passages only if we consider the whole of scripture. We must put the records together to understand the full picture, that people first choose to harden their own hearts and as a result are left by God in a state of spiritual blindness.

When this record occurs in Mark 4:12 and Luke 8:10 it comes in the form of two purpose-result clauses (see entry on Matt. 2:15, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled”), thus sandwiching the truth revealed in Matthew and John together into one perspective. They write that Christ’s teachings come in parables “so that” the people may see but not perceive, hear but not understand. The “so that” indicates the purpose and the result of the speaking in parables.

13:14, 15. Quoted from Isaiah 6:9, 10.
13:18. For an explanation of the parable of the Sower, see commentary on 13:3.
13:19. “Wicked One.” The Greek is poneros (#4190 πονηρός), which the BDAG Greek-English Lexicon describes as, “pertaining to being morally or socially worthless; therefore, ‘wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, and degenerate.” Poneros is an adjective, but it is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun; for more on substantives, see the commentary on Matthew 5:37).

The Slanderer is the fount and foundation of wickedness. It was in him that wickedness was first found, when he was lifted up with pride and decided to rebel against God. Ever since that time he has been true to his name, “the Wicked One,” and has been
doing and causing wickedness wherever he can, which, since he is “the god of this age,” is a considerable amount of wickedness. [For more names of the Slanderer (the Devil) and their meanings, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

13:25. “darnel.” The Greek word is zizantion (#2215 ζίζανιον) and it refers to the plant Lolium temulentum, or the Bearded Darnel. There are other varieties of Lolium, but they do not closely resemble wheat, and therefore are almost certainly not the plant referred to in the parable. The Bearded Darnel looks so much like wheat that it cannot be distinguished from it except by an expert, until the grain starts to form. The darnel grain is much smaller than wheat and dark brown. The seeds of the darnel were believed to be poisonous to men and animals (although not fowl). It has now been asserted by some botanists that it is not the seed of the darnel that is poisonous, but rather that it is easily susceptible to getting a mold that is poisonous (Harold and Alma Moldenke, *Plants of the Bible*, Dover Publications, NY, 1952). Nevertheless, the ancients, and even the modern Arabs, do not make any such distinction, and consider the seeds to be poisonous. The symptoms of eating the darnel include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, convulsions, and sometimes even death. The roots of the darnel are quite extensive, and when it appears in a wheat field, become entangled with the roots of the wheat so that if anyone tried to pull up the darnel they would most certainly pull up the wheat also.

Using the translation “weeds” as many modern translations do misses much of the depth of the parable. People frequently “weed” their gardens, and it is not hurtful but even helps the other plants grow. Only by knowing that one cannot do that with darnel makes that part of the parable make sense. Also, the parable epitomizes “by their fruit you will know them,” because it is when the grain starts to appear that the darnel can be easily seen.


13:32. “Smaller...becomes a tree.” Although there has historically been some disagreement about it, today scholars identify the “mustard” in the parable as the common black mustard (brassica nigra). In the parable the man purposely grew this mustard in his garden, just as people still do today, and mustard was valued as a spice and for the oil it produced. Although these annual plants commonly grew to only 3 to 4 feet tall, much larger plants are regularly observed, some growing to 10-15 feet tall with a central stem as large as a man’s forearm, and especially in the fall as the lack of rain hardens the plant they are well able to support a bird’s nest (*Plants in the Bible*, p. 59, 60).

The context of Jesus’ statement about the size of the mustard seed is the man sowing seed in his garden, which is confirmed by the word “garden plants” (lachanon; #3001 λάχανον; a potable herb; a vegetable). This verse is not a botanical reference to the size of every seed known to man, but rather a comparison of the mustard seed to the other seeds a gardener would typically sow in his garden in the biblical world at the time of Christ. It is absurd, and a misuse and misunderstanding of how the Word of God is written, to try to prove an error in the Word of God by finding a seed smaller than a mustard seed. Harold and Alma Moldenke correctly point out, “Such statements as that concerning the size of the mustard seed must always be judged in the light of the knowledge of the time of the people involved” (*Plants of the Bible*; Dover Publications, 1952, p. 61). Furthermore, but less likely, Jesus may also have been using a natural hyperbole (exaggeration), a common figure of speech used in discourse, the same way
many Westerners will say, “I am starving” when they are just hungry, or “I’m freezing” when they are just cold. The point of Jesus’ parable was that just as the mustard seed starts out very small but becomes very big, so too the Kingdom of Heaven seems to have a small start, but will one day fill the earth.

Matthew 17:20 and Luke 17:6 refer to “trust like a mustard seed.” The mustard seed is small, but it has complete trust that it can grow into the large garden herb. See commentary on Matthew 17:20.

13:33. Three satons of meal is about 9 gallons of meal.

13:35. Quoted from Psalm 78:2.


13:38. “the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For commentary on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

13:40 “burned up.” The Greek is katakaiō (#2618 κατακαίω), and means to burn up, or to consume. It cannot be overstated that the weeds “burn up,” they do not burn forever. Similarly, the people who are unsaved will be burned up in Gehenna, they will not burn forever.

13:43. “Anyone who has ears had better listen!” This is the same Greek phrase as Matthew 11:15 (see commentary on that verse). Jesus has just finished teaching that wicked people will be burned in Gehenna, while godly people will live and shine in the Kingdom of God. This is not mere threats. There will be a Judgment and unsaved people will be annihilated in Gehenna while saved people will live forever. Everyone better listen and pay attention. [For annihilation in Gehenna, see commentary on Rev. 20:10].

13:46. “pearl.” Pearls were very expensive in the ancient world, and very highly valued. [For more on pearls, see commentary on Revelation 18:12].

“great value.” The Greek word is polutimos (#4186 πολύτιμος), and it means to be of great value, or very expensive. To say the pearl was of “great price” is not as accurate a translation today because many things are priced way above, and sometimes way below, their actual value. This pearl was of great value, but the only way we know the price was high was that the man had to sell all he owned to buy it.

13:47. “lake.” He was teaching from a boat on the Lake of Galilee, so the context dictates that thalasso be translated “lake.”

13:52. “has been discipled.” The Greek word mathēteuō (#3100 μαθητεύω) means to be a disciple, and the fact that it an aorist participle means that the disciple has graduated and finished his training and reached a level of expertise. It is related to the noun mathētēs (#3101 μαθητής; pronounced ma-thay-tase) “disciple.” Some versions have “has been instructed,” but we went with “has been discipled” to maintain consistency with the word “disciple.”
“new and old.” The person who has been well trained about the Kingdom of Heaven has wisdom and knowledge and applies it well. Some of it is old knowledge that has been around for many generations, some of it is new knowledge that has recently been revealed.

Chapter 14

14:3. “put him in prison.” According to the records we have from Josephus, Herod Antipas put John in prison at Machaerus, his palace-fortress east of the Dead Sea. Machaerus was originally built about 90 BC by the Hasmonean king, Alexander Jannaeus (104 BC-78 BC). It is located about 15 miles (24 km) south and east of the point at which the Jordan River enters the Dead Sea. In 57 BC it was destroyed by Pompey's general Gabinius, but rebuilt by Herod the Great in 30 BC. Machaerus was the easternmost palace-fortress of Herod, and he strongly fortified it, in part due to its proximity to Arabia.

When Herod the Great died, the palace-fortress was passed to his son, Herod Antipas, who ruled from 4 BC until 39 AD, and who imprisoned and beheaded John the Baptist at Machaerus. Because Herod the Great built his palace in the center of the fortified area, we know the location Salome was when she danced before Herod Antipas and his guests and asked for the head of John the Baptist. Machaerus passed from Herod Antipas to Herod Agrippa I, and when he died in 44 AD, it came under Roman control. Jewish rebels took control after 66 AD during the First Jewish Revolt, but the Romans began a siege of the fortress in 72 AD. They built a wall of circumvallation around the fortress, and an embankment and ramp for the Roman siege engines, but the Jewish rebels surrendered before the Roman began their attack. The rebels were allowed to leave and the Romans tore the palace-fortress down, leaving only the foundations, which are still there today.

Some scholars think John was in prison for two years at Machaerus, but that is because they think Jesus had a three-year ministry. We believe Jesus’ ministry lasted only shortly over a year, from before Passover in 27 AD to Passover in 28 AD, and therefore the imprisonment of John would have been considerably less than a year. It seems clear that John was put in prison not too long after he baptized Jesus, because Jesus had not yet gone into Galilee and started his teaching nor had called out his disciples to follow him, who were later to be the apostles (Mark 1:14-16). However, John was imprisoned after Passover of 27 AD (compare John 2:13ff with John 3:22-24). John the Baptist was beheaded by Herod Antipas at his birthday celebration, but unfortunately we do not know when Herod’s birthday was. However, it was before the feeding of the 5000 (Matt. 14:13ff; Mark 6:32ff; Luke 9:10ff; John 6:1ff), and thus before the feast of Tabernacles, which occurred in our September/October (John 7:1ff). Actually, it was likely some months before Tabernacles, likely sometime in the summer months. Thus, if John was imprisoned in our April or May of 27 AD, and beheaded by October that same year at the latest, the most he would have been in prison is 6 months, but it was likely a much shorter time.

14:22. The record in Matthew 14:22-33 (Mark 6:45-51; John 6:15-21) is a good example of how different Gospels treat the records of Christ’s life, because all four Gospels record
Jesus feeding the 5,000, so what happens after that could be similar. We must keep in mind that although there is a “total picture” of what Jesus did, each Gospel portrays that in a different way to reveal and emphasize different things. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John record Jesus walking on the water, but Luke says nothing about it at all. Only Matthew records that Peter walked on the water. This no doubt helped people recognize the primacy of Peter in relation to the rest of the apostles, and also showed that Peter’s personal doubt was created by fear and taking his eyes off Jesus, a valuable lesson. By leaving the Peter event off, Mark is better able to emphasize the hardness of the disciples’ hearts and that they had not gained insight from the multiplying of the loaves, something that would have been overshadowed by the Peter incident. Thus Mark emphasizes that we are all supposed to learn from the examples of Jesus—what Jesus did and what is recorded about him is not just for us to know, but for us to learn from in our own walks. The Gospel of John does not focus on Jesus’ interaction with the apostles at all, but keeps its focus on what Jesus said and did, thus elevating him as the Son of God.

“immediately he compelled.” See commentary on Mark 6:45.

14:25. “fourth watch of the night.” The fourth watch of the night started at our 3 AM. At the time of Christ, in both Jewish and Roman reckoning of time, the night was divided into four “watches,” each being three hours long (see commentary on Mark 6:48 and 13:35).

14:26. “Ghost” is from the Greek phantasma, which means “an appearance.” Something that would appear and be of the spiritual world. Ghost is not exactly a perfect translation, since “ghost” means the spirit of a dead person, while “phantasma” might be any sort of spiritual appearance. Nevertheless, the disciples yelling, “It is an appearance!” just does not seem to do the verse justice.

14:30. “saw.” The Greek is blepō (#991 βλέπω), and it means to see, but its range of meaning includes, “to notice, to pay attention to.” Peter was so focused on the Lord that even though he and the others had been fighting the wind, he did not pay attention to it. However, once he was away from the boat and out on the water, his attention once again turned to the strength of the wind and he “saw” it clearly.


14:34. “Gennesaret.” This is where Jesus and the disciples landed, and it is confirmed in Mark 6:53. The records of Matthew, Mark, and John must be understood in light of the storm, which was coming from the northwest, so that the apostles on the boat were rowing right into it. Jesus apparently told them to go “toward” (pros = toward) Bethsaida (Mark 6:45), and the Gospel of John says that the apostles were sailing “to” (eis = to, into) Capernaum (John 6:16). Thus, Capernaum is likely where Jesus told the apostles to go. Bethsaida was almost a suburb of Capernaum, which was a major city, and site of a tax office and Roman troops, so for travel purposes, the names Bethsaida and Capernaum were basically synonymous. However, when Jesus got on the boat, that is not where they eventually went. Both Matthew and Mark make it clear that the boat landed at Gennesaret, which was a fertile plain just south and west of Capernaum. At the time of Christ it was densely populated, and had a small city by the same name on it. According to Josephus, date palms, figs, walnuts, olives and grapes were all grown there. No doubt Jesus planned to go to Capernaum shortly, but landed at Gennesaret and healed people there, then made the short walk to Capernaum, where he was when the people found him (John 6:24).
Chapter 15

15:3. “even you yourselves.” The kai (#2532 καὶ) before the emphatic humeis (5210 ὑµεῖς) is not ‘also’ and does not place the Pharisees alongside of Jesus’ disciples [as if they too had sinned]; it signifies ‘even you yourselves,’ the very ones who are truly guilty of transgression, while they pretend to find transgression in others” Lenski, Matthew, p. 583.

15:4. Quoted from Exodus 20:12 (Deut. 5:16) and Exodus 21:17.


“Moreover.” This comes from the quote in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. See Lenski, Matthew, p. 587.

“doctrines.” The Greek word is didaskalia (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse we felt “doctrine” was better than “teaching.” [For more on didaskalia see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13].

15:17. “toilet.” The Greek word is aphedrōn (#856 ἀφεδρόν), and it refers to a place where human waste goes: toilet, latrine, privy, sewer. By the time of Christ many of the larger cities had some kind of public toilets. Often they were seats over a kind of sluice that was periodically flushed by water. Also, some cities had very developed sewer systems. For example, Caesarea, on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, had a sewer system that was flushed by the tide.

15:19. “insults.” The Greek noun is blasphēmia (#988 βλασφημία; pronounced blas-fay-me'-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmia, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

15:22. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἵδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

15:23. “as she follows us.” The Greek reads, “from behind us,” which most versions translate “after us.” However, to cry out “after” someone can mean that you are chasing after, or “chasing,” the person (like “He is after me,” means “He is chasing me”), but that is not its meaning here. She was not chasing them. She knew they heard her and that she was being ignored. So she was walking behind them trying to get them to change their minds and help her; give her mercy. We tried to better capture the sense of the scene with “as she follows us.” Jesus was coming into the region of Tyre and Sidon, on the Phoenician coast, and was apparently walking down the road with the apostles following him. This woman followed the group, crying out as she went, “Have mercy on me!”


15:26, 27. (Cp. Mark 7:27 and 28)

“good.” Read below.

“dog” = little dog. This verse is a wonderful example of how one reading the Bible must pay attention to the cultural background involved. Although Jesus was Jewish and
most of the time in the Gospels the standards of Jewish culture apply, in this verse the standards of Greek culture apply. The Greek is *kunarion* (2952 κυνάριον), which is the diminutive of “dog.” It sometimes happened in the Greek and Roman world (although not in the Jewish world except among those who had given up being Kosher and were more apt to follow Roman customs) that “little dogs,” or “house dogs” were kept, and like our house dogs today, sometimes ate under (or beside) the table (Cp. Xenophon, Plato, Theophrastus, Plutarch, others. See Thayer’s lexicon and Liddell and Scott). The word can also refer to “puppies,” (Cp. Liddell and Scott; Vine) but that would probably not be the case here, since the woman was a Syrophoenician and would have been familiar with the Greek custom of having a little house dog that would eat by the table. The reference to the “little dog” is made only in the account of the Syrophoenician woman. There is no other use of *kunarion* in the Septuagint (Greek OT) or the Greek NT.

That Jesus would say “little dogs” is amazing grace. He did not, even by implication, call her a “dog,” which in Greek culture had overtones of shamelessness or audacity (cp. Liddell and Scott). Instead, by using the word “little dog,” or “housedog,” he only made a glancing reference that she did not deserve any help (but really, who does?). He opened a door of grace for her, and she walked through it. Also, he said it was not “good,” *kalos* (#2570 καλός), for the children’s bread to be thrown to the little dogs. He did not use the word “lawful” (*exestin*, # 1832). Rather, it was not “good” or “proper,” or “a fine thing to do.”

15:27. “for even...” It would not be correct to translate this as “but,” “however,” etc. The woman is not opposing Jesus in any way. She is merely pointing out that the little dogs do get crumbs when the family eats.

**Chapter 16**

16:14. “Elijah.” For information on why the people thought that Elijah would come, and why John the Baptist was called “Elijah,” see commentary on Matthew 17:10.

16:18. “congregation.” This is the translation of the word commonly translated “Church,” *ekklēsia* (#1577 ἐκκλησία). *Ekklēsia* has a wide range of meanings, but none of them refer to a physical building. The word *ekklēsia* refers to an assembly of people, any assembly of people for any reason. It does not have to be a religious gathering. The gathering of people in Acts 19:32 was a mob coming together with no particular ethnic or religious affiliation, in fact, the Bible says, “most of them did not know why they had come together” (ESV). In Acts 7:38 the term is used of the Jewish throng, including some Gentiles (Exod. 12:38), who were led out of Egypt by Moses. Another example is Matthew 18:17, where the “congregation” could refer to a congregation of Jews or the Church. In that verse, “congregation” has a multidispensational application. So the term *ekklēsia* does not solely apply to the Christian Church.

In modern English the term “Church” refers to a Christian building of worship; however this is not how the word *ekklēsia* is used in Scripture. Translating *ekklēsia* as “Church” causes some problems, primarily because almost everyone who reads “Church” thinks of the Christian Church. But, as we have seen, *ekklēsia* does not always refer to Christians.
We do need to recognize that the most common use of *ekklēsia* is referring to Christians, but as a congregation of people, not as a “church” building. This is made clear in Colossians 1:18: Christ is “the head of the body, the church,” which refers to the entire world congregation of Christians (Cp. also: Acts 5:11). The term *ekklēsia* can be used solely of a particular local assembly of believers (e.g., 3 John 1:10), or to specific groups, which by extension applies to the entire Church (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:2; Eph. 1:22). Lastly, *ekklēsia* is used in Revelation (2:1, etc.) in regard to the “congregation” after the Rapture. These are Jews and some God-fearing Gentiles, but not Christians, who have been Raptured off the earth before the book of Revelation starts (see commentary on Revelation 2:1).

16:19. “whatever you forbid on earth must be already forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth must be already permitted in heaven.” On the flyleaf of the paper cover to *The New Testament: A Private Translation in the Language of the People*, by Charles B. Williams (1953), the Greek grammarian Mantey, (co-author of the well-respected Greek grammar book, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* by Dana and Mantey) introduced the translation by saying that Williams did a better job of translating the Greek verb into English than any other New Testament he had studied. One of the examples he gave was Matthew 16:19 and 18:18. These are almost always translated as: (NIV) “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

However, the phrase, “will be bound in heaven” is not a good translation of the Greek verb. The “to be” verb is not a simple future, but rather a future passive periphrastic (and thus is most accurately translated “shall have been”), while the verb “bind” is a perfect passive participle. Williams translates the verse as:

Matt. 16:19: “I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you forbid on earth must be what is already forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth must be what is already permitted in heaven.”

Matt. 18:18: “...whatever you forbid on earth must be already forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth must be already permitted in heaven.”

The 1995 revision of the New American Standard Bible follows that translation quite closely: Matt. 16:19: “I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” Matt. 18:18: “Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”

Williams’ translation not only fits the Greek, but is how ministry actually works. God’s ministers do not make commands that God must then follow. Rather, God’s ministers work hard to be aware of what God is doing, and then follow His lead. God’s ministers follow God’s guidance, so what we bind or loose on earth must be inside the will of God, or what He has first done in heaven. Jesus himself worked that way, even as he said over and over: “So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise’” (John 5:19 ESV). “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge…” (John 5:30). “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38 ESV). “…I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me” (John 8:28 ESV). “The words that I say
to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works” (John 14:10 ESV).

It is clear that even Jesus did not bind and loose on His own, without knowing the Father’s will. Similarly, we also must know what God has already bound or loosed in heaven before we try to act on earth. It is appropriate that when Jesus was giving Peter the keys to the kingdom, he also told Peter that he walk in the will of God and not try to bind or loose on his own. The ministry does not belong to people, it belongs to God and Jesus, and the minister of the Lord follows the leading of the Lord.

Robertson provides a wonderful explanation of this difficult verse, based on his extensive knowledge of Greek and understanding the use of the language at the time by the Rabbis. He writes: “The same power here given to Peter belongs to every disciple of Jesus in all the ages. Advocates of papal supremacy insist on the primacy of Peter here and the power of Peter to pass on this supposed sovereignty to others. But this is all quite beside the mark. We shall soon see the disciples actually disputing again (Mt 18:1) as to which of them is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven as they will again (20:21) and even on the night before Christ’s death. Clearly neither Peter nor the rest understood Jesus to say here that Peter was to have supreme authority. What is added shows that Peter held the keys precisely as every preacher and teacher does. To ‘bind’ (dêsêis) in rabbinical language is to forbid, to ‘loose’ (lusêis) is to permit. Peter would be like a rabbi who passes on many points. …The teaching of Jesus is the standard for Peter and for all preachers of Christ. Note the future perfect indicative (estai dedemenon, estai lelumenon), a state of completion. All this assumes, of course, that Peter’s use of the keys will be in accord with the teaching and mind of Christ. The binding and loosening is repeated by Jesus to all the disciples (18:18). Later after the Resurrection Christ will use this same language to all the disciples (John 20:23), showing that it was not a special prerogative of Peter. He is simply first among equals because on this occasion he was spokesman for the faith of all. …Every preacher uses the keys of the kingdom when he proclaims the terms of salvation in Christ.” (Word Pictures in the New Testament).

Robertson correctly states (above) that the Greek is a future perfect indicative, and could literally be translated “will have been bound…will have been loosed.” As he points out, this construction indicates a state of completion. Williams understands this when he translates the verse such that what we allow or forbid must be inside the will of God, or already allowed or forbidden in heaven. If God had wanted the verse to say that what we bind on earth will then be bound in heaven, the Greek would have been worded quite differently than it is.

16:21. “From that time Jesus began to show to his disciples…” Now that the disciples know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (Matt. 16:13-17; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21) Jesus begins to tell them that he must suffer, die, and be raised from the dead. In spite of his clear teaching about it, however, they did not understand what he meant, and in this verse Peter even tried to stop Jesus from voicing it. [For more on Jesus’ clear teaching that he would suffer and die, see commentary on Luke 18:34].

16:22. “never, ever.” The Greek double negative ou me is usually translated “by no means” in the REV. However, in this case the reader may think that Peter is saying that Jesus could not be killed by any means known to man. The “never, ever” makes the point clear and preserves the double use of “no.” The disciples did not expect Jesus to be killed and then raised from the dead. That is simply not what most first-century Jews believed
about the Messiah, so they did not understand what Jesus was speaking of when he spoke of being raised from the dead (see commentary on Luke 18:34).

16:23. “Get behind me, Adversary.” The Greek is *hupago opiso satanas,* “Go behind me, Adversary.” The Greek is similar to what Jesus said to the Adversary in Matthew 4:10, *hupago Satanas* “Go, Adversary.” It is most likely that what Jesus said to Peter was just a rebuke meaning “Get away from me” (*International Critical Commentary, Matthew;* Davies and Allison); “Get out of my sight” (Lenski; cp. Thayer, BDAG). However, the addition of *opiso* (“behind, after”), which can in certain contexts be translated “follow,” (“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men”; Matt. 4:19, ESV) has led some people to conclude that Jesus is saying in essence, “Get following me,” meaning, “become a disciple again.” Although that is a lexical possibility, there are a couple reasons that militate against it. For one thing, if Jesus was telling Peter to be a follower again, it seems that he would not have added “Adversary.” After all, “Follow me again, Adversary,” does not seem very likely. Secondly, early scribes ascribed the same phrase to the Adversary himself in Luke 4:8. Although modern textual research shows that the phrase was added later, many Greek texts in the Western family have the same phrase in Luke 4:8 when Jesus was speaking to the Adversary (which is why “Get thee behind me, Satan” appears in the KJV). Thus it is clear that the early scribes did not think it was a request to return to being a proper follower, or disciple. Given the evidence, it seems that Jesus was strongly rebuking Peter, saying in essence, “Go away from me, Adversary,” a harsh rebuke that would have gotten Peter’s attention immediately, and caused him to think about the seriousness of the situation.

“Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

16:24. “he must.” Jesus’ statement contains three imperative verbs: “deny,” “take up” [lift up], and “follow.” In some cases, the imperative verb has the sense of an invitation, hence the traditional translation, “let him.” In this context, however, the sense of the verse is not an invitation, but a command, and a number of versions pick up on that fact (cp. HCSB; NAB; NET; NIV; The Source New Testament).

16:25. “life” (2x). The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. [For a more complete explanation of *psuchē,* “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

16:26. “life” (2x). The Greek word is *psuchē,* as in verse 25. It is used twice in verse 25 of the life of the body, and it is expanded in this verse to be life in general, both here and the hereafter, which is why many versions translate it “life” in verse 25 but “soul” in verse 26 (ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV). We felt it was better to translate the word the same way in these two verses and point out that “life” can be just our physical life or our physical and everlasting life [For a more complete explanation of *psuchē,* “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

16:27. “about to come” (Lenski; cp. Wuest, *New Testament*). Jesus spoke of his Second Coming and the events that surround it quite often. Some of these include, Matthew
16:27 (cp. Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26); 24:30-44 (Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27); 25:31-46; 26:64 (Mark 14:62); Mark 8:38; Luke 12:40; 17:24-30; John 14:3, 18; 21:22). The Old Testament is not nearly as clear about the first and second coming of the Messiah as the New Testament is, which makes sense because prophecies about something are never as clear as the events themselves. Nevertheless, even though somewhat veiled, Old Testament passages that speak of the Second Coming of Christ include Isaiah 63:1-6, Daniel 2:34, 35, 44; Zechariah 14:3-6, and there are many more that speak of Christ ruling the earth, which we know he does in his Second Coming.

The “Second Coming” is not “the Rapture,” which is a totally different event that is best described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18. In the Rapture, Jesus does not land on earth, but Christians are taken up into the air to be with Christ. There is a debate among Christians who believe in the Rapture (some do not believe there will be one) as to exactly when it will occur and whether it is before all the tribulation described in Revelation, during it, or after it, but all agree that the Rapture and the “Second Coming” when Christ physically comes to earth and conquers it, are different events.

“repay.” The Greek is apoodidomi (#591 ἀποδίδωμι), and it means to give or give out; to pay, repay, or fulfill a contractual obligation, to reward or give a recompense. It is used in both a positive sense (Matt. 6:4) and a negative, or bad sense (Matt. 12:36). In this verse, the word “repay” can refer to a good repayment, if the person has obeyed God, or a bad repayment, if the person has disobeyed God. Those people who have completely ignored God and not even gotten saved will be “repaid” by being thrown into the Lake of Fire and burned up (see commentary on Rev. 20:10). Those people who have gotten saved will be “repaid” with everlasting life, and also rewarded in the future Millennial Kingdom, for what they have done for Christ (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or worthless”).

Chapter 17

17:2. “transfigured.” The event described in Matthew 17:1-9 (Mark 9:2-9; Luke 9:28-36) referred to as “the Transfiguration,” is a wonderful miracle of God’s grace, preparing Jesus for his torture and death by giving him a taste of his glorious future and by having him talk, via a revelation vision, with “Moses,” and “Elijah.” The Transfiguration shows how much God loved both Jesus and us, and it serves as a model and reminder that God is always at work behind the scenes to prepare people for the difficulties that they will face in life.

There are many aspects to the Transfiguration, and it raises many different questions, and these should be handled subject by subject. We will first consider whether the Transfiguration was the coming Kingdom. There are some theologians who say that the “Kingdom” Christ was referring to in Matthew 16:28 actually came in some form at the Transfiguration, because in verse 28 Jesus said that some of the disciples would not die until the Kingdom of God came.

There are several reasons why this cannot be correct. The first and foremost is that the Kingdom did not come at the Transfiguration. After all, none of the Kingdom promises were fulfilled and the angels that Jesus said would come did not come. Also, Christ did not sit on his throne, lions do not eat straw like the oxen nor lie down with
domestic animals, neither the deserts nor the people of earth have been healed, and no one has been rewarded at the Judgment. In fact, there is nothing about the Transfiguration that indicates it was the coming of the Kingdom in any sense.

Jesus had been teaching that the Kingdom was near since he first started teaching and preaching, and there is no theologian who says that Christ’s message, “the Kingdom is near,” is actually saying, “the Transfiguration is near.” Jesus started teaching about the Kingdom in Matthew 4:17, and mentioned it some 30 times between then and the Transfiguration. Not once did the “Kingdom” Jesus spoke of refer to the Transfiguration. The “Kingdom” in Christ’s preaching refers to the coming Messianic Kingdom on earth [see Appendix 3, “The Meek Will Inherit the Earth”]. There is no justification for changing the meaning of “Kingdom” in Matthew 16:28 to mean the Transfiguration, which was new, unexpected, and only seen by three men, who were then told not to talk about it to anyone. The Transfiguration was not the “Kingdom.”

At the Transfiguration, Christ was given a taste of what he would be like in the future (he was clothed in white and he was glorious in appearance), but the subject being discussed was his death (Luke 9:31). The Kingdom could not come if the Messiah was an unacceptable sacrifice, and so his enduring to his death was extremely important. God gave Christ the vision to help prepare him for “his departure.” Many of the prophets of old, and certainly Paul and John, had visions of the future Kingdom. But it would be wrong to say that because Isaiah, Zechariah, Paul or John got a vision of the future Kingdom that meant that the Kingdom had actually come in some way, and it is wrong to say that because Christ had a vision of the Kingdom it had come. Matthew 17:9 clearly calls the experience a “vision,” although the NIV translation makes that point a little less clearly, saying, “What you have seen.”

Another reason to believe that Scripture does not equate the Transfiguration with the coming Kingdom is that one place the Transfiguration is recorded in is Luke 9, but after that, in Luke 11 Christ prayed in the Lord’s Prayer, “Your kingdom come.” If Christ prayed for the Kingdom to come after the Transfiguration, then the Transfiguration was not the Kingdom. Also, other scriptures after the Transfiguration mention the coming Kingdom, for example, Luke 12:40 speaks of the Son of Man coming; Luke 13:29 speaks of the banquet in the coming Kingdom, etc.

Another reason that the Transfiguration cannot be “the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom” is that Christ did not know that the Transfiguration was coming. It was a miracle done by God to help prepare Christ for his death. It was not foretold in prophecy nor anticipated in Scripture in any way. It certainly caught the only three witnesses by surprise. Jesus may have been given revelation that it was going to occur shortly before it happened, but none of the disciples knew anything about it. For Christ to tell his disciples that some of them would not die until he came in his Kingdom, and then somehow to expect them to realize that he was speaking about an unknown future event and not about the well-known Kingdom they and their ancestors had expected for years, makes that interpretation unacceptable. There is simply no good reason to equate the well-known and expected “Kingdom” with an unknown and unexpected vision of that Kingdom.

Lastly, it needs to be stated that if Christ were speaking of the Transfiguration in Matthew 16:28, then what he actually said does not make sense and is not factual. He said, “There are some standing here which shall not taste death [i.e., die] before they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.” However, the Transfiguration occurred shortly
after Christ made the statement. Luke 9:28 says it was about 8 days. It is almost certain that all of Jesus’ disciples were still alive 8 days later. Even if one of them had died, that is no justification for Jesus to say that only “some” would be alive. That Christ would prophesy that “some” of his disciples would be alive 8 days later makes no sense.

Furthermore, Jesus openly foretold that “some” of his disciples would still be alive to see the Kingdom. Remember, however, that only Peter, James and John were present at the Transfiguration, and they were strictly told keep it a secret (Matt. 17:9). If it was a secret between Jesus and 3 disciples, how could it be the fulfillment of Jesus’ public prophecy in any meaningful sense?

It can be concluded that it makes no sense at all that Christ would say that only some of his disciples would see him come in his Kingdom if what he was actually talking about was his Transfiguration. However, Christ knew the Old Testament very well, and he knew that many people would die in the Tribulation that would precede his Second Coming, Armageddon, and his setting up his kingdom on earth. Even if his Second Coming was very soon, after only seven years of Tribulation, it was still probable that most of his disciples would be killed. Thus it makes perfect sense for Christ to say that, after the Tribulation when the Son of Man came into his kingdom, only “some” would be alive to actually see it.

17:3. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“Moses and Elijah.” To properly understand the Transfiguration, we must recognize that it was “a vision;” a spiritual experience. Moses and Elijah were not there in person, but only as part of the vision. Matthew 17:9 clearly calls the experience a “vision.” The Greek word translated “vision” is horama (#3705 ὁραμά), and besides here, it is used of visions in Acts 9:10, 12; 10:3, 17, 19; 11:5; 12:9; 16:9, 10; and 18:9. Many Bible versions translate the Greek text as “vision” (cp. HCSB; Darby; ESV; KJV; NASB; NET; NKJV; RSV; YLT). The NIV is not as clear, saying, “What you have seen.”

In the revelation experience at the Transfiguration, Jesus was transported to the future, to the exalted state he would have after his resurrection. The Bible says, “and his face shone like the sun” (Matt. 17:2), which is exactly how it was after he was glorified when he appeared to the Apostle John (Rev. 1:16); in fact, the promise of God is that after the resurrection, all the righteous people “will shine like the sun” (Matt. 13:43). And just as on that mountain that day Jesus was not yet actually glorified, neither were Moses and Elijah actually there in person. But the promise was that if Jesus succeeded in being a sinless sacrifice for the sins of mankind, he would be glorified, and also Moses and Elijah would really be raised from the dead in the Resurrection of the Righteous (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15). The vision God gave Christ would one day be a reality if Jesus endured to the end, which he did.

God gave Jesus a revelation vision of what things would be like in the future for the same reason that He gave many prophets a vision of the future—for encouragement, strength, and hope. God gave Christ the vision to help prepare him for “his departure,” and the subject that “Moses” and “Elijah” discussed with Jesus was his death (Luke 9:31). Jesus was not the only one to whom God gave courage and hope by giving them a revelation vision of the future. Prophets such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah, had very clear revelations of the future, and so did New Testament figures such as Paul and John.
So while what God did for Jesus at the Transfiguration was very graphic, it was not materially different from what God had done to encourage others. This should show us the importance of having a clear hope, and building hope in the lives of others.

Although it is commonly taught that Moses and Elijah appeared in person at the Transfiguration, they were only there in a vision, not in reality. The Bible teaches that when a person dies, he is dead in every way, and not alive in any form until God raises him from the dead at the Rapture or one of the resurrections [see Appendix 4: “The Dead are Dead”].

Another clear reason that Moses and Elijah could not have been on the Mount of Transfiguration is that they could not be alive before Christ paid the price for their sin. If Moses and Elijah could get up from the dead and be in a glorified state before Jesus paid for their sin, then anyone could be raised before Jesus paid for their sin. In that case, there would have been no point in Jesus dying. Some people say, “Well, the body does die, but the soul lives on.” That cannot be correct. If the “souls” of Moses and Elijah could be as glorious as they were on the Mount of Transfiguration before Christ died for sin, then anyone’s soul could live with God in a glorified state before Christ died, so we again arrive at the conclusion that there would have been no need for the death and resurrection of Christ. The Bible is clear that until the death of Christ, no one’s sin had been paid for, which is why no one who had died could be alive in any form before the death and resurrection of Christ.

Another reason we know it was not really Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus is that 1 Corinthians 15:23 says that Christ is the “firstfruits” from the dead. However, if Moses and Elijah were alive on the Mount of Transfiguration in glorified bodies, then they were alive and glorified before Jesus got up from the dead. In that case, Jesus would not have been the “firstfruits” from the dead, but Moses, Elijah, or even some other godly person who died before they did would have been the real “firstfruits.” That cannot be the case. Moses and Elijah were not “firstfruits” before Jesus; they were a vision of the future.

Another reason that we know the Transfiguration event was a “vision” was that neither Jesus nor the Apostles would have known Moses and Elijah by sight. So part of the revelation vision was that Jesus, Peter, James, and John actually understood who and what they were seeing. God did not need to say, “Hey everyone, this is Moses and Elijah.” It often happens that when God gives someone a revelation vision, He also gives him an understanding of what he is seeing in the vision, and that is what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration.

It is sometimes taught that Elijah could be on the Mount of Transfiguration because he never died, but was taken directly up to heaven by God. This idea comes from 2 Kings 2:11, which says that Elijah “goeth up in a whirlwind, to the heavens” (YLT). To understand this verse we need to understand that the word “heaven” (“heavens” in the Hebrew), can refer either to the dwelling place of God, or to the air above the earth. That is why the Bible speaks of the birds of heaven (often translated “birds of the air), the rain from heaven, and the snow from heaven (2 Sam. 21:10; Deut. 11:11; Isa. 55:10). Elijah was taken by God’s whirlwind into the air, and moved away from Elisha, who could then take over his position as head prophet. Culturally, Elisha could never replace Elijah as long as Elijah was there, so God took Elijah away in a dramatic fashion.
The prophets with Elisha knew that God did not take Elijah to heaven, but to somewhere else on earth, and they begged Elisha to let them go look for him, which he finally allowed them to do. Of course they never found Elijah—God made sure of that, and Elisha stepped into the leadership role over the prophets of Israel.

Elijah eventually died somewhere on earth. We know that because the wages of sin is death, and Elijah was not sinless; no person has ever lived a sinless life except Jesus Christ. If God could take Elijah to heaven and give him everlasting life without Jesus dying for his sins, then God could have taken any good person to heaven before Christ paid for their sins, and the death of the Christ would have been unnecessary.

17:5. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

17:9. “from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest says, “from among those who are dead.”

17:10. “Then why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” The religious leaders of Christ’s day taught that Elijah would come before the Messiah, a doctrine based on a misinterpretation of Malachi 4:5: “See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.” However, Elijah was long dead, and God did not raise him from the dead to live again before the time of the Messiah. To properly understand Malachi 4:5, we need to know that the name “Elijah” in that verse is the figure of speech Antonomasia, or “name change” (see Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible). Antonomasia is the figure of speech in which one person is called by the name of another person in order to ascribe the characteristics of the second person to the one we are addressing. For example, we might say to a child who is jumping on the couch, “Stop that, Tarzan!” We know the child’s name is not “Tarzan,” but by calling him “Tarzan,” we ascribe the jungle behavior of Tarzan to the child. There are quite few examples of antonomasia in the Bible. Examples include:

- Jezebel called Jehu, “Zimri” (2 Kings 9:31) as a threat that his reign as king would be short if he killed her (which he did and still reigned for 28 years; 2 Kings 10:36).
- the Messiah (Jesus Christ) is called “David” because he shepherded the people like David did (Ezek. 37:24).
- Judah is called “Sodom” because it was so wicked (Isa. 1:10).
- John the Baptist is called “Elijah” because Elijah’s life and ministry paralleled John’s in many ways.

That John would be like Elijah was made clear to Zechariah by the angel Gabriel. When Zechariah was ministering in the Temple, Gabriel appeared to him and said that Elizabeth would have a son they were to name “John,” and he would go before God “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17). For those who remembered the angel’s words years later when John started his ministry, it was clear that John was indeed the “Elijah,” who was to come.

17:11. “Elijah comes, and will restore all things.” Jesus knew that John the Baptist was “Elijah.” Here Jesus used the words of the doctrinal formula commonly used about Elijah by the religious leaders to show they were quite correct—Elijah was coming, but now he had already come. The Scribes had not been wrong when they said “Elijah is coming,” they just did not know to whom they referred and thus missed it when he was among
them. Jesus, however, knew that “Elijah” was John the Baptist, as is clear from verses 12 and 13.

In this verse Jesus was referencing the promise in Malachi that Elijah would come. The verb “will restore” (ἀποκαταστήσεις) appears here in the same form as in the Septuagint text, an echo of the fact that Jesus, speaking Hebrew or Aramaic, would have been using the same vocabulary as Malachi. The Apostles were not confused by Jesus saying John “will restore” things because they knew the Old Testament text and Jesus immediately followed up what he said by adding that “Elijah” was John. Since John was already dead (see Matt. 14:1ff), it was clear that he was not going to restore anything. That was now left to Jesus. We learn from Mark that John the Baptist came to restore things and tried unsuccessfully to do so, thus being one of the reasons that the Messiah would have to suffer (see commentary on Mark 9:12).

17:18. “And Jesus subdued him.” The “him” refers to the demon. This is a good example of how spiritual insight and being a “sympathetic listener” (one who is looking for the author’s meaning, not stumbling at every “possible meaning”) is necessary to understand the text. Jesus did not “subdue” the child.

“subdued.” The Greek word translated “subdued” is epitimaō (#2008 ἐπιτιµάω). Usually epitimaō means to express strong disapproval of someone: rebuke, reprove, censure; or to speak seriously, and thus warn in order to prevent or end an action. It can also mean “punish” (cp. BDAG Lexicon). However, in this context, epitimaō has the technical meaning it has in Greek religion of gaining control over a spirit, a demon. Robert Guelich (Word Biblical Commentary: Mark) notes that in contexts like these epitimaō is “a commanding word uttered by God or by his spokes- man, by which evil powers are brought into submission.” Jesus subdued the demon by the power of God that he wielded, his power, which he expressed in words.

The demon would not respond to just being “rebuked.” Therefore, we cannot agree that Jesus “reproached the demon for having taken possession of the boy” (Meyer). For a “rebuke” to be effective, the hearer must have a heart to listen to and obey God, and demons do not have that kind of heart. The demon had to be dealt with by spiritual power. See commentary on Mark 1:25.

17:20. “trust like a mustard seed.” This phrase has been mistranslated in a number of versions, resulting in a confusing and Jesus giving a teaching contradictory to the context. The context of Jesus’ statement is that Jesus’ disciples were not able to cast a demon out of a boy (17:16) and wanted to know why (17:19). Jesus told them it was because of their little trust (17:20). At that point the Greek text says: “If you have trust [faith] like a mustard seed….” How much trust does a mustard seed have? Total trust! It may look small to the world, but it has no doubt that it can do what God created it to do and become the largest garden herb. That is the point Jesus is trying to make. It does not matter what he, or his disciples, looked like to the world, if they have the same kind of total trust that a mustard seed does, they could move mountains.

Unfortunately many translations entirely miss the point that Jesus was making. For example, the NIV84 has Jesus saying, “…if you have faith as small as a mustard seed….” But they added the word “small,” which is not in the Greek text, and that added word completely turns the parable upside down. Other versions that add words about the size of the mustard seed include the HCSB, NET, and NRSV. The problem the disciples had was that their trust was too small for them to cast out the demon. So Jesus is not
saying if they had small faith they could move mountains—that is the opposite of what he is saying! Small faith won’t cast out demons or move mountains. But total trust, like the tiny mustard seed has in its ability to grow into a huge plant, will cast out demons and move mountains.

17:21. This verse was added to some texts by being copied from Mark 9:29. The textual evidence is quite clear that it was not in the original version of Matthew.


“betrayed.” Jesus’ teaching that he (the Messiah) was going to be betrayed, suffer, and die, was so contrary to what the disciples believed that they could not grasp his clear teaching about it. See commentary on Luke 18:34

17:23. “kill him.” For more on Jesus’ clear teaching that he would suffer and die, see commentary on Luke 18:34.

17:25. “poll-tax.” The Greek word is κῆνσος (#2778 κῆνσος). In the NT it referred to the tax or tribute levied on individuals, and it was to be paid yearly. See commentary on Mark 12:14.

17:27. “lake.” The Sea of Galilee, see context, v. 24. They were in Capernaum, right beside the Sea of Galilee.

Chapter 18


18:9. “Gehenna.” See commentary on Matthew 5:22. [For information on annihilation in the lake of fire, see Appendix 5: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”].


18:11. The textual evidence is that this verse was not in the original text, but was added by copyists to harmonize with Luke 19:10. See Metzger, Textual Commentary.


18:19. “again.” The Greek word palin (#3825 πάλιν), here rendered as “again,” could be translated “furthermore.” The sense of the word is described by BDAG as a “marker of a discourse or narrative item added to items of a related nature, also, again, furthermore, thereupon” The word is not necessarily totally changing subjects but introducing a slightly related subject—that is, the topics of binding and loosing covered in verses 18 and of agreeing together in verse 19 are technically different subjects, although they are slightly related. Other examples of palin being used to change subjects are Matthew 5:32-33 and 2 Corinthians 11:15-16.

18:22. “seventy times seven.” Forgiveness: “77” or “70 times 7?” The versions differ. The King James Version says, “Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.” In contrast, the NIV says: “Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’”

Although the Greek reads in a way that means seventy times seven in regular Greek, Matthew 18:22 may not be “regular” Greek. The Greek in Matthew 18:22 is the exact wording of the Septuagint (LXX) of Genesis 4:24, where Lamech is bragging to his wives about the vengeance he will take on his enemies: “77” times. The Hebrew text of Genesis 4:24 is very clear: 77 times, and very noted linguists assert that the accepted
translation of the LXX came into Greek usage such that what in classical Greek meant “70 times 7,” in this biblical context of revenge and forgiveness it meant “77.” If this is the case, Jesus was contrasting the vengeful Lamech, who stated he would avenge himself “77 times” with the behavior of a godly person, who should forgive “77 times.” If the illusion is to Lamech, it forces us to be forgiving, but also to face the end of our forgiving. Will we act like the vengeful Lamech, willing to take vengeance on those we will not forgive?

Scholars who assert that the number should be “70 times 7” play down the association with Lamech and assert that the standard reading of the Greek should apply here. Some argue that “77 times” is not enough, and that the larger figure, 70 times 7, is a hyperbole (exaggeration), which was common in oriental thought. In that case, the hyperbole would be simply making the point that all the forgiving we can do is not enough—we must keep on forgiving.

Michael Hall (unpublished manuscript) pointed out that there were 70 periods of 7 in Daniel 9:24, from the going forth of the commandment to restore Jerusalem until the Messiah came and set up the Millennial Kingdom. Thus, he suggested that “70 times 7” was a veiled way of saying, “until the Millennial Kingdom.” If that is the case, then Jesus told us to forgive and forgive until this age of sin is over and he sets up his kingdom on earth. Mitigating against that idea are the number of scriptures showing that sin and forgiveness will still be necessary in the Messianic Age. Although Christ will reign, he will rule with a rod of iron, and although he, and the judges he appoints, will judge justly, they will still have to “settle disputes for many peoples” (Isa. 2:4). Furthermore, the existence of the Temple and the sin offering (Ezek. 43:19ff) show that mankind will still make mistakes and need forgiveness.

There is a good reason why scholars are in profound disagreement about this verse: the real meaning is not clear. If we had the original Hebrew or Aramaic that Jesus was speaking we could be sure, but we do not have them. It could also be argued that Jesus knowingly used a number that was unclear, driving us to both conclusions at the same time: by hyperbole, we should always forgive people, and by comparison, when we refuse to forgive any more, we become like ungodly Lamech who boasted of his revenge. However, there is no way to know that either.

18:23. “That is why.” The Greek is dia touto, and it connects the parable which follows with the forgiveness in the verses above. Jesus was teaching on unlimited forgiveness, and after making the statement that Peter should forgive seventy time seven times, he said, that is why what we should be doing can be compared to the Kingdom of Heaven, because God practices unlimited forgiveness (cp. Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament and New Testament Commentary: Matthews, by W. Hendrickson).

18:24. “ten thousand talents.” Different cultures had different talents, but most scholars believe Christ would have been referring to the Attic talent, which was equal to 6,000 denarii, or 6,000 days wages. One denarius (the plural is denarii) was a day’s wage for a field hand or a soldier. Different classes of workers worked different weeks, most would work 6 days per week in the biblical world. If we assume they would have 2 weeks off for sickness and perhaps a small vacation, the worker would work 50 weeks, or 50 X 6 days, which equals 300 days. Thus, to be paid a talent he would work 6000 ÷ 300, or 20 years. If one talent was 20 years wage, then 10,000 was the wages for 200,000 years, or 60 million days. To arrive at an idea of how much money is being referred to, if a field
hand made $8 per hour ($64 per day), then 1 talent was $384,000, and 10,000 talents was $3,840,000,000 dollars (3 billion, 840 million dollars), a ridiculously huge sum. According to Josephus, the total taxes that Judea, Samaria and Idumea made to imperial Rome was only 600 talents a year. The figure is meant to make the point that no one can ever actually pay off their debt to God. Another way of looking at the debt would be that a minimum wage worker would have to work 6,000 days times 10,000 talents, or 60 million days to work off the debt. Even if a person had a working life of 100 years he or she would only work 30,000 days, far short of the 60 million he would need to pay off the debt. At the time of Christ the average lifespan for a woman was in the early 30’s and for men it was their late 30’s. Since a person usually only worked about 300 days per year, if a boy started to work at 10 and worked to 50, he would only work 12,000 days in his life, not even getting a good start on the sixty million days needed to work to pay his debt.

18:25. “His lord commanded him to be sold…” Slave owners were under no obligation to keep families together, and it was common for slave families to be separated by being sold one by one to others, although sometimes more compassionate owners tried to keep families together. This was at least as true in Rome as in Israel and the other countries of the East. Furthermore, people sometimes even sold their own children to pay their debt (Nehemiah 5:5).

18:28. “one hundred denarii” = one hundred days wages, which, by the figures given for v. 24 above, would be $6,400. Not a small sum, but infinitesimal compared to the 10,000 talents. Jesus made an important point in his parable. Notice that he did not act as if the slave was owed nothing by his fellow slave. When people sin against us it hurts, sometimes very deeply. Jesus knows that and used the figure of 100 denarii to demonstrate that the debt we feel that is created by the sin of others is very real. Nevertheless, if we keep in mind how much we have been forgiven for, we can forgive it.

18:34. “the torturers.” Prisoners were often tortured, and it could even be said that prison itself was a torture. It certainly was not a good place to be. At the time Jesus was teaching, under the Law Administration, salvation was not guaranteed, and thus if lack of forgiveness was profound enough to destroy a person’s trust (“faith”) in God, it could jeopardize his everlasting life. Today in the Grace Administration, everlasting life is guaranteed after a person has trust in Christ, but rewards are not, so profound disobedience in the form of unforgiveness could lead to a loss of rewards in the Kingdom. There is, however, another truth that must be considered about the torturers. Anyone who lives in unforgiveness tortures himself. It is a constant weight on the shoulders that produces unhappiness, and robs the individual of peace and joy. The person who refuses to forgive hands himself over to the torturers who relentlessly do their work.

Chapter 19

19:5. Quoted from Genesis 2:24, occurs again in Mark 10:7.

“be glued to.” The Greek word is kollaō (#2853 κολλάω), and Thayer’s Lexicon says, “properly, to glue, glue to, glue together, cement, fasten together; hence universally, to join or fasten firmly together; in the N. T. only the passive is found.…”

19:16. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (αδου), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”). The “Look!” (the figure of speech asterismos) in this verse is important, because it shows that it was considered remarkable that someone (especially someone well off) would come to Jesus and ask how to have everlasting life. How many people actually seek everlasting life, especially rich people?


19:21. “If you really want to reach the goal.” The Greek word teleios (τελειος) refers to bringing something to an end, a finish; bringing to completeness, maturity, perfection, or to a goal. In this case, the word “perfect” can be misleading. The man wanted to have everlasting life, which Jesus said he could have by keeping the commandments (v. 17). However, when the man pressed in and asked if he lacked anything, Jesus took the conversation to a new level, and said if you really want to reach your goal, sell all you have and you will have treasure stored up in heaven [that treasure would be actually conferred when the Lord set up his kingdom on earth; see Appendix 3: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”].

19:24. “camel.” Here, “camel” is a hyperbole, and exaggeration to make a point. Jesus’ illustration is not extreme given the fact that Jesus, and Orientals from that era in general, were fond of hyperbole (cp. Luke 6:41, a person having a “beam” in his eye). As the “gnat” in Matthew 23:24 is a real hyperbole, so also is the camel. For the idea of the needle’s eye being a gate, or the “camel” being a “rope,” see commentary on Luke 18:25.

19:26. “With people...with God.” The key to understanding this passage, and the parallel passage in Mark, is the word “with,” which is the Greek preposition para (παρα). See commentary on Mark 10:27.

19:27. “Look.” The Greek word is idou (αδου), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”). Here it is not spoken with great force, but to remind Jesus of the sacrifices the apostle[s] had made.

“...so then what will we have?” Peter’s question is a good one, and one that all of us should be asking more. All of us are either like the rich man in verses 16-22 who hold on to worldly things and lose out on heavenly things, or we are like Peter who has “left everything” and will have great reward in the kingdom.

19:28. “New Beginning.” The words New Beginning are from the Greek word paliggenesia (παλιγγενεσια), a compound word that means “new origin” or “new birth.” It is comprised of palin, meaning “again,” and gennēsis, “origin” (the Greek word used for the Book of “Genesis”). Here in Matthew paliggenesia is used as a technical term for the Messianic Age (the HCSB translates the word “Messianic Age”). The only other usage in Scripture is Titus 3:5, which uses the term in a totally different context, and refers to the new beginning given to Christians when they are born again and receive holy spirit.

Christ’s Millennial Kingdom lasts 1000 years (Rev. 20:2-4) and is Christ’s kingdom on earth. Jesus will one day come back to earth, fight the battle of Armageddon, and set up a kingdom that fills the earth (Rev. 19:11-21; Dan. 2:34, 35, 44; The name “Armageddon” comes from Rev. 16:16, the place where the enemy kings are gathered). Jesus’ kingdom on earth is so different from our current fallen world and this present evil age that the Bible calls it a new beginning or new creation. Here in Matthew 19:28 Jesus calls it a paliggenesia, a new beginning. Isaiah 65:17 says God will create a new heaven
and earth (this is a different creation from the final heaven and earth of Rev. 21:1, which are also called a new heaven and earth). Peter called it the “restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21). The Bible also calls this future earth “paradise,” and it is the earth that the meek will inherit when they are raised from the dead. [see Appendix 3, “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”].

The wonderful teaching of the new earth that saved people will enjoy is almost completely unknown by Christians due to the unbiblical teaching that “heaven” is the eternal home of those who are saved. But the Bible is clear that Jesus comes back to earth, and when he does, the saved will be where he is.

19:29. “will receive a hundredfold.” Not everyone who is saved and receives everlasting life will receive the same reward on the Day of Judgment. Those people who have obeyed God’s commands, and done more for Christ, will receive more (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or worthless”).

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].

Chapters 20

20:3. “third hour.” About our 9 AM. The original workers had likely started about 6 AM, the start of the day, and when hired for a day were expected to work until 6 PM; 12 hours.

Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. The start of the Christian Church on the Day of Pentecost, marked by the outpouring of the gift of holy spirit, occurred at the third hour of the day (cp. Acts 2:15). [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].

20:5. “sixth hour; ninth hour.” The sixth hour is our noon, and ninth hour is our 3 PM. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].

20:6. “eleventh hour.” The eleventh hour is roughly 5 PM. (see commentary on 20:5). The workers were hired at the eleventh hour, and were expected to work until 6 PM.

20:8. “evening having come.” This is defined in verse 12 as 6 PM. The last workers started at the eleventh hour, 5 PM, and worked only one hour.

20:15. “Is your eye evil.” Meaning, are you greedy for more, covetous of what the others received? The “evil eye” was idiomatic in Semitic languages for someone who was greedy, covetous, and stingy. In Western cultures, the “evil eye” was a look or glance that meant harm and brought harm, but there is no evidence it was used that way in the Bible. See commentary on Matthew 6:22.

20:18. “Pay attention.” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).


20:21. “drink the cup.” “Drinking the cup” was a common idiom meaning to experience, whether that experience was good (cp. Ps. 16:5; 23:5; 116:13; Jer. 16:7) or

20:28. “life.” The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. This verse is evidence that the soul does not continue on after the body dies. Jesus gave up his soul and died so that others could have life. [For a more complete explanation of psuchē, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

“ransom.” The Greek word is lutron (#3083 λύτρον; pronounced loo’-tron). In the Greek literature, the lutron, “ransom” was the price paid for the release of a slave or prisoner of war. See commentary on Mark 10:45.

20:30. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

Chapter 21

21:5. Quoted from Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9

“Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).


“Hosanna.” The people who were shouting praises to Jesus as he entered Jerusalem were for the most part not the same group as the group that shouted, “Crucify him” only a few days later. See commentary on Luke 23:21.

“Yahweh.” “Yahweh” is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote a Gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh, so we have put it in the REV (see commentary on Matthew 3:3).

21:12. “Yahweh.” “Yahweh” is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote a Gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh, so we have put it in the REV (see commentary on Matthew 3:3). The Hebrew gospel of Matthew reads, “the house of Yahweh” whereas the Greek reads “temple of God.”


21:16. Quoted from Psalm 8:2.

21:19. “a lone fig tree by the path.” This is an important addition, because it tells us that the fig tree was not owned by anyone, but was public property. Jesus did not destroy private property.

21:21. “trust.” To properly understand “trust” in this verse, see the commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:9, “trust.”
“this mountain.” Jesus was on the Mount of Olives, where both Bethany and Bethphage were.

“snatched up.” The Greek is airō (#142 αἰρω; pronounced eye-rō), and it is passive voice, imperative mood. Although it would be very literal to say, “Be taken up,” the imperative mood combined with the context, moving a mountain at your command, gives the sense that the mountain is being snatched up out of its place and thrown into the ocean.

“doubt.” See commentary on Mark 11:23.

21:25. “discussed it among themselves.” The Jewish rulers were lying to Jesus, and he knew it (cp. v. 32). John 2:25 says that Jesus knew what was in people. The Jews believed that John’s baptism was from man and had no divine authority whatsoever, but they would not say so publicly. This kind of thing goes on all the time in religion, business, and politics. People lie to get an advantage. That is why we have to be “wise as serpents” and walk by revelation if we are going to do well in the world.

Jesus did not want to answer the question that the Jews asked about where he got his authority. He knew they would only use the information against him. He also knew that if he asked them the right question, in this case about John, he could stop their attack, which is exactly what happened. We have to follow Jesus’ example and realize that many people will use what we say against us, so we have to rely on God to know what is really going on in the hearts of people and what we should or should not say.

21:29. “changed his mind.” The Greek is metamelomai (#3338 µεταμέλομαι); but it is sometimes spelled with two “L”s and it has two distinct meanings in the NT: 1) to change one’s mind; and to regret; be ashamed over; feel remorse for, or 2) to reproach oneself for what one has done. It occurs five times in the NT: Matthew 21:9, 32; 27:3; 2 Corinthians 7:8; Hebrews 7:21.

21:33. “Hear another parable.” This parable is a clear reference to the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7, except in Isaiah the vineyard is itself Israel, and is wicked, while in Jesus’ parable the vineyard is God’s and it is the people who are hired to tend it who are evil. Jesus was using thinly veiled language to speak of the leaders of the Jews, who had been entrusted by God to take care of His vineyard, i.e., His people, but were evil. The Jews got his point (v. 45), and wanted to arrest him but were afraid of the people. This parable appears here in Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12, and Luke 20:9-19.

21:42. Quoted from Psalm 118:22, 23.

“Yahweh.” “Yahweh” is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote a Gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh, so we have put it in the REV (see commentary on Matthew 3:3).

Chapter 22

22:4. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ιδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).
22:14. “For many are called, but few are chosen.” This verse is quoted as if God was the one who did the choosing, but in fact it is solid evidence that God chooses those who first choose Him. We cannot ignore the parable and just interpret the conclusion like we want to. In the parable, the king invited people to the feast, but the first people who were invited “did not want to come” (v. 3). Then the king sent more people to invite them again, but they “paid no attention” (v. 5). Worse, they not only declined the king’s invitation, they mistreated the servants who were sent to invite them (v. 6). So the king invited others and they came to the feast (v. 10). Thus it is clear that the “chosen” are “chosen” because, as well as God choosing them, they chose God.

22:17. “poll-tax.” The Greek word is κῆνσος (#2778 kēnsoς). In the NT it referred to the tax or tribute levied on individuals, and it was to be paid yearly. See commentary on Mark 12:14.

22:19. “poll-tax.” The Greek word is κῆνσος (#2778 kēnsoς). In the NT it referred to the tax or tribute levied on individuals, and it was to be paid yearly. See commentary on Mark 12:14.

22:23. “who say there is no resurrection.” At the time of Christ the High Priest and the majority of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling counsel in Jerusalem, were Sadducees. The Sadducees denied the legitimacy of the “oral law,” and for the most part saw themselves as drawing their beliefs directly from the Torah, the five books of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy). On that basis, they denied the resurrection from the dead, and believed that both the body and soul of a person died and were gone forever. For the Sadducees, there was no Messianic Hope promised by God. There is evidence that because the Sadducees believed that they had no life but their one life, they tried to capitalize on every advantage they could in this life, which, as one can imagine, led to stretching moral boundaries to the breaking point. Thus the Roman guard could tell the priests that an angel had rolled back the stone of Jesus’ tomb and that Jesus had risen from the dead, and the priest, rather than say they were wrong about Jesus and jeopardize their position of power, bribed the guards to say Jesus’ disciples stole his body.


22:25. “Now there were with us seven brothers...” The Sadducees cite this as if it was a real case, and it probably was. Jesus did not try to refute their example. If there was one woman married to two brothers, that would have been good enough to make their case, but the Sadducees had a more involved example, so they used it.

22:29. “You err.” You are mistaken. Lenski asserts that the verb may be taken in a middle sense, “you are deceiving yourselves,” and he may be right.

“not having known the scriptures.” The Sadducees were misusing Moses’ teaching on what came to be called the “Levirate Law,” that if a man died, his brother would marry the widow and have children by her to preserve the name of the brother (Deut. 25:5-10). There is no reason to assume conditions on earth in the resurrection will be the same as they are in this life. Moses certainly did not teach that they were, so the Sadducees were taking a liberty with the text that had no foundation in truth.

Furthermore, the Scriptures clearly teach a resurrection from the dead (see verse 32). Even though the Sadducees only take the Torah (Genesis-Deut.) as authoritative, there is certainly an afterlife implied in the Torah. Abraham believed God would raise Isaac from the dead, for example. Moses knew there was a book of life (Exod. 32:32). Furthermore, Job, who lived around the time of Abraham, certainly knew about it (Job 19:25ff).
Besides, the Sadducees were in error in rejecting the Word of God spoken through the prophets, saying it was not Scripture.

“nor the power of God.” In denying the resurrection from the dead, the Sadducees denied the power of God. Furthermore, God is not only able to raise dead people to the state they were before, i.e., living, it is in His power to raise them such that they will be different from how they were on earth. On earth, we have a need for children and families, but that may not be the case in the next life. Our fleshly bodies will change.

“…the doctrine of the future state was there [in the Scripture], and the Sadducees should have believed it as it was, and not have added the absurd doctrine to it that men must live there as they do here. The way in which the enemies of the truth often attempt to make a doctrine of the Bible ridiculous is by adding to it, and then calling it absurd” (Barnes’ Notes; verse 29.)

22:30. “neither marry, nor are given in marriage.” This phrase exactly represents the biblical culture. Men marry, while women are “given in marriage.”

“but are as the angels in heaven.” The assumption is that angels do not marry and have families. That will be the case with us in the next life. There are some important things to pay attention to in this verse. One is that Jesus said we will be like the angels, not that we become angels. There are people who believe when a believer dies, he or she goes to heaven and becomes an angel. That is not the case. The context of this section is marriage, and when it comes to marriage, resurrected believers will be like angels in that they do not marry.

Also, this verse comes as close as any to addressing the question about whether or not there will be sexual intercourse in the next life, but it does not settle the issue completely. It is possible but unlikely that angels have sexual intercourse. There is no indication in Scripture that angels participate in sexual intercourse with each other. The most likely case is that human sexual drive was given by God to insure the future of the race, and that there will be no sexual drive in our new bodies. Without any sexual drive or desire, there would be little point to sexual intercourse. It is true that sexual intercourse is exciting and fulfilling here on earth, but again, that is most likely the design of God so that the race could continue.

“Yahweh.” “Yahweh” is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote a Gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh, so we have put it in the REV (see commentary on Matthew 3:3).

22:32. “I Yahweh am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Taken from Exodus 3:6. Jesus uses this verse to show that the Torah teaches a resurrection from the dead. God did not say that He “had been” the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but rather that he was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That is, that he was still their God, and would actively be so when they were raised from the dead.

Some would say that the present tense of the verb proves that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were alive in heaven at that time (and now), but the context is clearly “the resurrection,” (used four times in the context: verses 23, 27, 30, and 31).

“Yahweh.” The name “Yahweh” appears in the Hebrew text of Matthew. Yahweh is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew
manuscript of Matthew. There is evidence that Matthew wrote a Gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh, so we have put it in the REV (see commentary on Matthew 3:3).

22:35. “testing him.” The Greek word translated “testing” is peirazō (#3985 πειράζω; pronounced pay-ra’-zō), which can mean to tempt or to test. In this case, “test” is better. Behind this questions by the Pharisee was a swirling undercurrent of group rivalry coupled with suspicion about Jesus. The Sadducees and Pharisees differed greatly about what were the commandments in the Law. The Sadducees only accepted commandments in the 5 books of Moses, while the Pharisees thought there were many more. Thus, when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they were looking for even more ammunition against them, and would have been happy to have more to hold against Jesus as well. Thus they wanted to see what this young Rabbi from the Galilee could add to the ongoing debate about the commandments.

22:37. Quoted from Deuteronomy. 6:5.

“Love.” This is an instance of the verb “love,” agapao, (#25 ἀγαπάω) being in the future tense and the indicative mood but being used idiomatically as a present imperative (see Robertson, Grammar, p. 330). Given the imperative mood of “love,” it would be quite correct to translate this verse: “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” (cp. this command in Mark 12:30 and see commentary on Mark 12:30).

“Yahweh.” “Yahweh” is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote a Gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh, so we have put it in the REV (see commentary on Matthew 3:3).

“soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; and attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here psuchē is used very broadly, but certainly includes the attitude, feelings, and emotions of the person himself. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7, “Usages of ‘Soul’”].


22:40. “hangs.” After speaking about love, Jesus said, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt. 22:40 KJV). An essential part of every biblical household were the pegs in the walls and posts from which things could be hung. Even tents sometimes had pegs in the tent-poles, or at least some kind of hook tied to the tent poles so that clothes and other items could be kept in order and off the ground.

It was important that pegs for hanging things were made of good solid wood so that they would be sturdy and not break off. Wood from vines, for example, was not good for pegs, as we learn in Ezekiel. God asked Ezekiel, “Is wood ever taken from it [a vine] to make anything useful? Do they make pegs from it to hang things on?” (Ezek. 15:3 NIV). The expected answer was “No, they do not.” A peg made from the wood of a vine would break when something heavy was hung from it. In Isaiah 22, God said He would remove Shebna, the steward in charge of Hezekiah’s palace, and replace him with Eliakim. Shebna had been a disappointment, but God said that He would make Eliakim
like a firm peg, so firm that all the glory of his family could hang from him. “I will drive him [Eliakim] like a peg into a firm place; he will be a seat of honor for the house of his father. All the glory of his family will hang on him: its offspring and offshoots—all its lesser vessels, from the bowls to all the jars” (Isa. 22:23, 24).

Sadly, Eliakim was human, and eventually was not able to perform his duties, and even though he had once been a firm peg, he was broken off and what he supported was destroyed. “…the peg that was driven into a firm place [Eliakim] will give way, be cut off, and fall, and the load on it will be destroyed” (Isa. 22:25 HCSB). The word “destroyed” is accurate because many different things were hung from pegs, and it was common that when a peg broke holding a clay jar, or a skin of wine or milk, the load was destroyed.

Psalms speaks of a wineskin being hung from a peg. People hung their wineskins from a peg to keep them from being accidentally kicked, and also because they were less likely to spill when hung. “Though I am like a wineskin in the smoke, I do not forget your decrees” (Psalm 119:83 NIV). The wineskin was “in the smoke” because in the biblical era common houses did not have chimneys. If a fire was built in a house, for warmth and/or to cook, it was usually built in the middle of the room. The room would fill with smoke, but since people sat, ate, and slept on the floor, the really thick smoke usually stayed above them. In contrast, the poor wineskin was hung on a peg up in the thick smoke. What a wonderful Psalm! The psalmist says that even if he feels like a wineskin in the smoke, neglected and in a difficult situation, he would not forget God’s decrees and laws.

Wall pegs were vital to ancient living. They gave order and organization to the ancient household and held clothes, water jars, and other things that were essential to life. Thus it is not surprising that one of the many names of Jesus Christ is “the tent peg.” Zechariah 10:4 has three of the names of Jesus, the “cornerstone,” the “tent peg,” and the “battle bow.” “From Judah will come the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler” (Zechariah 10:4 NIV). Calling Jesus Christ “the tent peg” shows how essential he is to the organization of our lives. He does much more than give us everlasting life. He organizes our lives in a meaningful way, does a lot to keeps us out of the dirt of life, and helps keep us from some of the kicks and bumps of life. In return, we should realize that we are hung up for all to see, and like a nice piece of clothing on a peg reflects the wealth and value of the household, we can reflect the glory of Christ to those around us.

In Matthew 22:40 Jesus is using a very familiar scene in every home, and even in tents, of a peg or nail from which were hung wineskins and many other valuable things. In a very real sense, as a wineskin or article of clothing hangs from a peg and depends on the peg to keep it orderly and effective, the laws and commandments depend on love for God and love for mankind to be truly orderly and effective. It helps us understand how love is the peg that keeps the commandments orderly if we remember that the Hebrew word “torah” does not mean “law,” but “instruction.” Most of the “laws” in the Law of Moses are individual commands, certainly, but more than that, they are examples that serve as guides for us from which to build godly rules and laws to govern our society. For example, the Law tells us what to do if a person’s ox goes a person (Exod. 21:28-32), but does not tell us what to do about other animals that might be dangerous. We are to
understand that the rules about oxen are “instruction” that we then use to build other, similar righteous rules and laws.

One of Jesus’ complaints about the rules the religious leaders had put in place was that they did not properly apply the instruction of the Torah when making up their rules. So, for example, they realized a person could pull an animal out of ditch on the Sabbath, but believed that healing a human being on the Sabbath was breaking the Sabbath (Luke 13:14; 14:3-6). Similarly, the Jews wrongly thought that the message of Torah was to withdraw from sinners, while Jesus properly understood Torah and spent time with them. When questioned about it, he said to them, “Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’”

With the above background about tent pegs, we are now able to see the wonderful point Jesus was making when he spoke of the law and commandments hanging from love. He was speaking to the Pharisees, who were trying to trap him in his words (Matt. 22:15). One of them asked him which was the greatest commandment in the Law, to which he answered, love God with all your heart, soul, and mind; and love your neighbor like yourself. Then Jesus added, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt. 22:40 KJV). Jesus was making the point that loving God and loving our neighbor are like a great peg in God’s house that give order and meaning to the rest of His commandments. Without love the commandments lie broken, or in a disorganized heap, on the muddy floor, not able to profit us or others. Without love, the commandments are just heartless demands, but with love, they become the godly fabric upon which a godly society can be built. This should have been a huge lesson to the Pharisees, who were very particular about keeping the fine points of the Law, but often did so without love. Let us not be like the Pharisees, but instead let us understand the point that Jesus was making, that love is the essential peg from which every commandment hangs, and that gives order and meaning to the commandments.

As a final comment, we should point out that the REV and the King James Version gives us the correct and literal rendering of the Greek text by using the word “hang.” However, most Christians do not understand the common illustration that Jesus was making by comparing love to a great wall peg, so modern versions such as the HCSB, ESV, NASB, NET, and NIV, say “depend” instead of “hang.” While “depend” gets the general sense of “hang,” some of the depth of what Jesus was saying is lost.

22:43, “spirit.” It is very hard to tell whether it is more proper to say “Spirit” referring to God, or “spirit” referring to God’s gift of holy spirit when translating this verse. The Greek had no such problem, because every letter was either capital (in uncial manuscripts) or lower case (in miniscule manuscripts). God works seamlessly with people through the agency of His gift of holy spirit, which He puts upon people (and now is born and sealed inside people; Eph. 1:13, 14). It was God who originated the words David spoke, but like any prophet, he spoke them because he was energized by way of the gift of holy spirit that was upon him (cp. 1 Sam. 16:13). We used “spirit” here, knowing that the English “spirit” limits what actually transpired to the gift of holy spirit upon David energizing him, but knowing that the educated Christian knows that the gift of holy spirit never acts on its own, but is energized by God. (Cp. Mark 12:36; Acts 1:16; 4:25, which are the other times when David is said to speak by spirit).

It seems in keeping with the flow of the context and standard OT usage that Jesus is saying that David was speaking “by” (or “in association with”) the gift of God. In other
words, it seems more likely that Jesus is saying David is speaking by the spirit of God (i.e., not on his own) than saying that he was speaking, being directed by God Himself, although it may well be that is indeed the emphasis here; it is very hard to tell, and it bears repeating that the original text did not make a difference between spirit and Spirit. Also adding weight to the fact that this is likely a reference to the gift, not the Giver (God) is the fact that ἐν πνεύματι is clearly used of the gift of God in other places (cp. Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; 11:13; John 1:33; Acts 11:16; Rom. 9:1; 14:17; 15:16; 1 Cor. 12:3; 1 Thess. 1:5; Jude 1:20), but not once clearly used with God Himself.

The Old Testament context of speaking out in prophecy because a person has the spirit of God upon them is well established (and “upon,” as per the KJV, is a good rendition of the Hebrew and very accurate, in contrast to some modern versions). Many people spoke or acted prophetically when the spirit came upon them (cp. Num. 11:17, 24, 25; 24:2, 3; Judg. 3:10; 1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 1 Chron. 12:28; 15:1; 2 Chron. 24:20). That would make this verse in Matthew similar, and show David to be following in that prophetic pattern.

The REV has “by the spirit,” adding the word “the” even though the Greek text does not have it. The Greek reads ἐν πνεύματι (“in spirit;” ἐν πνεύματι), but the definite article is not needed in prepositional phrases to make the noun definite. Daniel Wallace writes: “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite. ...This is recognized by most grammarians.” (Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, p. 247). Thus, when prepositions such as en, dia, or hupo are used before the noun pneuma hagion, as occurs here in Matthew, the noun can either be definite (i.e., “the pneuma”) or indefinite (i.e., “pneuma”) depending on the context or what reads most smoothly in English, because sometimes “the” just refers to “the” spirit in the context or the spirit that is commonly known.

22:44. “Yahweh said to my Lord.” This is a quotation of Psalm 110:1. The Hebrew text reads, “Yahweh said to adōnī [translated “my lord], “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

This is a very important verse showing that Jesus Christ is not God, but a fully human servant of God. To see that, however, we must understand the use of “Lord” in this verse. Trinitarian commentators sometimes argue that “my Lord” in this verse is another name for God, and is therefore proof of the divinity of the Messiah. However, that is incorrect. Actually this verse is one of the great proofs of the complete humanity of the promised Messiah.

In all languages words are built from root words, and the meaning of the inflected word can sometimes be quite different from the meaning of the root. Psalm 110:1 is an example of the root word, which means “lord,” taking on a more specific meaning when it is inflected, and we need to understand that meaning to understand this verse.

The root word of the word “lord” in Psalm 110:1 is adōn, which means “Lord or lord,” and can refer to a human lord or God (Strong’s #113 אֲדֹנָי pronounced ah-dōnī, and sometimes shortened to אֲדֹנָי). When the root word adōn is inflected to adōnay, it refers to God. (Strong’s #0136 אֲדֹנָי, usually spelled out as adōnay or adōnai and usually pronounced either ah-doe-nay or ah-doe-nigh).

In stark contrast, however, when the root word adōn is inflected to adōnī, it refers to a human or angelic lord (Strong’s #113 אֲדֹנָי pronounced ah-doe-nee). The “i” ending is possessive in Hebrew, and thus is usually translated “my.” Some examples will help us
understand this: El is a name of God, so Eli (pronounced El-ee’) is “my God” (cp. Matthew 27:46). Ab or abba is “Father,” so abi (ab-ee’) is “my father.” The name Abimelech (pronounced Ab-ee-mel’-ek) is a compound word from abi, “my father” and melek, king, and meant, “my father is king” (cp. Judges 8:31). Similarly then, adôn is “Lord,” and adôni is “my Lord,” and that designation was never used of God, instead, the Hebrew uses adônay for God.

What most people who study the Bible must understand is that most Hebrew-English concordances and lexicons, for example Young’s Concordance or Strong’s Concordance, give only root words, not the word that actually occurs in the Hebrew text. Even most computer-based research programs give the root word when you mouse over “lord” in Psalm 110:1. The roots can be confusing, and we have sometimes discovered that even the same research tools assign different Strong’s numbers for these words, making exacting study using English resources sometimes quite difficult. This is one reason why biblical research done by people using only tools such as a Strong’s Concordance is limited, and people who genuinely want to do serious research into the text of Scripture must understand, not just the root words, but the inflected forms of the words and the impact those inflections have on the translation of the Bible.

Adôni is always used in Scripture to describe human masters and lords, but never God. Buzzard and Hunting write:

Psalm 110:1 provides a major key to understanding who Jesus is. The Hebrew Bible carefully distinguishes the divine title, adôna’i, the Supreme Lord, from adôni, the form of address appropriate to human and angelic superiors. Adôni, “my lord,” “my master,” on no occasion refers to the deity. Adôna’i, on the other hand is the special form of adôn, lord, reserved for address to the One God only. (The Doctrine of the Trinity, International Scholars Publications, New York, 1998, pp. 49 and 50).

The difference between adôn (the root word), adôni (“lord,” always used of men or angels) and adôna’i (which is almost always used of God) is critical to the understanding of Psalm 110:1. The Dictionary of Old Testament Words by Aaron Pick makes a difference between adônay and adôni, saying that adôni was “applied to man.” The Hebrew Lexicon by Brown, Driver and Briggs (BDB), considered by many to be the best available, makes the distinction between these words, and says that adôni “refers to human superiors.” The BDB lexicon points out that the following people were among those called “lord.” A master (Exod. 21:5); a husband (Gen. 18:12); a prophet (1 Kings 18:7 and 13); a prince (Gen. 42:10; 43:20); a king (1 Sam. 22:12); a father (Gen. 31:5); Moses (Num. 11:28; 12:11); a priest (1 Sam. 1:15 and 26); a theophanic angel (i.e., an angel representing God; Josh. 5:14; Judges 6:13); a captain (2 Sam. 11:11); and adôni was used for general recognition of superiority: Genesis 24:18; Ruth 2:13;

The fact that the Hebrew text uses the word adôni of the Messiah in Psalm 110 is very strong proof that he is not God. If the Messiah was to be God, then the word adôna’i would have been used. This distinction between adôni (a lord) and adôna’i (the Lord, God) holds even when God shows up in human form. In Genesis 18:3, Abraham addresses God who was “disguised” as a human, but the text uses adôna’i, not adôni.
Many scholars recognize that there is a distinction between the words *adōnī* and *adōnai*, and that these distinctions are important. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* notes:

The form ADÔNI (“my lord”), a royal title (1 Sam. 29:8), is to be carefully distinguished from the divine title ADONAI (“my Lord”) used of Yahweh. (Geoffrey Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1979, “Lord”).

There are several uses of *adōnai* that refer to angels or men, giving them an elevated status, but that does not indicate that the speaker believed they were God. This is in keeping with the language as a whole. Studies of words like Elohim show that it is also occasionally used of humans who have elevated status. Examples of *adōnai* referring to humans include Genesis 19:18 and 24:9, 39:2. In contrast to *adōnai* being used occasionally of men, there is no time when *adōnī* is used of God. Men may be elevated and represent God, but God is never lowered.

So that students can study the uses of *adōnī* (אֲדֹנִי) for themselves (since most sources only give the root words), we list below its occurrences in the Old Testament.


The following 148 verses contain 166 uses. Every one of them either refers to a human lord or an angel. None refers to God: Gen. 23:6, 11, 15; 24:12(2x), 14, 18, 27(3x), 35, 36, 37, 39, 42, 44, 48(2x), 49, 65; 31:35; 33:8, 13, 14(2x), 15; 39:8; 42:10; 43:20; 44:5, 7, 18(2x), 19, 20, 22, 24; 47:18(2x), 25; Exod. 21:5; 32:22; Num. 11:28; 12:11; 32:25, 27; 36:2; Josh. 5:14; 10:1, 3; Jdg. 1:5, 6, 7; 4:18; 6:13; Ruth 2:13; 1 Sam. 1:15, 26(2x); 22:12; 24:8; 25:24, 25(2x), 26(2x), 27, 28, 29, 31, 41; 26:17, 18, 19; 29:8; 30:13, 15; 2 Sam. 1:10; 3:21; 9:11; 11:11; 13:32, 33; 14:9, 12, 15, 17(2x), 18, 19(2x), 22; 15:15, 21(2x); 16:4, 9; 18:31, 32; 19:19(2x), 20, 26, 27, 30, 35, 37; 24:3, 21, 22; 1 Kings 1:13, 17, 18, 20(2x), 21, 24, 27(2x), 31, 36, 37(2x); 2:38; 3:17, 26; 18:7, 10; 20:4; 2 Kings 2:19; 4:16, 28; 5:3, 18, 20, 22; 6:5, 12, 15, 26; 8:5, 12; 10:9; 18:23, 24, 27; 1 Chr. 21:3(2x), 23; 2 Chron. 2:14, 15; Isa. 36:8, 9, 12; Jer. 37:20; 38:9; Dan. 1:10; 10:16, 17(2x), 19; 12:8; Zech. 1:9; 4:4, 5, 13; 6:4.

The following 24 uses “to my Lord” (לַאדֹנִי). While we in English separate the preposition from the noun or verb following, in Hebrew the preposition is attached directly to the word. Genesis 24:3; 54, 56; 32:5, 6, 19; 44:9, 16, 33; 1 Samuel 24:7; 25:27, 28, 30, 31; 2 Samuel 4:8; 19:29; 1 Kings 1:2; 18:13; 20:9; 1 Chronicles 21:3; Psalm 110:1.

The following 6 uses can be found under (v’*adōnī*; וַאדֹנִי), which would generally mean, “and” lord: Genesis 18:12; Numbers 36:2; 2 Samuel 11:11; 14:20; 19:28; 24:3.

The following use can be found under (m_*adōnī*; מֵאֲדֹנִי): Genesis 47:18.

Students of Hebrew know that the original text was written in an “unpointed” form, i.e., without the dots, dashes and marks that are now the written vowels. Thus some people may point out that since the vowel points of the Hebrew text were added later, the rabbis could have been mistaken. It should be pointed out, however, that the two Hebrew
words, *adōnai* and *adōnī*, even though written the same in unpointed Hebrew, sound different when pronounced. This is not unusual in a language. “Read” and “read” are spelled the same, but one can be pronounced “red,” as in “I read the book yesterday,” while the other is pronounced “reed,” as in “Please read the book to me.” The correct way to place the vowels in the text would have been preserved in the oral tradition of the Jews. Thus when the text was finally written with the vowels it would have been written as it had always been pronounced.

Further evidence that the Jews always thought that the word in Psalm 110:1 referred to a human Messiah and not God is given in the Greek text, both in the Septuagint and in quotations of the Old Testament that appear in the New Testament. It is important to remember that the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, was made about 250 BC, long before the Trinitarian debates started. Yet the Septuagint translation is clearly supportive of Psalm 110:1 referring to a human lord, not God. It translates *adōnī* as *ho kurios mou*, “my lord” (see, Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity, Christianity’s Self-inflicted Wound*; International Scholars Publication, New York, 1998, Atlanta Bible College and Restoration Fellowship, Morrow, GA, 1994, p. 28).

When Psalm 110:1 is quoted in the New Testament the same truth about the human lordship of the Messiah is preserved. Anthony Buzzard writes:

The New Testament, when it quotes Psalm 110:1, renders *l’adōnī* as “to my lord” (*to kurio mou*). But it renders *adōnai* ([Psalm 110] v. 5 and very often elsewhere) as “the Lord” (*kurios*). This proves that the difference between *adōnai* and *adōnī* was recognized and reported in Greek long before the Masoretic vowel points fixed the ancient, oral tradition permanently in writing (Anthony Buzzard, ed., *Focus on the Kingdom*, Atlanta Bible College, Morrow, GA, March 2000, p. 8, emphasis his.).

Sadly, many scholars have not paid close attention to the Hebrew text of Psalm 110:1, and incorrectly say that the second “Lord” in the verse is the Hebrew word *adōnai* (or *adōnay*) and thus means “God,” not recognizing that *adōnai* is not the actual Hebrew word in the verse. One such source is *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* edited by Walvoord and Zuck, Victor Books, 1985, p. 873. Another is Herbert Lockyer, *All the Divine Names and Titles in the Bible*, Zondervan, 1975, p. 15. A third is Alfred Plummer, *Gospel According to S. Luke: International Critical Commentary*; Edinburgh; T&T Clark, 1913, p. 472.

The well-known Smith’s Bible Dictionary contains an article on “Son of God,” written by Ezra Abbot. He writes:

Accordingly we find that, after the Ascension, the Apostles labored to bring the Jews to acknowledge that Jesus was not only *the Christ*, but was also a *Divine Person*, even the Lord Jehovah. See, H. B. Hackett, *Dr. William Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible*, article: “Son of God.” Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, reprint 1981, vol. 4, p. 3090).

We believe Abbot’s conclusion is faulty because he did not pay attention to the exact wording of the Hebrew text. Even scholars who contributed to Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible apparently agree, because there is a footnote after the above quotation that corrects it. The footnote states:
In ascribing to St. Peter the remarkable proposition that “God has made Jesus Jehovah,” the writer of this article appears to have overlooked the fact that *kurion* (“Lord”) refers to *kurio mou* (“my Lord”) in verse 34, quoted from Psalm 110:1, where the Hebrew correspondent is not Jehovah but *adōn*, the common word for “lord.”

The footnote is quite correct, for the word in Psalm 110 is the word for a “lord” or “master” and not God. Thus Psalm 110:1 gives us very clear evidence that the expected Messiah of God was not going to be God himself, but a created being. The Jews listening to Peter on the Day of Pentecost would clearly see the correlation in Peter’s teaching that Jesus was a “man approved of God” (v. 22 - KJV), the “my lord” of Psalm 110:1 which Peter quoted just shortly thereafter (v. 34). The use of *adōn* in the first verse of Psalm 110:1 makes it very clear that the Jews were not expecting their Messiah to be God, but were expecting a human “lord.”

The misinformation given about the Hebrew text of Psalm 110:1 in these respected and generally very helpful resource tools is very unfortunate, because it propounds the teaching that Jesus is God, which is actually exactly the opposite of what the Psalm itself is saying. There is a reason that in the Psalm David writes that God is “Yahweh” while the Messiah is his “lord.”

One of the clearest proofs that there is no Trinity is that neither Jesus nor the Apostles ever taught it. Psalm 110:1 is just one of many verses that were reasons the Jews were expecting a human Messiah. The ancient Jews had a lot of expectations about their Messiah that were based on Scripture. The Jews worshipped one God (Deut. 6:4), and never considered there to be a Trinity. Similarly, the Messiah the Jews were expecting was to be real human, not a God-man. He was to be a descendant of Eve (Gen. 3:15), a descendant of Abraham (Gen. 22:18), from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10); and a descendant of David (2 Sam. 7:12, 13; Isa. 11:1). He was to be a “lord” under Yahweh (Ps. 110:1) and a servant of Yahweh (Isaiah 42:1-7), but he was to be able to draw near to Yahweh (Jer. 30:21). He was to be a Jew, “one of their own” (Jer. 30:21), and he was to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

Since the Jews were expecting a human Messiah and did not think of “the Holy Spirit” as a “Person,” if the doctrine of the Trinity was true and was to be believed, someone, ostensibly the Messiah himself, had to teach it. But he never did. While there are a few verses where Jesus said things that modern Trinitarians say mean he was God, each of those can also be interpreted from the perspective that Jesus was not God, and many biblical Unitarian scholars have demonstrated in their writings. Meanwhile, the vast preponderance of New Testament verses are Jesus or the New Testament authors showing that Jesus was sent by God and did God’s will, not his own. Jesus quoted the Shema (Deut. 6:4), that there was only one God, to Jews who would have taken what he said at face value. Jesus did not take the opportunity—ever!—to teach what modern Trinitarians say is the foundation of the Christian Faith: that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and together the three Persons make One God. Why not? The most logical explanation is that there is no Trinity [For more information see, *One God & One Lord: Reconsidering the Cornerstone of the Christian Faith*, by Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit].

Psalm 110 is a Messianic and prophetic psalm in which God gave David a vision of the future, when God and the Messiah speak about what the Messiah will accomplish.
The fact that David does not call both God and the Messiah his “Lord,” but carefully words what he says such that Yahweh maintains His elevated position while the Messiah, God’s “right hand man,” is seen as David’s “Lord.” If God and Christ were both God and were co-equal and co-eternal, as the Trinity states, then Psalm 110:1 fails to recognize that equality, or even that Yahweh and the Messiah are both God. Quite the opposite! The Messiah, David’s adōnī, is seen to be distinct from, and lesser than, Yahweh.

“Yahweh.” “Yahweh” is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote a Gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh, so we have put it in the REV (see commentary on Matthew 3:3).

**Chapter 23**


23:14. This verse is omitted in the earliest and best Greek text of the Western, Alexandrian, and Caesarean text families, and when it is included in Greek texts, different texts have it in different places, a clear indication it was added as a harmonization from Mark 12:40 or Luke 20:47. “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation” (KJV).

23:15. “Gehenna.” See commentary on Matthew 5:22. [For information on annihilation in the lake of fire, see Appendix 5: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”].

23:16. “it is nothing.” The practices regarding oaths reveals the blindness and dishonesty of the religious leaders. Of course they had a “reason” for their view that an oath made by the gold of the sanctuary or the gift on the altar was binding, but an oath made by the sanctuary or altar itself was not binding. It seems that they reasoned that the binding nature of the oath was determined by the value of what the person swore by, and because neither the Temple nor altar was for sale, an oath by those things was not binding (R. L. Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, p. 49, 50). Of course the priests could use this to their advantage, because they could very sincerely swear an oath by the Temple to someone who did not know their customs, knowing full well that they were deceiving the person, and just shrug off their oath if it was not convenient to keep it, saying that “it is nothing,” that is, it is not binding. They were so blind and self-righteous they did not think God would judge such behavior. No wonder Jesus called them “fools,” and “blind,” and said “woe” to them, referring to great distress and disaster.

23:24. “gnat”...“camel.” The illustration combines the figures hyperbole (exaggeration) and hypocatastasis (comparison by implication; see commentary on Revelation 20:2). The “gnat” is the small things, while the “camel” represents the big things. The illustration was made more emotionally graphic to the Jews because the camel was an unclean animal and could not be eaten at all. For Jesus to imply that the Jews swallowed a camel would have been extremely offensive to them.

23:33. “Gehenna.” See commentary on Matthew 5:22. [For information on annihilation in the lake of fire, see Appendix 5: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”].
23:34. “Take notice!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδοὺ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

23:35. “with the result that.” This is an example of the Greek *hina* introducing a result (see commentary on Matthew 2:15). The Jews were not evil just so that they would be punished for it, but their evil will result in their being punished.

“will come.” The verb *erchomai* (#2064 ἔρχομαι) is in the subjunctive mood, but that is due to the fact that the *hina* at the beginning of the phrase makes the verb subjunctive. It must be translated from the context, which is future (cp. HCSB, NET).

23:37. “she.” The definite article is feminine and agrees with the pronoun “her” at the end of the phrase.

“keeps on killing.” The Greek word *apokteinō* (#615 ἀποκτείνω), kill, is a present participle. She kills and keeps on killing. The translation, “is killing” would be appropriate in some contexts, but not here. The point is that she has killed the prophets and keeps on killing them, something that was about to be fulfilled in Jesus himself in just a few days.

23:38. “Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδοὺ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

23:39. Quoted from Psalm 118:26. The Hebrew text of Matthew is different from the standard quotation from the Old Testament. Is simply reads, “Blessed is our savior.” See note on Matthew 21:9 and Matthew 3:3. Since the Hebrew text did not have Yahweh, we followed the reading of the Greek text.

**Chapter 24**

24:1. “Temple.” Properly understanding this verse requires an understanding of the Temple complex during the time of Jesus. The “Temple” in this verse is the Temple proper, into which only Jews were allowed to enter. Once a person left the Temple, he was in the Temple courts. The courts were an approximately 40 acre area enclosed by walls. On the south end were tall buildings that were used as marketplaces, etc. On the north end was the Antonia Fortress, the Roman fortress that allowed the Romans to control mobs in the Temple (Cp. Acts 21:34 etc. “castle” KJV). Jesus left the “Temple,” the Temple proper, called the “sanctuary” in some versions, but in doing so was in the presence of the huge buildings on the south end of the Temple Mount enclosure. The disciples, mostly Galileans who did not have anything in Galilee like the Temple structure, were amazed by the buildings, even though they had seen them before, and pointed them out to Jesus. Jesus answered them in a way that should have kept them grounded in the truth that we are not to get too attached to the things of this life, for they are all temporary. Jesus said that not one stone of all those great buildings would be left standing on top of another. True to Jesus’ teaching, there is now not one single stone of those buildings left standing. The disciples, rightly believing they were speaking with the Messiah, but wrongly thinking that very soon he was going to come into Jerusalem and conquer it and set up his kingdom, then asked him the question in 24:3, “What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

24:3. “what will be the sign of your coming.” This question of the disciples was prompted by Jesus saying that not one stone in all the buildings around them would be left
The “coming” of Christ that the disciples asked about in this verse is misunderstood by most Christians. As we study the verse, we will see that the Apostle were not speaking of Jesus “coming” from heaven to earth, but were taking about him simply coming into Jerusalem and conquering it.

It is important to properly understand both the Apostles’ question and Jesus’ answer. It helps if we remember that the Apostles asked this question during the last week of Jesus’ life here on earth, and even though they had been with him for a long time, there was a lot they did not understand. For example, the Apostles did not think of Jesus’ “coming” the way we do today. Therefore, we must be careful not to read our understanding of the coming of Christ back into the minds of the Apostles and disciples.

The Apostles did not think of Jesus’ “coming” as “coming from heaven.” To fully understand this, it is helpful to know that the word translated “coming” is parousia (παρουσία; pronounced par-oos-ee’-ah), and it was used in several different ways, including to refer to a king or official “coming,” “arriving,” the “presence” of the person after he arrived, or a “visit,” in the biblical sense of visiting in blessing or judgment. The visit of a king, for example, was referred to as a parousia.

The BDAG Greek-English lexicon says that parousia was “the official term for a visit of a person of high rank, esp. of kings and emperors visiting a province.” Robert Mounce writes that parousia “is widely used in nonbiblical texts for the arrival of a person of high status” (New International Biblical Commentary). Ann Nyland writes that the Emperor Nero wanted as many people present as possible at his parousia to Corinth (The Source New Testament; note on Matt. 24:3). Visits by dignitaries were expensive, so the cost of the “visit” was often paid for by special taxes that were levied, making the parousia of a high-ranking official a burdensome event for many people. A parousia was a public event, because kings and dignitaries arrived with great pomp and pageantry. So when the Apostles asked Jesus about his parousia, they understood that when he came in judgment and to set up his kingdom it would be something everyone would see. It was not going to be an event that was private or hidden from public view.

Even after Christians started using parousia as a technical term for the “coming” of Christ, which they did after Jesus ascended into heaven, it still never lost its ordinary meaning of the arrival or personal presence of someone important. So, for example, in 1 Corinthians 16:17, Paul refers to the “coming” of Stephanas; in 2 Corinthians 7:6 and 7, he refers to the “coming” of Titus, and then in 10:10 to his own personal presence; in Philippians 1:26 and 2:12, he refers to his “coming” to visit the Philippians; and in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 he refers to the parousia of the antichrist.

Knowing the many meanings of parousia helps us understand that just because the Apostles asked, “what will be the sign of your coming,” that does not mean that they knew he was going to come down from heaven. They did not even know he was going to die, so they certainly did not understand the things that had to happen after his death; i.e., his resurrection, ascension into heaven, and his coming back to earth from heaven.

The Apostles could not have known about Jesus’ coming from heaven when they asked him about it as recorded in Matthew 24:3, because they did not know about it a couple days later at the Last Supper (almost one-quarter of the Gospel of John is taken up by the Last Supper; chapters 13-17). At that final meal before his arrest, in a lengthy teaching and prayer, Jesus told the Apostles he was going away to the Father. But the
Apostles did not understand what he was saying to them. They said among themselves, “We do not understand what he is saying” (John 16:18; see commentary on John 16:31).

Since the Apostles did not know Jesus was going to die, be raised, ascend, or return to earth from heaven, what did they mean by the question, “What will be the sign of your coming…”? To answer that question it is vital to remember that Jesus had been speaking of the city of Jerusalem and that it would be destroyed (Matt. 24:1, 2). Although Jerusalem was controlled by the Romans, the Apostles knew that it was going to be conquered by Messiah, and that he would rule the earth from there (Isa. 2:1-3; Jer. 3:17; Micah 4:1, 2; Zech. 2:12). So when Jesus spoke of the destruction of the Temple, it was natural for the Apostles to ask when it would happen.

Jesus was going to “come” to Jerusalem, end the present age, and start the new age. The New Jerusalem, the new Temple, and the division of the land of Israel when Jesus rules the earth is described in Ezekiel chapters 40-48. The essence of the Apostles’ question was, “Tell us when you are going to come to Jerusalem in judgment and end this age?” It is possible that the Apostles thought that Jesus was going to go back to Galilee for a while before he came in judgment. Or, since Isaiah said that the Messiah would come from Edom, splattered in blood (Isa. 63:1-4), they may have thought he needed to leave Jerusalem and start his conquest of the earth from another place.

What the Apostles were asking was, “When are you going to come to Jerusalem to conquer and judge it, and end this present evil age?” Roger Hahn writes, “The fact that they connected the coming of the Messiah and the end of the age reflected their acceptance of the general Jewish understandings of eschatology. Most Jews believed human history was divided into two great ages: the present, evil age and the glorious age to come. …The ages overlapped during the lifetime of the Messiah” (Matthew: A Commentary for Bible Students). The pre-conceived notion held by the Apostles from their Jewish upbringing, that when the Messiah came the present age would end and the new age would begin, was the main thing that kept them from understanding what Jesus had been clearly telling them for months about his death and resurrection. It did not fit with what they had been taught, and so they did not understand it. Similarly, they could not grasp that Jesus would go away into heaven and not usher in the Messianic Age, which is why at the Last Supper they did not understand what he was talking about when he told them he was going to the Father (John 14-16).

Jesus did not try to directly correct the Apostles misunderstanding about his parousia. W. C. Allen correctly observes that Jesus “overlooks the fact that the disciples, according to the Gospel narrative, did not have the requisite understanding of the future for a question about Christ’s coming” (International Critical Commentary). Instead, he answered the Apostles’ question in a straightforward way, realizing that they would later be able to remember and understand those things that they did not understand right then. After Jesus’ ascension into heaven, the nature of his parousia became clear, just as what Jesus had said about his death and resurrection became clear after his resurrection. Hindsight is always 20-20, especially if we remember that people told us beforehand what would happen.

The book of Acts gives us more proof that the Apostles did not understand about Jesus ascending to heaven until when it occurred. In the days between Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, the disciples asked him, “Lord, is it at this time you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Their question was logical because Jesus had just
spoken to them about the coming holy spirit (Acts 1:5), and the disciples knew that the Old Testament prophesies connected the giving of the gift of holy spirit with the Messianic Age (cp. Isa. 32:15-18; Joel 2:28-3:17). So when Jesus told them that the gift of holy spirit was going to be poured out, it was natural for them to assume that the Messianic Kingdom was at hand. But for them to think that Jesus could restore the Kingdom to Israel right then meant they did not expect him to go to heaven and spend time there. Had the disciples known that Jesus was going to ascend into heaven and be there for a while, they would have never asked him if he was going to restore the Kingdom to Israel at that time (see commentary on Acts 1:6).

We now shift our focus from the “coming” of Christ to the purpose of the Gospel of Matthew, and study the word parousia from that perspective. Each of the Four Gospels presents a different picture of the Messiah. Matthew shows Jesus as the King, Mark as the servant, Luke as a man, and John as the Son of God (see commentary on Mark 1:1; “the Gospel of Jesus Christ”). In light of that, it is noteworthy that the only Gospel that uses the word parousia is Matthew (Matt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39), the Gospel portraying Christ as a King. In Matthew, the “coming” of Christ is a parousia. In contrast, Jesus’ “coming” in Mark is the word erchomai (#2064 ἔρχομαι), the standard Greek word for coming or going, used over six hundred times in the New Testament. Since Mark portrays Christ as a servant, it makes sense that Mark does not use the word parousia. Similarly, Luke portrays Jesus as a man, a human being, and Luke also uses the word erchomai for Christ’s coming. The Gospel of John, which portrays Jesus as the Son of God, could appropriately use parousia for the coming of Jesus, but does not contain Jesus’ teaching on the end of the age that Matthew, Mark, and Luke, do. So from a study of the Four Gospels and an understanding of the word parousia, we can see that the use of parousia in Matthew supports its specific portrayal of Jesus as the King.

“and the end of the age.” One thing we can see from the Greek text is that the disciples thought of Jesus’ “coming” and the end of the age as one event, not two. Although most translations have something such as, “the sign of your coming and the end of the age,” in the Greek text the sentence has only one definite article (“the”), thus connecting the “coming and end of the age.” We know that when Jesus comes from heaven and fights the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-21), he will end this present evil age and start the new Messianic Age. The Apostles did not know anything about the Rapture of the Christian Church, which is part of the Administration of the Sacred Secret, so they did not mention it (see commentary on Ephesians 3:2).

24:5. “Messiah.” The Greek is christos, which is usually translated “Christ.” However, the word means “anointed” or “messiah”; we translated the meaning of the word here and said “Messiah” rather than “Christ,” because these false messiahs may not actually be claiming to be Jesus himself, but only claiming to be the messiah.

24:6. “you will hear wars nearby and reports of wars far away.” This phrase is traditionally translated as “wars and rumors of wars.” But we feel that is misleading even though some of the “reports” may in fact turn out to be rumors. We should keep in mind that this statement of Jesus is a prophecy of the last days, and in our modern time world-wide communication and reporting is both more immediate and more accurate than it was years ago. In our common English, a “rumor” is a report that is most likely false, and that is not the meaning of the Greek here. In this verse the “reports” are reports of war, not false or unsubstantiated reports of war. The Greek word usually translated “rumors” is
simply akoē (#189 ἀκοή pronounced ah-kō-ē), a noun, and it means the ear (the organ of hearing), or what is heard by the ear, in this case, a report.

In the first part of the sentence, “you will hear wars nearby,” the word “hear” is a verb, akouō (#191 ἀκούω; pronounced ā–koo-ō), and it means “hear.” The verb “hear” is followed by the noun “wars,” and the whole phrase is usually translated as, “you will hear of wars,” as if the word “wars” was in the genitive case, but it is not. The word “wars” is accusative, the direct object of “hear,” meaning the people will “hear wars.” To understand what Jesus is saying we must remember that the Bible is Israel-centered. So in the first part of the sentence Jesus is saying that as the times of the end approach, the people in Israel will be able to hear wars going on (which they may themselves be involved in). Then, the second part of the sentence tells us the people will also hear “reports” (or “news”) of wars that they cannot hear themselves; wars far away.

B. Newman and P. Stein (A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew) write: “The word ‘rumors’ in English is usually used for news about things that may or may not have happened, but it is important to note that the sense here is that there will be wars everywhere. The TEV rendering [given below] is thus a good model to follow.” Also, H. Meyer (Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament) notes that Jesus is speaking “with reference to wars near at hand, the din and tumult of which are actually heard, and to wars at a distance, of which nothing is known except from the reports that are brought home” (see also, John Bengel, Bengel’s New Testament Commentary; D. Hagner; Word Biblical Commentary).

Today’s English Version (TEV) translates the sentence as, “you will hear the noise of battle close by and the news of battles far away.” The New English Bible is very similar to that, saying “near at hand” instead of “close by.” The Source New Testament has: “You will hear wars nearby and you will hear reports of wars.” Other versions that have a similar translation include the Complete Jewish Bible and the Concordant Literal New Testament.

24:7. “group will rise against group.” The Greek word translated as “group” is ethnos (#1484 ἔθνος), which has a large number of different meanings. These include the meaning that we feel fits the best in this context: a group of people united by kinship, culture, or traditions. The other meanings of ethnos include: a group or multitude (of people or animals) that is living together or closely associated; the whole human race (thus “people”); a race; a nation; a company, troop, or mass of people; a group of the same nature or ancestry; the unbelievers in contrast to God’s chosen people; also, in the New Testament ethnos is sometimes used for Gentile Christians in contrast to Jewish Christians.

The exact meaning of ethnos has to be determined by the context in which it is used. In this case, Jesus is speaking of the end times and saying that ethnos will rise and fight against ethnos, and the meaning that fits best is people groups that are united by kinship, culture, traditions, and belief systems. Lensiki basically agrees and says the term refers here to “a body of people that is held together by the same customs.” Although ethnos has been traditionally translated “nation,” that is not its best use in this context. One reason for that is today most of what we call “nations” would be called “kingdoms” in the biblical culture, even though they are not strictly ruled by a “king,” and thus would be included in the next phrase, “kingdom against kingdom.” That leaves the phrase ethnos against ethnos to refer to smaller people groups.
What we see in the world around us is “group against group” and “kingdom against kingdom” (more properly, “nation against nation”). While it is true that nations (kingdoms) are fighting each other, such as North versus South Korea, or Russia versus the Ukraine, the greater fighting seems to be group against group. In the USA, gangs are fighting other gangs, and there is also much racial violence. All over Europe, anti-Jewish groups are rising up and terrorizing Jews. In the Moslem world, Shiites are fighting Sunnis. It seems to be group versus group all over the world. These “groups” are people groups that are united by kinship, culture, traditions, and belief systems, and the “group versus group” mentality is intensifying around the world.

It is decidedly difficult to translate the word *ethnos* as it is used in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 into English. A few modern translations are getting away from the word “nation,” which is misleading, and translating *ethnos* as “people” or “peoples” (cp. CJB, MGI). While “people” is certainly better than “nation,” the reader may misunderstand and think that Jesus was speaking of general violence between individuals. While there will certainly be violence by individuals in the end times, that is not what the verse is referring to. On the other hand, we must understand “group” as referring to a group that is connected by lineage, race, creed, tradition, or belief, and not just a gather at the local store. Each member of the group is definitely connected to the group. Perhaps 50 years ago, “tribe” would have communicated the meaning well, but today “tribe” is more exclusively used of native tribes. Other words that come close are “sect,” but that puts too much emphasis on belief, and “ethnic group,” but that puts too much emphasis on race. Jesus was referring to the fact that as we approach the end, groups will rise up against each other: racial and ethnic groups, religious groups, socio-economic groups, and so forth. The concept of *ethnos* as a connected group of people was much easier to understand in the ancient world, when governments were often adversarial to people and families, and families were both big and the foundation of the culture. In the ancient world much more than today there was “safety in a multitude,” and people grouped based on family, ancestry, and creed.

24:9. “tortured.” The Greek is *thlipsis* (#2347 θλῖψις), and it refers to outward trouble that inflicts distress; oppression; affliction; tribulation; and also the inward experience of distress, affliction, or trouble (BDAG). It was common practice to torture prisoners in the first century, and in this case the fact that believers would be handed over to *thlipsis* clearly means torture. Two thousand years after Matthew was written, we humans have not become any more civilized, and torture is common practice all over the world. It will be even worse after the Rapture, which is why Revelation 14:13 says that those who die in the Lord (i.e., without remaining unconverted or renouncing the Faith) will be blessed.

24:15. “Holy Place” is a designation of the Temple. Quoted from Daniel 11:31. “Place” is the Greek *topos* (5117 τόπος). The word “place” can refer to any place specifically mentioned; however it was also one of the designations of the Temple in Jerusalem. Matthew 24:15; John 4:20, 11:48, 19:20; Acts 6:31, 14, 21:28. See Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Also, see *Secrets of Golgotha* by Ernest Martin.

24:23. “Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδοὺ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“Messiah.” See commentary on 24:5.

24:25. “Take notice!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

24:26. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“inner rooms.” A reference to the inner rooms of the Temple. It would have been a sin for an ordinary Israelite to enter into the Holy Place or the Holy of Holies of the Temple, so it was safe to say the Messiah was in there when no one would check to see if the report was true.

24:29. Quoted from Isaiah 13:10

24:30. “Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven.” Jesus’ coming in the clouds is a reference to Daniel 7:13. This is the “Second Coming” of Christ. Jesus spoke of his Second Coming and the events that surround it quite often. Some of these include, Matthew 16:27 (cp. Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26); 24:30-44 (Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27); 25:31-46; 26:64 (Mark 14:62); Mark 8:38; Luke 12:40; 17:24-30; John 14:3, 18; 21:22). See commentary on Matthew 16:27.


“gather his elect.” This is the first resurrection, and includes both the elect on earth (cp. Matt. 25:32) and the dead who are righteous and who will live with Christ in the Millennial Kingdom (cp. Ezek. 37:12-14; John 5:28, 29; Rev. 20:4-6).

24:36. “But about that day and hour no one knows.” Many attempts have been made to determine when Jesus will Rapture the Church, then later come to earth, fight the Battle of Armageddon, and set up his Millennial Kingdom. Usually people who try to determine the dates for the events of the End take the phrase “day and hour” in a Western, literal way, and say that we may not know the day and hour, but we can know the year. This misses the simple point of the way the vocabulary was used at the time of Christ and in the Bible. Although they could be used specifically for a 24-hour “day” and a 60-minute “hour,” there is no reason to think “day” or “hour” were used that way here.

In the Bible and in the Greco-Roman world, both “day” and “hour” were often used generally. In fact, the word “day” was sometimes used to describe a quality, such as in the phrase, “children of the day” (1 Thess. 5:5), and “day” was also used to describe a period of time (cp. Eph. 6:16, the evil day). Similarly, although “hour” is sometimes used of just an hour or a short period of time, it is also used of a specifically appointed time, such as the hour of the incense offering (Luke 1:10), or the dinner hour (Luke 14:17). Remember, in this teaching Jesus is trying to tell people what they do not know, and making the point that these future times are unknown; he was not trying to tease people and get them to guess the “year” by saying they did not know the “day” or “hour.” In this context, the phrase seems to best refer to the fact that people do not know the time period (including the duration) or appointed time of the return, and in fact we do not. We do not know how long the Battle of Armageddon will take, for example.

This understanding of the verse is augmented by the way Matthew 24:36 reads. It does not say that only the Father knows the day and hour. It says that only the Father knows “about” or “concerning” (the Greek is the preposition peri; “about” or “concerning”) that day and hour. This is a subtle but important point to understand, because since the Father works with people, it is possible that even He does not know the exact time He will send Jesus back to earth, but will adjust it depending on what people
do, just as He did with many other events in history, such as the death of Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:1-6); the destruction of Ahab (1 Kings 21:20-29).

This is also one of the clear verses that shows that Jesus was not God, but only knew what God showed him. Trinitarians try to side-step the clear meaning of this verse by saying that Jesus’ human part did not know the day or hour, but his divine part must have known. But even Trinitarians admit Jesus was not schizophrenic: even with two natures, Trinitarians teach that Jesus was “fully God and fully man.” Furthermore, in this passage Jesus does not refer to himself as “Jesus” but as “the Son,” emphasizing his position of authority and the fact that he was the Son of God. This verse is clear and simple proof that “the Son” is not God, but the created Son of God.

24:37. “For as in the days of Noah…” For an explanation of why Jesus used the days of Noah as a comparison to his Sheep and Goat Judgment, see commentary on verse 40.

24:40. “one will be taken and the other left.” This verse describes the harsh reality of what happens when Jesus Christ comes down from heaven and sets up his kingdom on earth—some people will be allowed into the Kingdom and some will be destroyed in the flames of Gehenna. The Apostles knew about the Tribulation period from the many references to it in the Old Testament (cp. Isa. 13:9-13; 24:1-6; Dan. 12:1; Amos 5:18-20). They also knew that the Tribulation would be followed by the Lord setting up his kingdom on earth (Dan. 2:44; 7:13, 14; Ezek. chapters 40-48), and that the Messiah’s kingdom would be inhabited by resurrected believers (Ezek. 37:11-14; Dan. 12:2). Of course, there were things the Apostles did not understand; such as that the Messiah would have to die and later ascend into heaven before setting up his kingdom on earth.

The Apostles were anxious for the Kingdom to come, so in Matthew 24:3 they asked Jesus about the coming of his kingdom. Matthew 24 and 25 are Jesus’ answer to their question. In the first part of Matthew 24 Jesus describes some events of the Great Tribulation, which occurs after the Rapture of the Christian Church and precedes his coming from heaven (Rev. 19:11ff). Matthew 24:30 begins to describe Jesus coming to earth and gathering the elect, who are the ones who will be allowed into the Kingdom. Jesus described the Judgment that will follow his arrival on earth in a way they could all understand it: the Flood of Noah. In the Flood, evil people were “taken” away, while Noah and his family were “left” on earth and repopulated the earth.

After comparing the Judgment to Noah’s Flood, Jesus tells the disciples to watch and be ready, and tells the “Parable of the Ten Virgins” (Matt. 25:1-13) about staying ready in order to be able to enter the Kingdom, and he also tells the “Parable of the Talents” about getting into the Kingdom and being rewarded by the Master (Matt. 25:14-30). Then Jesus returns to his teaching about the events of the Tribulation and Judgment. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus tells about how, when he comes to earth, he will gather everyone who is left alive after the Great Tribulation (“all the nations”). He will have them brought before his throne and he will judge them, dividing the people into two categories: the “sheep” (righteous) and the “goats” (unrighteous). Jesus will let the sheep into his kingdom and they will live on the earth. In contrast, the “goats” will be taken away to destruction. Although it was never stated in the Old Testament or Gospels, we learn from the Book of Revelation, that the first part of Jesus’ Kingdom on earth lasts 1000 years (Rev. 20:2-5).

It is sometimes wrongly taught by Christians that Matthew 24:37-41 is about the Rapture of the Church. But these verses in Matthew 24 cannot be wrested from their
context, which is Jesus Christ’s Second Coming, when he comes in judgment to the earth (cp. Rev. 19:11-20:4). Matthew 24:30 says the nations will see the Messiah as he comes in power and glory, and that they will “mourn.” Then Matthew 25:31–33 speaks of the coming of the Messiah and notes that Christ will “sit on his throne” and “all the nations will be gathered before him.” These things are not associated with the Rapture of the Christian Church. At the Rapture, the Church meets the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17). He never comes all the way to the earth. Those left on earth will be confused about the disappearance of the Christians. They will not know where the Christians went. Furthermore, at the Rapture the nations do not see Christ nor do they “mourn.” So the context shows that Matthew 24 and Luke 17 are speaking of the Second Coming of Christ to the earth to Israel when he fights at Armageddon, judges the people, and sets up his Kingdom.

The meaning of “one shall be taken and the other left” is made clear by the words themselves, the context, and the scope of Scripture. The time of Christ’s coming in judgment will be similar to the time of the judgment in the days of Noah when the flood came and “took” people away. Note that Matthew 24:39 specifically says that the flood “took” the unrighteous, while the righteous—Noah and his family—were “left.” That is historically correct. The flood took all the unrighteous people away and left Noah and his family alive on earth. So too in Matthew, the ones who are “taken” are taken for judgment and then “taken” off the earth. Being “taken” is not a blessing. At the Sheep and Goat Judgment, the unrighteous are taken to the flames (Matt. 25:46), while the righteous are left on the earth and inherit the Kingdom. Spiros Zodhiates writes:

In Matt. 24:40, 41; Luke 17:34, 35, paralambano in the passive form is used as the opposite of aphieimi, “to let be.” In these verses, those who are taken are not to be misconstrued as those whom the Lord favors, as if they were the same saints spoken of in 1 Thess. 4:17 who will be raptured (harpazo, “to seize, catch away, as if by force”) to meet the Lord in the clouds. The verb paralambano in most cases indicates a demonstration in favor of the one taken, but not always. In Matt. 4:5, 8, it is used of Satan “taking” Jesus up to tempt him. In John 19:16 it is used of “taking” Jesus to lead him to the cross. It is used to refer to those in the days of Noah who were taken away, not being favored but being punished, while Noah and his family were “left” intact. Therefore, in this passage in Matthew and the parallel passage in Luke, paralambano must not be equated to the believers who are to be raptured at the coming of the Lord for his saints. It refers rather to those who, as in the days of Noah, are taken to destruction. The others are left alone (aphieimi) for the purpose of entering into the blessings of Christ’s kingdom (identified by some as the Millennium) and the righteous rule of Christ upon earth” (The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament; entry on paralambano p. 1108).

Robert Mounce writes: “The man working in the field (v. 40) and the woman grinding meal (verse 41) will be taken away in judgment (not to safety; cf. parallel in v. 39 with those “taken away” by the flood)” (New International Biblical Commentary: Matthew p. 229).
Another clear way we know that Matthew 24:37-41 is not about the Rapture is by comparing it to its parallel Scripture in Luke 17:26 and 27. As in Matthew 24, in Luke 17 Jesus was asked when the Kingdom would come (Luke 17:20). Luke 17 gives a much shorter answer than Matthew 24, and includes different information, but it speaks of Noah’s Flood, and says when the Flood came, it “destroyed them all” (Luke 17:27). Luke also then compared the coming of the Son of Man to the days of Lot, when fire fell on Sodom and Gomorrah and “destroyed them all.” This parallel teaching is positive proof that Jesus was not teaching about the Rapture, because in the Rapture Christians will be taken from the earth while the unrighteous who are left on earth to experience the Tribulation. The unbelievers will not be destroyed at the Rapture, but will continue their lives.

People sometimes doubt that there will be the “Rapture” because Jesus did not mention it in this teaching about the end times. Jesus did not teach about it because it is part of “Sacred Secret,” of the Administration of God’s Grace (see commentary on Ephesians 3:2). It is not found in the Old Testament or the Gospels but is part of the revelation of the Church Epistles. The revelation that is addressed specifically to the Christian Church is written in the seven epistles (letters) of Paul to the Church, known theologically as the “Church Epistles.” The fact that these seven epistles (Romans through Thessalonians) are especially important to the Christian Church is not often taught, yet it is of vital importance. Israel will not be Raptured, but will be resurrected and then return to the land of Israel (Ezek. 37:11-14).

One last thing to cover is the objection of those Christians who say that the scholars quoted above are wrong and that “take” refers to those who are taken for a blessing in the Rapture while “left” refers to those who are left for judgment. Even though this interpretation ignores the context, there is another, more important point that needs to be made. The context of Matthew and Luke are crystal clear about the circumstances of Christ’s coming, such as the nations mourning and being gathered to the Judgment, and this is plainly his Second Coming and not the Rapture. Therefore, no matter which group is blessed and which group is judged, neither group is Raptured. One is blessed and left on earth to enter the Kingdom (Matt. 25:34) while the other is judged and taken away (Matt. 25:41).

**24:41. “Two women.”** Although the word “women” is supplied from the context and is not in the Greek text, it is correctly supplied on the basis of the biblical culture. The biblical culture was very segregated by sex: there were jobs men did that women just did not do, and jobs that women did that men would not do. Working in the fields was usually done by men, hence “men” is supplied in verse 40, and the grinding of the grain with a hand mill was always considered to be women’s work, just as carrying water was considered women’s work (thus it is a woman Jesus meets at Jacob’s well in John 4:7). It was also considered women’s work to set up and take down the family tent, which was why Jael was so confident in driving a tent stake through Sisera’s head (Judges 4:21); she had driven many tent stakes in her lifetime.

**24:43. “allowed” = eao (1439) = “1. to let, allow, permit; 2. to let alone, to allow to do as one wishes; 3. to let go, give up, leave.” The difference between “let,” “allow,” and “permit” can be very slight, but “allow” usually means no more than lack of prohibition whereas “permit” implies a granting of express permission. Thus “allow” was usually the better choice for eao in this verse.
“dug through.” Biblical custom. Most houses were of some mud or mud and stone construction, so thieves “dug through” the wall and gained entrance to the house.

Chapter 25

25:1. “At that time.” This is one of the times when chapter headings can be unhelpful. Matthew 25:1 continues the context from 24:51 and that would have been much easier to see for most people had there not been a new chapter. The subject Jesus is speaking about is the time when the Kingdom of Heaven finally arrives on earth. The parables show that life will go on “as usual” here on earth until one eventful day when the Lord, the Bridegroom, will come and set up his kingdom on earth, and then the door to salvation will be shut. Those who have been obedient (24:46) and wise (25:2) will get to enter. The evil and foolish will be shut out, and “there will be the sobbing and the gnashing of teeth” (24:51).

25:6. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἵδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

25:13. “watch.” The Greek is grēgorō (1127 γρηγόρω; pronounced grey-gor-eh’ō), which means “be awake” (sometimes used for being alive) “watch,” “be alert,” “pay attention.” However, in this context it means more than just “watch,” it has the pregnant meaning of being alert and paying attention, in large part by doing what we are supposed to be doing. It does not mean, “sit back, relax, and just keep watch.” It means be doing what you are supposed to be doing until the Lord comes.

25:31. “glorious throne.” This is an example of the Figure of Speech Antimereia (of the noun in regimen for an adjective. Bullinger, Figures). The Greek literally reads “a throne of his glory.” “Glory” is moved by antimereia from an adjective to a noun to give it more emphasis. Unfortunately, in English, it makes the sentence hard to understand, so using the simple adjective makes sense.

25:32. “goats.” The typical goat of the ancient Middle East was black. This made separating the sheep from the goats an easy job, and added to the differences between the sheep and goats in biblical metaphor. Second to man, goats have been the most severe destroyers of land in history. They will overgraze areas of vegetation, eating weeds, shrubs, and small trees, and stand on their hind legs to eat the twigs of larger trees (and will climb the trees if the branches are dense enough and eat twigs and small branches they can reach). They will usually stick with a flock, but are not averse to wandering off, and a couple goats can quickly establish a feral flock that damages crops. The meat was eaten, but usually only of the young goat, or kid, and it was not valued as highly as the meat of the cow or sheep. Similarly, goat milk was used, but not valued as highly as cow milk, perhaps in part due to volume. Those things, added to the fact that the sheep was white, the color of righteousness and purity, and the goat was black, the color of evil and darkness, made the metaphor between the sheep (believers), and goats (unbelievers), a natural and good one.

A major reason for keeping goats was their hardiness and their hair. Usually goat hair was long and black, and thus easily woven. It was woven into a rough cloth which was made into sacks for storing and carrying things, and thus this cloth was called “sackcloth” (cp. Matt. 11:21; Luke 10:13; Rev. 6:12; 11:3). Another important use for
goat hair was it was tightly woven into the cloth that tents were made from. The reason that goat hair was especially good for tents was that it swelled when wet, and shrank when dry. That meant that if it started to rain, the tent cloth would swell and naturally repel the rain, but when it was dry the tent hair shrank and let the air circulate so that the tent was comfortable.

The Beloved woman in Song of Solomon said her skin was “dark like the tents of Kedar” (Song of Sol. 1:5), because she worked out in the sun so her skin had become dark like goat hair. Her Lover said to her: “Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Gilead” (Song of Sol. 6:5), meaning she had black hair that waved and bounced from the top of her head over her shoulders, dark and shining and bouncing like a large flock of goats wending its way down the mountain.

25:41. “fire of the coming Age.” The Greek does not refer to “eternal fire,” as if the fire would last forever, but rather “the fire of the coming Age,” that is, the fire associated with Christ’s kingdom on earth, when the wicked will be punished by being thrown into Gehenna. [See Appendix 2, “Life in the Age to Come.”]

“the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For commentary on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer.”]

25:46. “punishment in the Age to come.” This is the punishment “in” or perhaps even better, “associated with” the Age to Come, i.e., the Messianic Age [For the translation “life in the Age to come,” see Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].

The simple understanding of this verse has been obscured by orthodox Christian tradition. From the context is seems clear that the primary emphasis of the verse is as it is translated in the REV: “punishment in the Age to come.” People who have died are not being punished “in hell” now as is commonly taught. Right now, when a person dies, he is dead in the ground awaiting a resurrection and judgment [For the dead being dead now, and not alive in any form, see commentary on 1 Cor. 15:26, “death”].

When Christ comes to earth and fights the Battle of Armageddon, he will throw the “beast” and the false prophet into the Lake of Fire. Those two are the first two people who are thrown into the Lake of Fire. After Armageddon, Jesus will set up his Millennial Kingdom on earth. It is called his “Millennial Kingdom” because it lasts 1000 years (Rev. 20:2-6. For commentary on what Christ’s Millennial Kingdom will be like, see commentary on Matt. 5:5, “the meek will inherit the earth”).

When Jesus sits on his throne in his Millennial Kingdom, one of his first acts will be to gather before him all the people who have survived the Tribulation and Armageddon, and judge them according to their works. This judgment is called by scholars, “the sheep and goat judgment,” because Jesus is said to separate the people into two categories, “sheep” (believers), and “goats” (unbelievers) (Matt. 25:32). The goats are then led off to their punishment.

Another misconception that must be cleared up about this verse is that it does not teach that people burn forever in the Lake of Fire. The “goats” are thrown into the fire and burned up; annihilated. The phrase that has caused the confusion is κόλασις οίωνον, which usually gets translated, “eternal punishment” (kolasis aiônios literally means, “age
punishment,” because in Greek the adjective (aiōnios; age) usually is after the noun (kólasis; punishment). As we stated above, because of the context, which is the start of Christ’s kingdom on earth, we feel that the primary emphasis of this verse is, “the punishment associated with the Age to come.” However, the adjective aiōnios can refer to duration as well as a specific age, so there is a sense in which “everlasting punishment” is a good translation, but it must be properly understood.

The Greek word kolasis, “punishment,” is a noun, not a verb. The phrase is not “everlasting punishing,” as if the “punishing” went on forever, but rather it is “everlasting punishment,” because the punishment, which is death, goes on forever. For those who are thrown into the Lake of Fire and experience the “second death” (Rev. 20:14), their punishment, death, will never end. They are never given life again; they are annihilated from existence forever.

There are times when the noun “punishment” is used for the process of the act of being punished, so how do we know that this verse does not use “punishment” in the sense of “punishing”? The way to know that is from the scope of Scripture. Does the whole Bible, taken together, teach that the unsaved are annihilated in the fire, or survive in the fire and burn forever? The clear reading of Scripture is that mankind is given a choice between life and death. There is no verse that states that God gives people a choice between living forever in a good place or living forever in a bad place. John 3:16 gives the choice between “perish” or “everlasting life.” Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin is “death,” but the gift of God is “life.” Jesus said the believer has passed from “death” to “life” (John 5:24). The orthodox teaching is that people burn “in hell” forever, but that mostly comes from the unbiblical idea of the “immortal soul,” a concept that does not exist in the Bible. [For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see commentary on Rev. 20:10].

“life in the Age to come.” [See Appendix 2, “Life in the Age to Come”.]

Chapter 26

26:5. “Not during the feast.” The Feast of Passover was attended by hundreds of thousands of Jews from around world, and there was great nationalistic fervor the accompanied it because of its historic roots associated with deliverance from Egypt. The Jews of Jesus’ day would have loved nothing better than deliverance from Rome, and would welcome a Messiah to do that for them. The Jews knew this and, as much as they wanted to arrest Jesus, did not want to risk a riot, but preferred to wait until after the feast when the crowds went home. Their plans were altered when one of Jesus’ closest men, Judas, offered to hand him over to them.

26:7. “perfume.” The Greek word is muron (#3464 μῦρον), and it is a general term for perfume, ointment, perfumed oil, or even a sweet smelling substance. In the New Testament the emphasis is on the way it smell, and thus “perfume” seems to be the best translation. It is not an “ointment,” per se, because that implies it would be being used for healing. Also, what Mary put on Jesus was likely not oily, so “perfumed oil” is perhaps not the best translation.

“poured it on his head.” This record of Mary (we learn who she is from John) pouring the oil on Jesus occurs in Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; and John 12:1-8. The
anointing occurred in the house of Simon the Leper (Matt. 26:6; Mark 14:3), which is why John specifically says Martha was serving. If the supper occurred at the house of Mary and Martha that would never be stated because it would be obvious and expected.

At first glance there seems to be a contradiction between Matthew, Mark, and John, because Matthew and Mark say the ointment was poured on Jesus’ head, while John says the feet. The key is to realize that a flask of oil worth a year’s salary would be quite large, and covered both his head and feet. That is why Jesus said that the woman “poured this perfume on my body” (Matt. 26:12).

26:25. “Rabbi.” It is very telling that Judas would call Jesus “Rabbi” when the other disciples call him “Lord” (cp. 26:22). In the book of Matthew, Jesus is only called “Rabbi” by Judas.

26:26. “bread.” This was not special bread, but the ordinary bread that the apostles were eating. Originally, communion was not a “ceremony,” but occurred at the start of a communal meal. There was no special bread or wine. Jesus did not have any, nor did the early Church. They used the bread and wine they were already eating and drinking. As with most things, over time the simple offering of thanks and time that was taken to eat some bread and drink some wine in recognition of Jesus’ sacrifice became ritualized and the “communion service” was invented.

In the early Church, anyone who wanted to eat and drink and recognize the sacrifice of Jesus could. There was no “membership,” or “requirements” that had to be met. Jesus did not ask for any, nor, as far as we can tell from the apostolic Church, did the early Christians. Again, over time Christians became concerned about not having the “right” people partake of the bread and wine, especially because it was supposed to accompany a personal commitment to the Lord. That was exacerbated by the Roman persecution of the early Church, because many Christians, rather than be tortured, gave in and offered sacrifices to the Roman gods. They would be "Romans" until the time of persecution was over (most persecutions lasted only a short time), and then they wanted to be received back into the congregation. However, the "confessors," (those Christians who were tortured and often maimed because they continued to confess Jesus as Lord but survived—in contrast to the martyrs, those Christians who died for Christ) often did not want to allow these "weak" and "uncommitted" Christians back into the Church. Thus they would try to exclude them from the meetings and the communion.

26:28. “covenant.” See commentary on Hebrews 7:22. The word “new” is not included, as it is in the KJV. Textual scholars conclude that it was added to some Greek texts so that this verse mirrored Luke 22:20 more closely. Had “new” been original, there is no good reason for dropping it from the early texts.


26:38. “soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is used more broadly of Jesus himself with an emphasis on his thoughts and emotions. Thus, while the verse could read something such as, “I am troubled” (cp. NAB; CJB), the inclusion of the word “soul” points us to his thoughts, feelings, and emotions. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].
“deeply grieved.” The Greek word is perilupos (#4036 περιλύπος), and it means deeply grieved, very sad, exceedingly sorrowful. Jesus knew the time of his arrest was approaching, and he was dealing with the emotions that were flooding him. He knew from Scripture and from the culture that he would be whipped and beaten for some 40 hours before dying on the cross as the true Passover Lamb. It was requiring all his love and resolve to move ahead and obey God to his painful death.

26:41. “spirit.” This is the use of spirit that refers to the action of the mind, i.e., attitudes and emotions. The Apostles had a willing attitude, but their flesh was weak and unable to stay awake. [For more on “spirit,” including a long list of the ways it is used in the Bible, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]

26:45. “Are you still sleeping…?” The verse can be translated with a statement, i.e., “sleep on now…” or with a question, “Are you still sleeping…?” Commentators are divided, but most of them agree that, since Christ said very shortly after that, “Rise and let us go” that if Christ did in fact make a statement, then it is irony, not a serious statement. We have decided to translate the verse as a question given the following:
A) The words can legitimately be translated as a question.
B) Irony is hard to detect in a book and usually confuses the reader.
C) Christ obviously did not mean for them to sleep since he spoke to them (if they were sleeping and he wanted them to continue sleeping, he would not have woken them up just to tell them to sleep on) and since he told them to get up in the very next verse.

“Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“clubs” The KJV has staves, but the Greek just reads “woods” leaving the reader to figure out what the people were carrying that was made of wood. Since many people carried staffs, it would be natural to say that, but staffs were hard to fight with in a crowd and the association of this weapon with swords makes “clubs” the more likely choice.

26:51. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδοú), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

26:52. “those who take the sword will perish by the sword.” This verse is speaking about self-willed aggression outside the bounds of the law. It has nothing to do with self-defense or the proper use of the criminal justice system. Earlier that same day, Jesus had told the disciples to buy a sword if they did not have one. “He [Jesus] said to them, ‘But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one’” (Luke 22:36). Obviously, Jesus would not tell people in the afternoon to go buy a sword if they did not own one, but then later that night teach that if they used the sword they had bought they would die by it.

There is a perfectly good reason Christ told his disciples to go buy a sword: self-defense. Peter, however, was not acting in self-defense when he drew his sword and used it on the servant of the priest. The people who came to arrest Jesus represented the legal authorities at the time. If the police came to your house to arrest you, even if you had not actually committed the crime, you would not be acting in self-defense if you pulled a weapon and started to fight with them. To be acting legally, you would have to win your
case in court. When Peter pulled his sword and smote the servant of the High Priest, he was acting outside the will of God and outside the law of the land, and that is the context of Jesus’ rebuke. What Jesus said has absolutely nothing to do with self-defense, war or the criminal justice system.

What Jesus said has historically been proven to be true. Throughout history, robbers and brigands who unlawfully taken up the sword against the legal authorities have ben killed or executed.

The police and other civil authorities set up by governments are charged with the duty of maintaining a social justice system. They “bear the sword” to keep society safe, and God calls them His “servants.” The Bible states: “For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer” (Rom. 13:4).

26:57. “led him away to the house of Caiaphas.” Caiaphas was the High Priest. The Gospel of Matthew skips over the fact that Jesus was taken first to Annas, and from Annas to Caiaphas, but that is clearly recorded in the Gospel of John. For the chronology of the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus, see commentary on John 18:13.

26:64. Quoted from Psalm 110:1, Daniel 7:13.

“Yes, it is as you say.” See Matthew 27:11 note on “It is as you say.” In the related record in Mark 14:62, Jesus says, “I am.” Some critics say that Jesus never claimed to be the Son of God. Here, he swears to it.

“nevertheless.” This is a legitimate translation of the Greek, and is somewhat adversative due to the fact that the High Priest was asking if Jesus was the Christ, but not to believe him, but to confirm his “blasphemy.” Jesus agrees that he is the Christ, but he is certainly not confirming the accusation of blasphemy, so he says, “nevertheless, you will see the Son of Man....”

26:65. “tore his garments.” The word “garments” is himation (#2440 ιμάτιον; hi-mä-tee-on), which refers to a garment of any type, or the outer garment like a cloak or mantle. The Greek is plural, so it may well be that the High Priest grabbed both his inner and outer garment at the neck and tore them a handbreadth, which was the standard tearing when blasphemy was heard.

“Defaming talk...defamation.” The Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημεώ) and the Greek noun blasphēmia (#988 βλασφημία) are transliterated (not translated) from the Greek into English as “blasphemy.” However, “blasphemy” in English has a different meaning than blasphēmeō does in Greek. In English, “blasphemy” is only used in reference to God. It is insulting God or a god, insulting something considered sacred (like defacing a cross or statue of Jesus), or claiming to be God or a god in some way. However, in Greek, blasphēmeō and blasphēmia (the noun) did not have to refer to God or a god, although they could, but were common words that were used of someone speaking against another. The primary meanings were showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. In this case, the religious leaders thought it was insulting to God’s reputation that Jesus would refer to himself as God’s Messiah. [For more on blasphēmeō and blasphēmia see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

26:69. “servant-girl.” The Greek word can be either “slave-girl” or “servant-girl.” The context determines which. This girl (and the ones in Mark 14:66, 69; Luke 22:56; Acts 12:13) may have been slave-girls, but there the context does not give enough weight to go in that direction.
26:71. “another servant-girl.” We felt it was important to add “servant-girl” in italics because the Greek is feminine, so any Greek reader would know it was another servant-girl, and not just another servant. There are times the Greek can be more condensed and clearer than the English.

26:73. “your accent makes you known.” It is common for “city folk” to make fun of the way “country folk” talk, and the culture at the time of Christ was no different. Galilee was considered unsophisticated by the standards in Judea and Jerusalem. Robertson (Word Pictures in the New Testament) writes: “The Galileans had difficulty with the gutturals.” Paul Maier (First Easter, p. 53) writes: “It was a standing joke that you couldn’t tell if a Galilean were talking about an ass, a lamb, or a jug of wine, since they pronounced hamor, innmar, and hamar just about the same.”

Chapter 27

27:2. “Pilate.” This is the first mention of Pontus Pilate in the Bible. Pilate was Prefect from 26-36 AD, the second longest rulership of any Prefect of Judea. It helps to know that because there is a lot of misinformation among Christians that Pilate was a horrible governor, but not according to Roman standards.

In order to really understand Pilate’s actions at the trial of Jesus Christ, it is helpful to understand another incident that occurred less than a year earlier. About half a year before the trial of Jesus, Pilate had set up some golden shields in his Jerusalem headquarters that had a dedication to Tiberias on them. The Jews protested the presence of these shields, but Pilate refused to remove them. The Jews took their case straight to Tiberias, the emperor of Rome at the time. The letter got to Tiberias as quickly as it did because it was sent through Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch of Galilee, who forwarded it from the Jews to Rome. No wonder Scripture says Pilate and Herod were hostile towards each other before the trial of Jesus (Luke 23:12).

Tiberias wrote a terse letter to Pilate, ordered him to move the shields to Caesarea, and warned him to uphold all the religious and political customs of the Jews. This letter was no doubt on his mind at the trial of Jesus, and when Pilate was about to let Jesus go, the Jews played their trump card and said, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king speaks against Caesar” (John 19:12).

What is not known by the average reader is that “Caesar’s Friend” is more than just a phrase; it is a name, a designation, a “badge of belonging” to a very exclusive group of people who were especially close to Caesar. If a person who was designated to be “Caesar’s Friend” officially displeased Caesar to the point of being kicked out of the club, so to speak, the consequence was compulsory suicide or exile from Rome.

When we closely follow the events in the trial of Jesus, we can see that the Jews knew about the letter from Tiberias to Pilate and Pilate’s position as “Caesar’s Friend,” and used them to their advantage to pressure Pilate. When Jesus first came before Pilate, the Jews accused him of being an evildoer (John 18:30), and tried to say things that would convince Pilate to crucify him because of Roman law and sensibilities, such as that he had been corrupting the nation and forbidding paying taxes to Caesar (Luke 23:2). Had Pilate complied, that would have ended the matter as far as the Jews were concerned. But when Pilate refused to crucify Jesus, saying he had not committed a capital crime,
Jews moved their reason to their religious customs and the charge of blasphemy, saying that Jesus needed to die because he made himself the Son of God (John 19:7). Of course, when Pilate heard that Jesus had called himself the Son of God, he tried even harder to let Jesus go, but that was when the Jews, in a less than subtle way, made it clear it was going to be Pilate or Jesus. Besides, as Pilate continued to resist the Jews pressure to crucify Jesus, it got to the point a riot started to break out (Matt. 27:24). Preventing a riot was the reason the Roman governor came from Caesarea to Jerusalem during the feasts in the first place, and if there had been a riot, and if news of that got back to Tiberias, it would not go well for Pilate. Pilate realized that, in the face of the hatred and determination of the Jews, he was not accomplishing anything but stirring up a riot, something that would likely cost lives—including his own.

Pilate also realized that if he did not crucify Jesus, the Jews would write to Tiberias and say that Pilate had not obeyed Tiberias’ command that had come in the letter, because he had not been respectful of Jewish laws and customs about things such as blasphemy, and worse, he allowed a man to live who called himself a king and threatened the unity of the Jewish people and even the Roman Empire. At that point, most people would have done what Pilate did: save his own life. Pilate had Jesus crucified. [For the order of the events of Jesus’ last days, see commentary on John 18:13].

We know quite a bit about Pilate from Roman records. However, there was no physical evidence found in Israel for his governorship until 1961. An Italian team of archaeologists under the direction of Antonio Frova discovered a stone about two feet by three feet while excavating an ancient theater in Caesarea, the Roman capital of Israel. The stone tablet read in Latin: “Pontius Pilatus, Prefect of Judea, has presented the Tiberieum to the Caesareans.” The record that Pilate was a “Prefect” is correct; he was not a “Procurator” (despite the many reference works that say he was). Calling Pilate a “Procurator” is a historic anachronism, because it was not until later, under the Emperor Claudius (ruled 41-54) that the Roman governors of Judea were referred to as Procurators. The Prefects had more military responsibilities than the Procurators. We can correctly call Pilate a Prefect or a governor.

Pilate’s name tells us much about him. The family name, Pontius, was the name of a prominent clan among the Samnites, a group of people who lived along the Apennine Mountains southeast of Rome, and early on in Rome’s history the Samnites had fought a series of wars with Rome and almost conquered them. A fighter that was often seen in the gladiator arena was a person dressed as, and trained to fight as, a Samnite warrior. The Samnites were conquered and absorbed by Rome, their leading class becoming Roman equestrian class (the Roman middle class). Pilates’ first name is typically Samnite, and means, “armed with a pilum.” The pilum was a javelin about 6 feet long that was half wooden spear handle and half pointed iron shaft. It was a very effective weapon, and quickly copied by the Romans and used in the legions.


27:9. “spoken.” Not “written,” either by Jeremiah or Zechariah, but “spoken” by Jeremiah. See Bullinger’s note in The Companion Bible. These words are found in Zechariah 11:12, 13 with allusions to Jeremiah 18:1-4; 19:1-3. They are ascribed to Jeremiah since, in Jesus’ day, the books of the prophets were headed by Jeremiah, not Isaiah as now, and the quotation is identified by the name of the first book of the group, rather than by the name of the specific book within the group. Similarly in Luke 24:44,
“Psalms” includes all the books known as the writings because it is the first book of the group. See commentary in *The Ryrie Study Bible.*

The Hebrew Gospel of Matthew has the abbreviation for Yahweh in this verse, but it is very different from the Greek text and is not included in the REV (see commentary on Matt. 3:3).


27:11. “It is as you say.” Jesus answers Pilate’s question in the affirmative, that he is a king. It is important to translate this verse in the affirmative. Jesus was not playing word games with Pilate, giving him an ambiguous answer. Pilate’s everlasting life was at stake, and Pilate, like everyone else, had to have a chance to believe and accept Jesus as Messiah. This should not be considered unusual. Jesus had told many others he was the Messiah (Matt. 16:16-20; Mark 14:62; John 4:26; 10:24-25); besides that, the conversation between Pilate and Jesus was not as short as Matthew, Mark (15:2-5), or Luke (23:3) records. The Gospel of John records the longer conversation (John 18:33-38; 19:9-11). In this longer conversation, Jesus tells Pilate that although he is a king, “My kingdom is not of this world” and “my kingdom is from another place” (John 18:36), and “Everyone on the side of truth listens to me” (John 18:37). Of course Pilate, being a Roman and believing in the Roman gods, if he believed anything at all, did not have a clear and accurate picture of God, the afterlife, the Messianic Age, or anything that would have given true meaning to what Jesus said. To Pilate, Jesus’ words were likely nonsense, and he responded with “What is truth?” (John 18:38). One thing Pilate did get from his conversation with Jesus was that he was not a threat to Rome in the sense that he was trying to foment rebellion and overthrow Roman rule. That is what the religious leaders were accusing Jesus of, so that Pilate would crucify him, but Pilate, after questioning Jesus, was satisfied that was not the case, and came to the religious leaders and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him” (John 19:6).

Many excellent Greek scholars attest to the fact that Jesus’ answer to Pilate, “It is as you say,” was not an ambiguous statement. A. T. Robertson correctly states, “By his answer (‘thou sayest’) Jesus confesses that he is” (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*). *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* by W. R. Nicoll simply says that Jesus’ answer “== yes.” R. C. H. Lenski says this about Jesus’ answer: “It is the regular way of affirming the contents of the question.” Albert Barnes, in *Barnes’ Notes,* says, “Thou sayest.” [KJV] That is, thou sayest right, or thou sayest the truth. …Though he acknowledge that he was the king yet he stated fully that his kingdom was not of this world, and that therefore it could not be alleged against him as treason against the Roman emperor.” Further evidence that this was an affirmative statement comes from Matthew 26:64 and Mark 14:62 (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*). In these are two parallel records the high priest asks Jesus if he was the Messiah. Matthew records that the Lord answered, “You have said it” (*su eipas*); but Mark reports the answer with the clear affirmative, “I am” (*ego eimi*). This interchangeability of the two statements demonstrates that the idiom was confirmatory. (Cp. Matt 26:64; 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 22:70; 23:3; John 18:37).

27:19. “dream.” The Romans put a lot of weight into dreams, particularly when there was a lot going on politically. Calpurnia, the wife of Julius Caesar, had a dream that he
was going to be killed, and her pleas were so insistent that he almost stayed home, but did not, and was killed by Brutus and his co-conspirators. That event gave dreams a lot of standing to the Romans, and was no doubt one of the reasons Pilate worked so hard to have Jesus released.

27:20. “persuaded.” The Greek word is peithô, to persuade, have confidence in. The Word Study Dictionary by Zodhiates does a very good job defining this word. It sometimes gets translated “trust” but we have stayed away from that translation and stayed with “confidence.” It also gets translated “obey,” but that is not technically correct, and especially in Hebrews 13:17 (“obey your leaders”) it gets misused. We have left it “obey” in James 3:3, because although the horse’s bit does allow us to persuade it, “obey” is more understandable in the context.

27:23. “Crucify him.” This is not the same crowd that had said, “Hosanna,” and “Son of David” some days earlier. See commentary on Luke 23:21.

27:29. “mocked.” The Greek word translated “mocked” is empaizô (#1702 ἐμπαίζω), and means “mock,” “make fun of,” “ridicule.” In some contexts it has a second meaning, that of outwitting someone in a way that makes a fool of the person; to trick; to deceive; (Matt. 2:16). The “mocking” can be simply verbal, or it can be physical as well, and thus it can be categorized as physical abuse. It is used that way in the Septuagint (Judg. 16:25, 1 Sam. 31:4, Prov. 23:35). Empaizô is also used euphemistically for rape (Gen. 39:14, 17; Judg. 19:25; 20:5), which has caused some people to speculate that during his torture Jesus was raped by one or more of the Roman soldiers. Although homosexuality and bisexuality were common in the Roman world, the context of “mock” in the NT seems to exclude rape. For one thing, empaizô is used of Jesus being mocked when he was in public settings and even when he was on the cross (Luke 22:63; 23:36). He was also mocked in Herod’s presence but certainly not likely raped right there in the public of Herod’s court (Luke 23:11).

The times Jesus is recorded as being “mocked” when he was alone with the soldiers also seem to exclude him being raped. Both records, Matthew 27:29-31 and Mark 15:17-20, show that the soldiers put royal clothes on Jesus, then mocked him, then removed those clothes. That the clothes were removed after he was “mocked” certainly seems to exclude rape as part of the mocking. Jesus went through terrible and prolonged verbal and physical abuse between the time he was arrested and the time he died on the cross, and that included being mocked in many different settings by many different people. Sadly, Jesus still suffers physical abuse via his Body, the Church, which is persecuted for his name. Nevertheless, there will come a day when that will stop, and every knee will bow before him.

27:39. “insults.” The Greek verb blasphêmeô (#987 βλασφημέω) is transliterated (not translated) from the Greek into English as “blasphemy.” However, in Greek, blasphêmeô and blasphêmia (the noun) did not have to refer to God or a god, although they could, but were common words that were used of someone speaking against another. The primary meanings were showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. In this case, the people were hurling insults at Jesus. [For more on blasphêmeô, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

27:45. “sixth hour…ninth hour.” The sixth hour is our noon, and the ninth hour is about our 3 PM. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at
daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].


“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” It is sometimes taught that God forsook Jesus, and that He did so because Jesus became sin. That is simply not true. First, God did not forsook Jesus, the Scripture clearly states that Jesus was doing God’s will and could have even had 72,000 angels to help him if he wanted (Matt. 26:53). At the time of the crucifixion, “God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ” (2 Cor. 5:19). Furthermore, God does not leave us when we sin. If there is any truth that is central to Christianity, it is that God loves sinners and stays with us even when we do sin. Even if Jesus did “become sin,” God would have stayed with him just like He stays with us when we sin. Also, Jesus did not “become sin,” as if he could somehow embody sin. He became a “sin offering,” and was the completion and fulfillment of all the sin offerings that had gone before him that could not actually take away sin. [For more on Jesus becoming a sin offering, see commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:21].

In one of the greatest examples of love the world has ever seen, Jesus continued to try to demonstrate to people that he was the promised Messiah even from the cross. One notable way he did that was by quoting at least the first and last verse of Psalm 22, a Psalm of David and one that his audience would have known well. Psalm 22 is a Messianic Psalm, and one that clearly portrays the crucifixion and what was going on in those circumstances.

For one thing, it certainly looked like Jesus had been forsaken by God, even though he certainly knew he had not been (cp. Ps. 22:1).

- Ps. 22:6 says, “I am a worm,” and the Hebrew word for “worm” also refers to the scarlet color of the dye produced by the worm, and Jesus, covered with blood from head to toe, fit the description of that red worm.
- Ps. 22:7 says, “All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.” That was certainly true at the location could see.
- Ps. 22:8 tells us what the mockers said: “He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.” We know from the Gospel records that is what the mockers were saying.
- Ps. 22:11 says, “Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help,” and that was certainly true. Trouble was all around him in the form of his enemies, and his disciples had fled the scene.
- Ps. 22:12 says, “Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.” The bull represented a powerful, irresistible force, and in this case the Roman soldiers who guarded Christ were certainly like bulls surrounding him.
- Ps. 22:14 says, “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint.” Jesus’ strength was almost gone, he was dehydrated, and his bones had been pulled and stretched by Roman torture and by the act of crucifixion itself, but miraculously, not a bone was broken.
- Ps. 22:15 says, “My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.” After losing all that blood and being beaten for so long Jesus has almost no strength left. As he became dehydrated, his tongue would swell and become sticky in his mouth. This also explains why, even though he
Matthew 14

quoted Psalm 22:1, some people misunderstood and thought he was calling out for Elijah.

- Ps. 22:16 says, “Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.” The Gentiles were known as dogs, and the Roman soldiers surrounded Jesus and had pierced his hands and feet. This is an amazing prophecy since crucifixion did not exist in the time of David, so David wrote this prophecy purely by revelation, there is no cultural way David could have known about crucifixion.

- Ps. 22:17 says, “I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me.” Jesus hurt so badly it was like he could count all his bones. Besides that, the Roman flagellum whip was tipped with pieces of metal or bone and ripped the flesh off the body, often exposing some of the bones. It may well have been possible that some of Jesus’ bones were actually exposed. Also, people were staring at him and gloating.

- Ps. 22:18 says, “They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.” The Roman soldiers did exactly what the prophecy said.

- Ps. 22:24 says, “For he [God] has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.” This shows that although we can feel like we are abandoned when we are suffering, godly people know in their heart that God is still with them, and Jesus certainly knew that.

- Ps. 22:31 closes with, “for he has done it,” which can be “It is finished.” Jesus knew that godly people standing within hearing distance would be able to mentally recite much or all of Psalm 22 and then see how it was being fulfilled right before their very eyes, and then would also be able to describe that to others and spread the news about him. Thus, with his dying words Jesus was trying very hard to reach a lost world and reconcile them to God.

As Jesus was quoting from Psalm 22, there is every reason to believe that his audience recognized what he was quoting, even if he only quoted the first and last verse. (It is noteworthy that Charles Spurgeon thinks that Psalm 22, “may have been actually repeated word by word by our Lord when hanging on the tree” (The Treasury of David, introductory notes on Psalm 22)).

By the time of Jesus, the Jews read from the Old Testament in the synagogue every week (Acts 13:15; Acts 15:21; see also Luke 4 when Jesus read from Isaiah). After Nebuchadnezzar burned the Temple to the ground and thus brought the sacrifices and rituals associated with the Temple to an end, the reading and study of the Old Testament became much more central to Judaism. Even after the Temple was rebuilt in the Persian period, the attention to reading and study of the Old Testament that had become part of the synagogue service never stopped. Since the average Jew did not have a copy of much if any of the Old Testament, it was important to them to go to the synagogue to hear it read and discussed. Furthermore, the Jews encouraged each other to memorize the Scriptures even starting from the time they were children (Deut. 6:1-5). This meant that every devoted Jew had more than a passing familiarity with the Psalms.

Another way we can see that the Jews were very familiar with the Psalms is from how many times Psalms are quoted in the New Testament, and quoted as if the audience was familiar with them (Matt. 4:6 [Luke 4:10, 11]; Matt. 5:5; 13:35; 21:9; 23:39 [Mark
This large number of quotations shows that, as well as comforting and encouraging verses, the Psalms contained verses that gave important information about the Messiah and the Kingdom, something that would not have been lost on the Jewish audience, nor on the coverts who came to Judaism.

The words that Jesus spoke from the cross were not the words of a man who had been forsaken by God. They were Jesus' last possible attempt to reach the world with the Word of Truth.

“ninth hour.” About our 3 PM. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].


27:51. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

27:52. “Many bodies of the holy ones who had fallen asleep were raised…” Matthew 27:51-53 has caught the attention of readers for centuries because of the notable miracle that those verses describe. These verses occur immediately after the death of Jesus recorded earlier in the chapter. We do not believe it was in the original text. This record of the earthquake, the rocks being split, the graves being opened and the dead being raised occurs only in Matthew, and it contains some apparent inconsistencies. There are no manuscripts of Matthew that omit these verses. This means that if these verses are an addition or contain added material, it would have had to have been done very early, no later than the first part of the second century. Although it is very unusual to have an addition to the text present in every extant manuscript, it has been known to happen, and interestingly enough, in Matthew (it seems very clear that “in my name” was changed to “in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” in Matthew 28:19 [One God & One Lord, M. Graeser, J. Lynn, J. Schoenheit, p. 448]).

The patristic literature also indicates that these verses are original. “Patristic” comes from the Latin word for “father,” which is pater. So the word “patristic” is used by scholars for the writings of the early theologians, who are known as “the Church Fathers.” When the Church Fathers quote Matthew 27 as a body of text, the part about the dead being raised is also quoted. It is interesting that there are times when it would seem natural for those early theologians to refer to these events, when in fact they do not mention them, but it is always dangerous to argue from silence. So, the textual and patristic evidence shows us that if Matthew 27:52 and 53 were an addition, it is a very early one.

In spite of the textual evidence indicating that Matthew 27:52 and 53 are original, there are some very disturbing things about these verses. First and foremost is that if “many” of the Old Testament saints arose and went to Jerusalem, why are they not
mentioned anywhere else? In fact, the entire event is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. This seems quite incredible if it actually occurred. Are we to believe that “many” Old Testament saints such as Joshua, Josiah or Jeremiah got up from the dead and entered Jerusalem, but never joined the apostles? When Lazarus was raised from the dead, he rejoined Jesus and the apostles. The traditional answer to that question is that when the saints got up from the dead they were in their glorified bodies and at some point, perhaps very shortly after witnessing in Jerusalem, they ascended up into heaven. Thus they would not have been around for the events in Acts. However, that cannot be, because Scripture is very clear that Jesus is the “firstfruits from the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

Jesus is the very first person to be raised from the dead unto everlasting life. The Old Testament and Gospels have records of people being raised from the dead, but all those people were raised in their normal bodies and died again. They were not raised to everlasting life because Christ had not yet been raised from the dead. The “many holy people” Matthew refers to as being raised were raised when Jesus died, and not after his resurrection, and that is a big problem. Some Bible teachers say that the phrase, “after his resurrection,” in verse 53 refers to the entire event, and that the dead were not raised until after Jesus’ resurrection. However, this is not the reading of the Greek text. The raising from the dead is clearly set at the time of the death of Christ. Thus if they were raised, they could not have been raised with everlasting bodies.

Other theologians point out that these “holy ones” did not enter Jerusalem until after the resurrection, but that really misses the point. If someone was raised from the dead with a glorified and everlasting body before Jesus was, then that person would have been the “firstfruits from the dead,” and not Jesus. If these saints spent three days near their tombs, this in itself is a problem, because these verses seem to have a chronological inconsistency. What would be the point in raising them from the dead just to have them stay near their tombs, and then appear in Jerusalem three days later? If God got them up to be witnesses, would they not begin witnessing immediately?

Another verse that would contradict a theory that Old Testament believers got up from the dead in their new and everlasting bodies, and then shortly ascend to heaven, is that John 3:13 affirms that when the book of John was written (perhaps 80-90 AD), no one was in heaven but Jesus (see commentary on John 3:13, 16). The KJV of John 3:13 reads: “And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.”

Although most modern versions of John 3:13 have the shorter version, omitting the last phrase (“which is in heaven”), it is our belief that it is original, and part of the narration of John, not part of Jesus’ speech to Nicodemus. The Companion Bible by E. W. Bullinger has some good notes about this on John 3:13ff. If no one was in heaven except Jesus by the time the Gospel of John was written (perhaps 90 AD), then there is no way that those Old Testament believers could have gotten up unto everlasting life around the time of the death of Christ, because there is no way they would have been alive throughout the period covered by the Book of Acts and not been mentioned or had a noticeable impact.
Even assuming that these Old Testament believers got up from the dead in their fleshly bodies, only to die again shortly afterwards, presents some serious problems. There is the chronological question as to why they stayed by their tombs for three days, and did not enter Jerusalem until “after the resurrection.” Also, the lack of biblical evidence that they had risen is a major problem. Did no one notice them for three full days? That would be very unlikely. Also, why did they not get word to the apostles who were living in fear during those same three days (John 20:19)? Furthermore, where were they when the apostles were first hearing about the resurrection? Evidence for the resurrection was coming to the Apostles from many places. Peter and John went to the empty tomb, but were not convinced of Jesus’ resurrection (John 20:3-10). Mary Magdalene told them she had seen Jesus, but they still did not believe (Mark 16:9-11). Later Mary and all the women told the disciples about the angel at the tomb who said Christ was raised, but they still did not believe (Luke 24:1-11). Since Jesus’ tomb was outside the city and there were many tombs all over that whole area, would not some of the disciples have encountered a few of these risen saints? That seems logical, especially since “they appeared to many people.” Are we to really believe that none of those “many people” were disciples or would have gotten word to the disciples? Then Jesus appeared to two disciples as they walked to Emmaus. Those two traveled back to Jerusalem and told the disciples about it (Luke 24:13-35), and it was while they were all talking that Jesus appeared in the room with them. By that time it was Sunday evening (John 20:19). It seems impossible that “many” Old Testament saints had been raised for three days and had begun to enter the city of Jerusalem.

Another problem is where were these “many saints” on the Day of Pentecost, only 50 days later? The number of disciples was specifically given at about 120. That is not a large number considering the many lives that Jesus touched. It does not seem possible that the 120 believers were both those who had followed Jesus and those saints who were raised from the dead. When Peter met with them to choose a successor to Judas, would not a risen saint be a great potential leader? Yet nothing is said about them at all.

There is no evidence that any of these “many saints” joined the disciples, yet what else would they do? Where would they go? All of their families were long dead and they would not have had any jobs, food, money, or places to stay. Furthermore, there is no evidence that they convinced any of the unbelievers. The crowds on Pentecost, and the religious leaders, seem to have never heard of them. Thus it certainly seems they would have joined the disciples for support.

Furthermore, on the day of Pentecost, Peter assures the crowds that David died and was buried, and his tomb was still known (David’s body, 1000 years old, would have been decayed and gone). Had David just been resurrected and walking around Jerusalem witnessing, it seems certain that Peter would have mentioned that fact, and not said that he was dead. Of course, David might have been one saint that God did not raise. But if there were Old Testament believers walking around Jerusalem, that certainly weakens Peter’s argument that Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. It would be logical for someone in the crowd at Pentecost to ask why Peter was saying Jesus was the first one up from the dead if there were “many” believers up before him.

Also, the unbelievers and the critics of the apostles never mentioned these resurrected believers. The religious leaders of Jerusalem, for example, accused the apostles, saying, “…you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching.” (Acts 5:28). Surely, if
even a few Old Testament believers were also in Jerusalem and had appeared “to many,”
the religious leaders would have been concerned about that also, yet there is no mention
that anyone else was spreading the teaching of Christ’s resurrection.

Another problem with these verses is that they break the flow of events in
Matthew. Matthew records that at the time of Christ’s death there was an earthquake,
rocks split, and the curtain of the Temple was torn (v. 51). Then verse 54 says that when
the centurion and those guarding Jesus “saw” the things that happened, they exclaimed
that Jesus was the Son of God. We believe that Jesus was crucified on the top of the Mt.
of Olives (The Place of Christ’s Crucifixion by Earnest Martin), and that the centurion
and the others could have indeed seen the Temple curtain rip and the earthquake and
rocks split. Thus, without verses 52 and 53, Matthew 27: 51 and 54 read smoothly and is
possible. But when verses 52 and 53 are added, then the centurion and guards could not
have seen “all that had happened” (v. 54), because there is no way they could have seen
many bodies come out of tombs all around the area. Thus the addition of verses 52 and 53
add a contradiction to the text.

The problems mentioned above are not the only difficulty with these verses in
Matthew. The vocabulary in the verses seems unique to this section of Scripture even
though it can be anchored in other biblical texts. We will look at two words in the order
they appear in the verse: “bodies,” and “resurrection.” Verse 52 says that many “bodies”
of the holy people arose. At first this seems unusual because the vast majority of the time
it is the “people” who arise, not just the body. It was Lazarus who came out of the tomb,
ot Lazarus’ body. Thus this vocabulary of the “body” usually was used in later debates
when Gnostics and Neo-Platonists were bringing into Christianity their ideas about the
soul living on after death, and saying that only the body would need to get up because the
soul would return to it from heaven, where it had been since the death of the body. It is
true that Isaiah 26:19 says that in the future the dead bodies will arise, and Romans 8:11
mentions life being given to our “mortal bodies.” However, the fact that “bodies” is used
in Matthew 27:52 is unusual and makes it suspect.

The most unusual word in Matthew 27:53 is “resurrection.” The Greek word is
egerais (#1454 ἐγεραῖς), and this is the only time it is used in the New Testament. Indeed,
it is used only once in the Greek Old Testament, and that was not about getting up from
the dead, but arising from sleep. “You know when I sit and when I rise” (Ps. 139:2). The
word means “a waking up as from sleep, a rousing or rising up.” As far as all other extant
Greek literature is concerned, egerais was not used of rising from the dead until the
Church Father, Irenaeus. (Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Gerhard Kittel,
Matthew 27:52b and 53,” by Dr. Dan McConaughy). Several scenarios are possible: by
the time Matthew wrote, Christians were using “egerais” to refer to the resurrection
because it can mean a waking from sleep, and Matthew used it that way. Or Matthew
may have been the first to use it that way and the concept spread in Christianity. What we
believe is the case, however, is that this verse was written a little later than the Gospel of
Matthew and then imported into it. Although there is no “absolute proof” that Matthew
would not have used the word, it is very unusual that its only occurrence in the entire
New Testament is in this one difficult section.
The contextual evidence and the scope of Scripture give good evidence for believing that
Matthew 27: 52 and 53 were added to the text. However, there is really no honest way to
absolutely exclude these verses from the text. They are not missing in any of the texts of this section of Matthew. They are referred to by many Church Fathers and, lastly, although the vocabulary is not common, it does not demand that the section be considered a later addition to the text. We can conclude that if Old Testament believers were raised, they were not raised to everlasting life because then Jesus would not be the firstfruits from the dead. It is possible that they were raised and then died again in a few weeks or months. But as we have seen, it is unlikely, due to a lack of supporting evidence.

“fallen asleep.” The Greek verb is koimaō (κοιμάω), to fall asleep, to be asleep. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.

27:57. “when it was evening.” After Jesus died, Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and got permission to take the body of Jesus (Matt. 27:58; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:52; John 19:38). He wrapped the body in a clean linen cloth and put it in the tomb, which was not the traditional Jewish burial custom (Matt. 27:59; Mark 15:46; Luke 22:53). Why would Joseph do that? The most likely reason is that Nicodemus, who brought the spices, was supposed to meet Joseph at the tomb but was delayed. Then Joseph not knowing what had happened, closed the tomb and left (Matt. 27:60). At that point the women from Galilee who were watching Joseph, and had seen that he had laid Jesus’ body in the tomb without preparing it according to the common custom, left also. The Sabbath would have been starting by that time.

It is also possible, but less likely, that Joseph believed Jesus would be raised from the dead, and thus he did not bother to bury Jesus with all the spices and formal wrappings. However, that explanation leaves us with some unanswered questions, such as how did Nicodemus know Joseph was going to get Jesus’ body and how did he know where Joseph buried him? Also, if Joseph did not properly bury Jesus because he believed Jesus would be raised from the dead in three days, it would have been inappropriate and presumptuous for Nicodemus to go to Joseph’s personal tomb, open it, and wrap Jesus’ body without Joseph’s permission.

The women from Galilee were watching Joseph, and all of them saw that he had laid Jesus’ body in the tomb without preparing it according to the common custom (Matt. 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55). That is why they went and bought and prepared spices, and went to properly bury Jesus on Sunday morning. The women went home intending to prepare Jesus’ body properly, but Luke makes it clear the Sabbath was too close to do that, so they had to wait until Friday to buy and prepare the spices. Luke 23:54 says the Sabbath was beginning, however, this “Sabbath” is not the weekly Sabbath, but the Sabbath that was the 15th day of Nisan, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was always a Sabbath (Lev. 23:7). The year Jesus was crucified, the 15th of Nisan was a Thursday (see commentary on Luke 23:54).

The woman bought and prepared the spices on Friday, and rested Saturday (the weekly Sabbath), and then brought the spices to the tomb early Sunday morning (see commentary on John 20:1). Although the women would have had time to bring the spices to the tomb on Friday, they did not do that. The most logical explanation for that is that they knew there was a guard at the tomb. In contrast, they would have thought that by Sunday, the fourth day, the guard would be gone and they could successfully anoint Jesus’ body.
After Joseph of Arimathea and the women left the tomb, Nicodemus came with his servants and gave Jesus a burial that was according to Jewish custom. He brought spices with him, and re-wrapped Jesus’ body with the spices. However, the women had already left and did not see what Nicodemus had done. It would have been natural for a rich man like Nicodemus to have servants with him, who are the “they” of John 19:40. After all, Nicodemus was a wealthy man and member of the Sanhedrin (John 3:1), and he was bringing 75 pounds of spices, which would have required help and were very valuable. It is possible that Nicodemus’ work was completed after dark, and thus on the Sabbath, or he may have gotten Jesus buried just before the Sabbath started. In either case, he would not have been able to eat the Passover meal because he had touched Jesus’ dead body. [For more on Nicodemus, see commentary on John 19:40].

27:58. “Then Pilate commanded it to be given to him.” From a Roman perspective, Jesus was a criminal, and after his death his dead body would have been simply thrown into a pit with the other criminals who were crucified that day and all of them would have been buried together and forgotten. Of course, if a family member or friend wanted a body, he could have it. Thus, when Joseph asked Pilate for the body of Jesus, it was given to him. The whole arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus seems to have caught Mary and the apostles completely off guard, and they were not prepared for his death, nor were the apostles prepared to publicly step forward and get the body. From a Roman legal perspective, after Pilate gave Joseph the body, it belonged to him and he could do with it as he pleased.

27:60. “laid it in his own new tomb.” This was just before sunset Wednesday evening. [For more information on a Wednesday crucifixion and burial, see commentary on Matthew 12:40].

27:61. “And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary…” The Bible does not specifically say how the women knew about Jesus’ burial and knew where to go so they could watch Joseph put the body of Jesus in the tomb. The most likely explanation is that they did not want to leave Jesus just hanging on the cross, and so stayed in the area. It is even possible that Mary, Jesus’ mother, thought she would claim Jesus’ body if the Romans came and took him down. In any case, the women were likely still there when Joseph took Jesus down from the cross and carried his body away. They would have followed Joseph, and sat down where they could see what he was doing. That is why Matthew 27:61 says they were “sitting opposite the tomb,” i.e., they were sitting in a way they could see the tomb. Nicodemus may have noticed them, or he may have been trying so hard to get done before the darkness set in that he did not pay attention to them. The women noticed that Joseph did not properly prepare Jesus’ body for burial, but simply wrapped him in a cloth, closed the tomb, and left, which is why they went to prepare spices themselves (see commentary on Matt. 27:60 and John 19:40).

27:62. “now on the next day.” This is the morning on the 15th of Nisan. The Passover sacrifice is killed in the late afternoon on the 14th of Nisan and eaten after sunset. Since sunset starts the next day, the Passover meal actually ends up being eaten on the next day, the 15th day of Nisan, which is the first day of the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exod. 12:6-19). In spite of the fact it was a Sabbath day, the Pharisees and chief priests were so filled with trepidation about Jesus that they went to Pilate and requested a guard to keep the tomb secure.
Pilate’s answer, “You have a watch,” or as it is in some versions, “You have a guard,” has sometimes been misunderstood to mean that the Priests already had the Temple police, so they should use them. That is not correct. Pilate gave permission to the priests to requisition a detachment of Roman guards, which is why the guards would have been in trouble if the governor heard that the body of Jesus had been stolen while they were guarding it (cp. Matt. 28:12-15).

“were gathered.” Passive voice. The spiritual and social forces were powerfully at work, exerting an influence. It is as if an invisible hand rounded up these religious leaders.

27:63. “will be raised.” Passive voice. The religious leaders remembered, but did not believe, what the disciples never grasped—that Jesus taught he would be raised after three days.

27:65. “You can have.” The Greek word is echō (#2192 ἔχω), which is usually “you have,” but in this case it can be “you can have” (see BDAG, ἔχω, definition 9).

“a guard of soldiers.” The Greek word is koustōdia (#2892 κουστωδία), a guard of Roman soldiers. The Pharisees and chief priests were so filled with trepidation about Jesus that they went to Pilate and requested a guard to keep the tomb secure (Matt. 27:62-66). Pilate’s answer as it appears in many English versions, “You have a watch,” or “You have a guard,” has sometimes been misunderstood to mean that Pilate told the priests that since they already had the Temple police, they should use them. That is not correct. Pilate gave permission to the priests to requisition a detachment of Roman guards, which is why those soldiers would have been in trouble if the governor heard that the guard and fallen asleep and the body of Jesus had been stolen (Matt. 28:12-15). Pilate would not care if the Temple police had fallen asleep and Jesus’ body had been stolen.

27:66. “put a seal on the stone.” They did not “seal” the stone in the sense of somehow gluing it closed. That is not the meaning of “seal” in this case. If they could have glued the stone closed, they would not have needed the guard. They put a seal on the stone, which would have been wax or clay that connected the stone to the wall and which would have had a “seal” (an insignia of some kind), pressed into the wax. If the stone were moved, the wax or clay would have been broken and the insignia destroyed. This seal let everyone know the grave had not been tampered with. It is even possible that in this case the seal was clay attached to the wall of the tomb and wax on the rolling-stone, with a chord between them.

“setting the guard.” The Greek text simply has the phrase “with the guard” at the end of the sentence, which has led to various interpretations and translations. For example, the NASB says that the Jews sealed the tomb “along with the guards.” Some interpreters have even suggested that the Jews “sealed” the tomb “with the guards,” meaning that the guards were the effective seal, but this interpretation seems very unlikely. It seems most likely that the phrase is not meant to communicate that the guards helped seal the tomb, but rather that the tomb was left “with the guards,” as the Jews requested, so the body would not be stolen. Perhaps a more conflated translation the preserved the phrase “with the guard” would be: “So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and leaving it with the guard.”
Chapter 28

28:1. “as it began to dusk and come toward the first day of the week.” This event, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary coming to view the tomb, is not recorded in any Gospel but Matthew. This is now Saturday the 17th of Nisan, in the late evening, just before the Saturday Sabbath ended and Sunday, the first day of the week, began. The Jewish day starts with sunset, and this verse says it was late on the Sabbath (late Saturday afternoon); it was not Sunday morning as many people believe.

Although many translations have “dawn,” not “dusk,” that is a misunderstanding of what the Greek text is saying. The Greek text reads in a way that seems very difficult when translated literally, which is due to the idioms involved. A very literal rendering of the Greek text is: “Now late of the [on the] Sabbaths, at the dawn [or beginning] toward the first of the Sabbaths.” This is a very difficult sentence, and to understand it we need to know two things: that “Sabbaths” (the plural of Sabbath) was the regular Hebrew idiom for a week, and also that the Jewish day, and thus each new week, “dawned,” or “began” at sunset on the weekly Sabbath. Thus, sunset on Saturday started Sunday and the new week. Although many English versions read “dawn” in this verse, the Greek word epiphōskō (ἐπιφώσκω) literally means, “to grow light,” and it was used of the “dawn” or “beginning” of something [For more on epiphōskō, see commentary on Luke 23:54]. According to Jewish reckoning of time, the new day was dawning, or beginning, at sunset.

Thus the women came to see the tomb late on one “Sabbaths” (on one week), just before the beginning of another “Sabbaths” (the beginning of another week). So this record occurs Saturday evening, just around sunset, but it was still the Sabbath. Even so, it would not have been wrong for the women to come late on the Sabbath, because walking was allowed on the Sabbath as long as one did not walk too far. Thus, this verse does not contradict the verse that says the women “rested” on the Sabbath (Luke 23:56). Besides, that verse was speaking in the context of the work involved in preparing the spices for Jesus’ burial.

About this verse, Robertson (Word Pictures in the New Testament) writes: “This careful chronological statement according to Jewish days clearly means that before the Sabbath was over, that is before six PM, this visit by the women was made ‘to see the sepulcher.’” Robertson is correct that this is a “careful chronological statement,” and not paying attention to it is one of the reasons people wrongly think the Bible contradicts itself in the timing of some the events that occurred after the death of Jesus. The Sabbath that ended would logically been the weekly Sabbath, Saturday. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were checking on the tomb in expectation of anointing Jesus’ body at daylight the next morning, i.e., on Sunday morning.

This verse is saying that just as the Sabbath was coming to an end on Saturday evening, the women came to “look at” the tomb. The Greek word theoreō, “to look at,” usually refers to viewing something from a distance, which would have been the case since the guards would have kept the women from getting too close to the tomb. At this time the stone would have been still in place in front of the tomb. If the women came Saturday night just to “see the tomb,” it is very possible that they were checking to see if the guard was gone yet. The third day of Christ’s “three days and three nights” ended just about this time Saturday evening, so if the guards had already left, then the way was clear
to bring the spices Sunday morning. However, the guards were still there and so was the stone that was covering the tomb door. Due to the time of day, it is possible that Jesus was already up from the dead and out of the tomb. If not, his resurrection would have occurred very shortly after they saw the tomb.

There is a time break between 28:1 and 28:2. The events of 28:2 occurred around dawn Sunday morning, because when the angel opened the tomb, some of the guards went and reported to the chief priests what had happened. One of the astounding things about the four Gospels is that there is no explicit description of Jesus getting up from the dead, an event that would have happened around the time Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the tomb. There is no description such as, “Then the life of God entered Jesus and he woke up from the dead and passed effortlessly through the stone wall of the tomb.” No amount of guesswork will tell us for certain, but it is possible that any description of the resurrection cannot come close to describing it as it would need to be described. After all, it involved changing Jesus’ dead human body into the living spirit-powered body of the one who is second in command to God in all the universe.

28:2. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“there was a great earthquake.” On the 18th of Nisan, Sunday morning, while it was still very dark, but getting close to early dawn, there was an earthquake and an angel rolled the stone away from the tomb door. We know this occurred close to dawn because the guards would have gone back into the city and told the chief priests what had happened shortly after they had been frightened by the angel (Matt. 28:4, 11). However, the Scripture says that the guards were still talking to the chief priests when the women, who had come to the tomb at dawn just after the sun rose, had already seen both the angels and Jesus, and were on their way to tell the disciples what they had seen (Matt. 28:5-11). Thus, the angel rolling back the stone and scaring the guards could not have been too long before daybreak. However, it was early enough that the guards had left by the time Mary Magdalene arrived, and she had come alone to the tomb before the sun rose and thus before the group of women who came with the spices, who arrived after the sun had risen. The guards coming to their senses, discussing what to do, going to the chief priests, and reporting to them what happened, would have likely taken no more than an hour, two at the most.

It is often taught that the resurrection occurred simultaneously with this earthquake. However, Scripture never says this. The actual event of the resurrection is not portrayed in Scripture. Furthermore, this was now Sunday, the first day of the week, which would have been the fourth day since Jesus was buried. But Jesus was only in the grave 3 days and 3 nights (Matt. 12:40). Christ’s resurrection was “three days and three nights” after his burial, so it would have been on Saturday just before sunset.

If Jesus got up from the dead Saturday night around sunset, why would the angel wait until just before dawn to open the grave? The most likely reason is that God knew the disciples would start coming to the tomb Sunday morning, and did not want to have the tomb open all night without a guard lest people think that the most likely explanation for the missing body of Jesus was that people stole it (which is what people believed anyway; cp. Matt. 28:15). So likely not too long before sunrise Sunday morning (an hour or so would be enough), there was an earthquake. The earthquake and angel were not needed for Jesus to rise from the dead and leave the tomb, they were for a witness of the
resurrection to people, and to clear the way for the disciples to get to the tomb without Roman interference. The angel rolled the stone away, doing it without human involvement, proving the tomb was empty. Then, when Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb before sunrise, the guard was already gone, and by the time the women who brought the spices to the tomb were going to tell the disciples what had happened to them, the guard was in the city reporting to the priests.

“Yahweh.” “Yahweh” is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote a Gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh, so we have put it in the REV (see commentary on Matthew 3:3).

“rolled away the stone.” The Greek is ἀποκυλίω (apokúliō), to roll away. In this context it seems that the stone was more than simply rolled back away from the entrance of the tomb, but rather rolled away from the tomb entirely. It would have been lying flat on the ground some distance from the grave to mark that fact that the grave was empty for all to see, and could not be closed again without a major effort requiring many men. The flat stone also provided a good seat for the angel, who sat on it in triumph of the resurrection.

28:6. “Come, see the place where he was lying.” Since the women were already in the tomb, this is a clear indication that there was more than one room in the tomb, and the women were standing in the weeping chamber, the large room just inside the door of many tombs. The angel invited the woman to step into the room that had held the dead body of Jesus (See commentary on Mark 16:5).

28:7. “go.” The Greek verb is πορεύομαι (poreúomai), and is an aorist participle, literally, “having gone.” This is the idiom of the prophetic perfect, when a past tense is put for something that is actually future to express the certainty of it or emphasize it [For more information of the prophetic perfect, see commentary on Ephesians 2:6].

“Look!” The Greek word is ἰδού (idon), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“Galilee.” One of the interesting details in the record of the death and resurrection of Christ is the fact that it took so long for the disciples to obey the command to go to Galilee. The chronology of the trip to Galilee is: On the night of his arrest Jesus told the disciples that he would meet them in Galilee after his resurrection; so obviously they were supposed to go there (Matt. 26:32). However, they were all denying that they would forsake him, and his statement about Galilee seemed to go unnoticed. It would have been a great act of trust for them to have gone to Galilee and waited for him to meet them, just as he said. It seems certain, however, that he knew they did not believe he would be raised from the dead, and just as certain that he would have to tell them a few times to go to Galilee, which is what he ended up doing.

The Sunday after he was resurrected, angels, then Jesus himself, told the women to tell the disciples to go to Galilee (Matt. 28:7, 10), but they still did not go. Then, when Jesus appeared to the disciples behind closed doors that evening (Luke 24:36-46; John 20:19-24), the Bible does not say he told them to go to Galilee, but at that point they should have believed the women (and what Jesus said in Matt. 26:32) and left for Galilee. Instead, they were still in Jerusalem, still behind locked doors, a week later when Jesus appeared to them again (John 20:26-29).
The Bible does not say if Jesus told the disciples to go to Galilee in this second behind-locked-doors meeting with his disciples. However, it seems that he did, because the next thing the Bible says after the second meeting is that the disciples went to Galilee (Matt. 18:16a), and Jesus met them at the Sea of Galilee (which John 21:1 calls the Sea of Tiberias, because Tiberias was the most influential city on the lake).

A major reason for the disciples to go to Galilee was it was the base of Jesus’ operation and where he had the most disciples. In the days before his ascension, in Jerusalem there were only 120 disciples (Acts 2:15). In contrast, he met with more than 500 people at one time (1 Cor. 15:6), which is likely the meeting on a mountain in Galilee, mentioned in Matthew 28:16-20.

The Bible does not record the consequences of the disciples not obeying Jesus and going to Galilee. However, we know that Jesus would not say to do it if there was not some good reason, so we can be sure that there were some consequences. There was almost certainly two important consequences: for one thing, if all the Apostles had returned to Galilee right after his death, the rumor that they had taken Jesus’ body from the tomb would have been difficult to perpetrate, because if his leaders had all left the area, what disciple would steal the body? The lie that the disciple’s had stolen Jesus’ body only made sense because the Apostles were still in town, and in hiding.

Even on Sunday morning, however, Jesus was still directing the Apostles to go to Galilee. He still wanted the witness of his resurrection to reach the people of Galilee, and there may have been another reason as well. It is likely that the disciples were being sought out by the religious leaders and painfully interrogated. The situation was dangerous enough that a week after the resurrection the disciples were still hiding behind locked doors. It is typical that the Bible would not focus on any hardship to the disciples at this time, focusing instead on the resurrection of Christ and events involving his appearances to people, so the fact that the Bible does not mention any specific persecution does not mean it did not happen. By the time Jesus and the Apostles showed back up in town, likely almost a full month later, Jesus apparently did not publicly show himself, and the religious leaders apparently thought the crisis was over and left them alone.

“See!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

28:9. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“Jesus met them.” The first person that Jesus met after his resurrection was Mary Magdalene. The next people Jesus appeared to was this group of women that had come to the tomb to properly bury his body but were met by angels and now were on their way to the disciples to tell them that Jesus had been raised from the dead. How much more convincing their testimony should have been now that they could all say in unison that they had actually seen the living Christ. No matter; the Eleven and the disciples did not believe them any more than they had believed Mary Magdalene. By evening, however, when Cleopas and the other disciple return from the road to Emmaus, where they had seen the Lord, Jesus had already appeared to Peter, and at last the disciples (most of them, anyway), believed he was raised from the dead (Luke 24:34).

“Greetings.” The Greek reads chaírō (#5463 χαίρω; pronounced kī-rō). It means “be well,” or “rejoice,” and was a standard greeting like our “Hi.” The Hebrew text of
Matthew (see commentary on 3:3) has, “May the Name deliver you.” In this case, “the Name” in full is used instead of the rabbinic abbreviation for Yahweh, which is apparently an abbreviation of the Hebrew for “the Name.”

“paid homage.” The act of grabbing the feet was an act of homage. See commentary on Matthew 2:2.

28:11. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (ιδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“some of the guard.” At the same time that the women were traveling to tell the disciples, some of the guards arrived at Jerusalem and gave their report to the Jews. The Bible does not say how many guards watched the tomb, but only “some” of the guards reported what they saw, the rest were apparently so terrified they ran off and stayed hidden.

The religious leaders bribed the guards with a large amount of money to say the disciples stole the body while they were asleep, a report that is still often believed. Also, the Jews told the guards that if Pilate heard they had fallen asleep, a capital offense, the Jews would take care of that also. That fact confirms that the guards were Roman soldiers and not Temple police, because if Jewish police had fallen asleep on the job and the body of Jesus been stolen, Pilate would have not cared at all about it. But if Roman soldiers on duty had fallen asleep and botched their assignment, they could have been executed.

God sent an angel to roll back the stone in sight of the guards (Matt. 28:2-4). This was grace upon grace to them. He did not have to do that. He could have just rolled the stone back by invisible power. God gave the guards a wonderful opportunity to believe in, and testify to, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was not something they expected when they got “tomb guard duty,” but it is what happened. We never know when God is going to move powerfully in the world. If we happen to be fortunate enough to be part of a move of God, we need to be prepared to believe and testify. These guards showed that they were more interested in money than the truth.

28:16. “The eleven disciples.” The “eleven disciples” are the apostles minus Judas, who has committed suicide (Matt. 27:5). In Greek, the sentence has a de, which is usually a break or a change of subject. It seemed the best way to represent that break here was simply to start the new sentence without any connective particle in English.

“went into Galilee.” The “eleven disciples” go to Galilee, and the Eleven are the apostles minus Judas, who has committed suicide (Matt. 27:5). There is a long time break between Matthew 28:15, when Jesus met with the women, and the first half of 28:16 when the Eleven go to Galilee. It would have been ten days or more.

Jesus had met the women on Resurrection Sunday, the 18th of Nisan and spoken with them about the disciples going to Galilee. But they were still in Jerusalem on Sunday the 25th of Nisan when he appeared to them a second time behind closed doors. Even if the disciples left that day for Galilee, it was usually a trip of three days.

Then between the first half and second half of Matthew 28:16 there is another time break. After the Apostles go to Galilee, Jesus’ meets them on the Sea of Galilee, which is the third time he appeared to all of them together (John 21:14). Sometime after that meeting we know that Jesus met with the Apostles and a large group of disciples on a mountain (Matt. 28:16b).

28:17. “they.” This refers to all the disciples together. This is almost certainly the event recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:6 when he was seen by more than 500 believers at one time.
There were not 500 disciples in Jerusalem, which is clear from the fact that there were only about 120 there around the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:15). However, Jesus’ headquarters through most of his ministry had been the Galilee, and thus the account of the more than 500 people who saw him at one time would have occurred there. The fact that he got with so many disciples at least partially explains why he would go to Galilee at all. There were many like Thomas who needed to see proof to be sure, and Jesus’ appearing in person in the Galilee was surely a boost to the believers.

Although all the disciples “worshipped” Jesus, which in that culture meant to bow down before him or prostrate oneself before him, some of them “doubted.” This is understandable. Jesus told the Apostles over and over he was going to be killed and then raised from the dead, and it was such a foreign concept to them they did not understand the plain words he was speaking. The death and resurrection of the Messiah was a new concept to these Jews, and so it was natural that, even when they were faced with the living Christ, some of them “doubted;” they were not 100% sure of what they were seeing.

“All bowed before him.” See commentary on Matthew 2:2. Most versions translated proskuneō as “worship” here, but that is an unclear translation. The act of “worship” in that biblical culture was to fall down before someone, which is what these disciples did. That does not mean that they did not doubt at the same time. They bowed (or fell down) before him, but even in doing that act of showing respect, some were doubting.

28:18. “has been given to me.” This is one of the many verses that make it clear that Jesus Christ is not God. If Christ were really God, and co-equal and co-eternal with the Father as the Trinitarians teach, then it is illogical to say Christ was given authority. God, by definition, has authority. The authority Jesus now has is delegated and derived, and is not a function of his “divine nature.” The wording of these scriptures is, in actuality, a refutation of the Trinity. Jesus is that man to whom God gave “all authority.” In contrast to Christ, there is no verse anywhere that says “God” was given authority. God has all authority, and delegates it to others. The fact that this verse says Jesus was “given” the authority shows he is not God. Although there are some Trinitarians who teach that Jesus divested himself of his authority when he was incarnated as a human, this verse is Jesus talking after his resurrection, and all Trinitarians admit that Jesus supposedly resumed his full Godhood after he was raised from the dead.

Trinitarians then argue that when the Scripture says that “God” gave Jesus his position and authority, such as in Acts 2:36, which says, “God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ,” that “God” means the Father. We believe, however, that the Bible is making a simple and clear contrast between “Jesus” and “God” in those verses. We assert that is introducing false doctrine into the Bible to define the word “God” as “the Triune God” if “Jesus” is not in the context, but if he is, then “God” suddenly means “the Father.” We see no need for such verbal gymnastics. If we read the Bible with the assumption that Jesus is not God, then “God” does not have to be constantly redefined as sometimes the Father and sometimes the Triune God.

Matthew 28:18 is only one of many verses that say the same basic thing: that Jesus got his authority from “God.” For example, God “placed” everything under his feet and “appointed” him to be Head of the Church (Eph. 1:22).

28:19. “Go and make disciples of all the nations.” The phrase, “of all the nations” reads as if it was a genitive when in fact “nations” is in the accusative case (direct object),
not the genitive case. Thus, in one sense, a more proper translation is “go disciple all the nations.” Normally we would want to avoid the genitive in this case because it can be limiting and mean “out of, “ thus referring to make some of the people disciples, whereas the accusative is a clearly broad goal, “disciple all the nations.” The reason that most versions read, “make disciples of all the nations” rather than “disciple all nations” is that the Greek word mathēteuō (μαθητεύω) more naturally refers to both the making and training of disciples. Thus, if we say, “go and make disciples of all the nations,” we clearly understand that they were not disciples before, and we have to get them saved and then disciple them, whereas if we say, “go disciple all nations,” they may already be disciples and we are going to give them further instruction. Translators differ as to which translation is closer to representing what Christ said, and so both translations exist among the English versions.

It seems clear that after his resurrection Jesus expanded the missionary work of his disciples. Whereas before his resurrection he clearly said, “Do not go on any road of the Gentiles, and do not enter into any city of the Samaritans, but go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5, 6), now he says to go to the nations and disciple them.

“in my name.” We have translated the text according to the evidence we have that there were early Greek texts that read that way, and also according to what the Apostles did in Acts. They made disciples in the name of Jesus. We admit that there is no extant Greek text that says “go and make disciples of all the nations in my name,” they all read “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the holy spirit.” Nevertheless, we believe that the historical evidence, as well as the evidence in the Bible itself, supports the conclusion that the common rendering is a very early addition to the text, and the original reading was “in my name.” We give the following evidence to support our conclusion:

1). There is not a single occurrence of the disciples baptizing anyone in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Every single record in the New Testament show that people were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.'” (Acts 2:38). “They had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8:16). “So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:48). “On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5).

It is inconceivable to us that Jesus would command his Apostle to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit just before he ascended, and yet about a month later, on the Day of Pentecost, they completely ignored what he said and baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ.” To us, it seems clear that Christ told the Apostles to make disciples in his name, so that is what they did, baptizing in Jesus’ name.

2). Based on the biblical and historic evidence, it is the consensus of many scholars that the Trinitarian formula that appears in Matthew 28:19 was a later addition to the text. For example, the conservative Christian publication, The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, states (“Baptism,” Vol. 1, p. 465):

It appears from Biblical records that the earliest Christians baptized with the formula ‘in the name of Jesus Christ’ (Acts 2:38). The Trinitarian formula ascribed to Jesus in his final commission (Matt. 28:19) is
generally regarded to have been shaped at a later date through the
liturgical usage of the community of Christians.

3. Eusebius (c. 260–c. 340) was the Bishop of Caesarea and is known as “the
Father of Church History.” Although he wrote prolifically, his most celebrated work is
his Ecclesiastical History, a history of the Church from the Apostolic period until his
own time. Today it is still the principle work on the history of the church at that time.
Eusebius quotes many verses in his writings, and Matthew 28:19 is one of them. Fredrick
Conybeare studied the works of Eusebius and documented that on 17 different occasions
he quoted Matthew 28:19 without the Trinitarian formula, but instead with “in my name”
(see Fredrick C. Conybeare in Zeitschrift fur Neutestamentlich Wissenschaft, “The
Eusebian Form of the Text of Matthew 28:19,” 1901, pp. 275-288). For example, in Book
III of his Ecclesiastical History, Chapter 5, Section 2, which is about the Jewish
persecution of early Christians, we read,

But the rest of the apostles, who had been incessantly plotted against with
a view to their destruction, and had been driven out of the land of Judea,
got unto all nations to preach the Gospel, relying upon the power of
Christ, who had said to them, ‘Go ye and make disciples of all the nations
in my name.’

We read the same thing in his Oration in Praise of Emperor Constantine, Chapter
16, Section 8, which says:

What king or prince in any age of the world, what philosopher, legislator
or prophet, in civilized or barbarous lands, has attained so great a height of
excellence, I say not after death, but while living still, and full of mighty
power, as to fill the ears and tongues of all mankind with the praises of his
name? Surely none save our only Savior has done this, when, after his
victory over death, he spoke the word to his followers, and fulfilled it by
the event, saying to them, ‘Go ye and make disciples of all nations in my
name.’

The Greek text that Eusebius was using read, quoted by Conybeare, is, πορευθέντες
μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν τῷ ὄνοματί μου διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὁσα
ἐνετειλάμην όμι. This translates to “Go, disciple all the nations in my name, teaching
them to keep all things, whatsoever I have commanded you.”

Eusebius was present at the council of Nicaea, and involved in the debates about
Arian teaching and whether Christ was God or a creation of God. We feel confident that
if the manuscripts he had in front of him read “in the name of the Father, and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit,” he would never have quoted it as “in my name.” Interestingly,
however, after (and only after) the Counsel of Nicaea, when there was great pressure
from the Emperor and other bishops to conform to a Trinitarian belief, Eusebius quoted
Matthew 28:19 with the Trinitarian formula on three different occasions. We believe that
the earliest manuscripts read “in my name,” and that the phrase was enlarged to reflect
the orthodox position as Trinitarian influence spread.
4). Although Eusebius is the only Church Father that directly quotes a shorter version of Matthew 28:19, Conybeare (cited above), notes that there are “echoes” from two other pieces of pre-Nicene literature, both earlier than Eusebius, that indicate they were referencing a version of Matthew without the Trinitarian baptismal formula. Those two sources are Justin Martyr (c. 100-165) in his dialogue with Trypho, and the early Christian work called “The Shepherd of Hermas.” While not strong evidence of a shorter version of Matthew 28:19, the evidence of these Church Fathers does add some support to our conclusion.

5). The reading “go and make disciples of all the nations in my name” creates internal agreement with what we see in Luke and in the Epistles of Paul. In the last chapter of Luke, when Jesus was talking to his disciples, he said, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise out from among the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46, 47). It fits the scope of Scripture that both Matthew and Luke would end with Jesus speaking to his followers about making disciples in his name in all of the nations, and not that Jesus would command baptism in Matthew but leave it out in Luke. Furthermore, Paul wrote, “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to tell the Good News” (1 Cor. 1:17). It hardly seems correct that Paul could say that Jesus did not send him to baptize if in fact one of the very last commands of Jesus to his disciples was to go and baptize people.

6). That the command to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit would have been added to the text of Matthew fits the scribal tendency to add the practices of the Church at a later time back into the text. For example, when it comes to baptism, textual research shows that there is little doubt that the closing verses of Mark were added to Mark and were not part of the original text, and they too include the command to baptize (cp. Mark 16:16, and see commentary on Mark 16:9). Another example of adding a practice of the Church back into the text involves fasting. Fasting was important to the developing Church, and the word “fasting” became inserted into the Greek manuscripts in several places, and from there even got into some of the early versions such as the King James Version (cp. Matt. 17:21; Mark 9:29; Acts 10:30; 1 Cor. 7:5). Thankfully, the number of Greek texts and early manuscripts we have today and our ability to compare them has allowed us to ferret out most of the later additions, but there are still some problem verses, such as Matthew 28:19.

7). The traditional reading of Matthew 28:19 has long been noted to have some problems. In the words of Hans Kosmala, “The traditional conclusion is, even as a prose text, comparatively ‘heavy;’ its syntax is awkward and, as Otto Michael has remarked, we miss some logical order.” The logical order that Michael, Kosmala, and other scholars have referred to is that making a disciple in the early Church involved teaching them to obey and then baptizing them when they made a commitment to Christ. Yet in the closing verses of Matthew 28, the disciples are first baptized, then taught to obey. While this is not conclusive in and of itself, it is evidence to the fact that the phrase “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit” seems to be put in the text out of order, rather than just being a part of the original text.

8). The short reading has a balance and elegance that the longer reading lacks. Kosmala writes:
“The older Eusebian version enables us to divide the conclusion of Matthew into four natural lines… We see the passage is no longer a prose text like the traditional text, but a hymnic piece. The Eusebian conclusion has a definitely poetical and almost elegant form. It is a self-contained unit of four lines. It is well balanced in its structure and the lines follow one after the other in a logical sequence;…. The poem is not a Greek poem… It is Semitic in the structure of its contents. In its Greek garb it is most likely a translation from Hebrew. … the interrelation between the four lines is obvious. It is the same as in all well-constructed Hebrew poetry” (Hans Kosmala, “The Conclusion of Matthew;” Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute 4 (ASTI 4), 1965, pp. 132-147).

9). The short reading fits with the scope of Scripture regarding the importance of the name of Jesus. It makes perfect sense that before leaving earth, Jesus would instruct his followers to make disciples in his name (Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:47) and be witnesses for him (Acts 1:8). From the book of Acts alone, we learn that the name of Jesus was central to Christian life. The disciples baptized in his name (Acts 2:38; 8:12; 10:48; 19:5); healed in his name (Acts 3:6, 16; 4:10; ); taught that salvation came by his name (Acts 4:12); taught and preached in his name (Acts 5:28; 9:27); suffered for his name (Acts 5:41; 9:16), called on his name (Acts 9:14, 21; 22:16); received forgiveness through his name (Acts 10:43); were called by his name (Acts 15:17); risked their lives for his name (Acts 15:26); cast out demons by his name (Acts 16:18); and were willing to die for his name (Acts 21:13). The Bible even tells us that there was opposition to the name of Jesus (Acts 4:17, 18; 5:26; 26:9).

From what we can see in the New Testament, it completely fits with the scope of Scripture that shortly before leaving earth, Jesus would tell his disciples, “Go and make disciples of all the nations in my name, teaching them to obey all that I commanded you.” Then, from what we know about the developing church, it makes sense that likely sometime in the middle of the second century someone would add the phrase about baptizing in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

10). Another “interesting” piece of information about Matthew 18:19 is that it seems to be missing in some places where it seems logically it would have been. Conybeare (cited above) points out some of the places in ancient writings where we would have expected Matthew 28:19 to be, but it is not copied, or only partially copied. While it is true that there is no way to prove that an original was somehow expunged, or even if the text would have supported the Trinitarian formula if we had the text, it is well known that, particularly after the time of the Emperor Theodosius (346-395), writings that did not agree with the official position of the Church were sought out and destroyed. Origen, for example, is cited as quoting the first part of Matthew 28:19 three times, but each time stopping with “nations.” Conybeare also points out that in the fourth century, the group called the “Pneumatomacki,” those people who resisted recognizing “the Holy Spirit” as the third person of the Trinity, apparently used a text of Matthew that did not have the Trinitarian formula, something that can be inferred from the things written by and against them.

11). The Trinitarian formula does not appear in the Shem-Tob Hebrew manuscript of Matthew. In the fourteenth century a complete Hebrew text of Matthew appeared in the body of a Jewish polemical treatise entitled Even Bohan, “The Touchstone.” The
author was Shem-Tob ben Isaac ben-Shaprut (sometimes called Ibn Shaprut; because his name was actually Shem-Tov, sometimes the manuscript it referred to as the Shem-Tov manuscript). This Hebrew manuscript does not seem to be copied from the Greek or Latin, as was thought by earlier scholars, but clearly seems to be a copy from a Hebrew manuscript tradition, which is very important because some of the Church Fathers testified that Matthew wrote his gospel in Hebrew. [For more on the Shem-Tob Hebrew manuscript of Matthew, see commentary on Matthew 3:3].

In contrast to the common reading found in the Greek manuscripts, the Shem-Tob Hebrew manuscript reads:

19Go, **20** and (teach) them to carry out all the things which I have commanded you forever.”

The omission of the command to baptize and the Trinitarian formula in the Shem-Tob manuscript contributes to our conclusion that the Trinitarian formula did not exist in the original manuscript of Matthew, but was a later addition.

12). The book of Matthew has no presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Some prominent Trinitarians doubt that the apostles were even introduced to the doctrine until after they received holy spirit. It seems strange that there would be an inclusion of the doctrine of the Trinity at the very end of Matthew when it had not been a subject of discussion earlier in the book, and it seems even stranger that Jesus would introduce a new baptismal formula that had the name of the Father, Son, and holy spirit without some teaching as to what that meant or why it needed to be there.

13). Why would the Trinitarian baptismal formula have been added in Matthew 28:19? As the Church developed, both the ceremony of baptism and the doctrine of the Trinity became more central to the Faith, and so verses that dealt with those subjects were sometimes altered or added. In fact, many passages of the Bible were altered by scribes to fit their theology (see Bart Ehrman, The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture). The Gospel of Matthew became the favorite Gospel in the Greek Church, so it was important that doctrines central to the Faith could be found in it. As Kosmala points out: “It [Matthew] was put to an extensive liturgical use, as research of the past few decades has shown. No gospel lent itself so readily for any additions which the Church felt obliged to make than the Gospel of Matthew.”

We must keep in mind that today if people disagree on an issue of the Faith, about the worst thing that happens is that they refuse to speak to each other. But in the centuries after Christ, theology was hotly debated and “losers” could be beaten or killed by angry mobs, imprisoned, banished or even executed. So there was a lot of pressure on bishops to have verses that supported one’s particular position to be able to “win” any debate.

Although the ancient manuscripts often differ, thankfully, that does not mean we cannot trust the Bible. Today we have some 5700 Greek manuscripts, plus manuscripts in Latin, Georgian, Coptic, Syriac, etc., plus quotations that exist in the Church Fathers, and furthermore today we are aided by computers that can compare and contrast all these manuscripts. So given today’s situation, scholars are usually able to determine the original reading of the text. Nevertheless, there are a few verses such as this one, Matthew 28:19, which are still hotly debated.

Scholars have proposed different possibilities as to when the Trinitarian baptismal formula would have been added to the text, and how it came to be so widely dispersed. Conybeare suggested that the reading was created sometime around 130-140 AD and first
appeared in the Old Latin texts and texts from Africa [Alexandria], and then got copied into the Greek texts in Rome and then, during the Nicene time got established enough to get into the Greek texts that have survived until today.

14). We have dealt above with reasons why the REV translation reads, go and make disciples of all the nations in my name, teaching them to obey all that I commanded you,” and leaves out the phrase about baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We now turn to a different side of the argument. What if we are wrong and the common text is correct. Does that mean there is a Trinity? No, it does not. There is no “proof” of the Trinity in the common reading of Matthew 28:19. If the Father, Son and holy spirit are mentioned in the original text of this verse, it would only affirm that those three exist, something we do not contest. The doctrine of the Trinity states that the Father, Son and “Holy Spirit” together make “one God,” and that is never stated in this verse. This verse refers to three, but never says they are “one.” If the phrase about the Father, Son, and holy spirit is original, then the three things this verse refers to are: God the Father; His Son the Lord Jesus Christ; and the power of holy spirit. (We say “holy spirit” instead of “Holy Spirit” because we believe that this verse is referring to God’s gift of holy spirit that is born inside each believer. It is lower case because it refers to the gift of God, and not God. For more on this, see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be like Christ.

15). It is sometimes stated that in order to be baptized into something, that something has to be God, but that reasoning is false, because Scripture states that the Israelites were “baptized into Moses” (1 Cor. 10:2).

16). It is important to understand why the word “name” is used. A study of the culture and language shows that the word “name” stood for “authority.” Examples are very numerous, but space allows only a small selection. Deuteronomy 18:5 and 7 speak of serving in the “name” (authority) of the Lord. Deuteronomy 18:22 speaks of prophesying in the “name” (authority) of the Lord. In 1 Samuel 17:45, David attacked Goliath in the “name” (authority) of the Lord, and he blessed the people in the “name” (authority) of the Lord. In 2 Kings 2:24, Elisha cursed troublemakers in the “name” (authority) of the Lord. The Apostles baptized in the “name” of Jesus Christ because it meant all his authority, similarly, Paul rhetorically asks the Corinthians if they were baptized “in the name of Paul,” which of course they were not because Paul had no power or authority to save anyone. These scriptures are only a small sample, but they are very clear. Also, we should know that there are other customs involving the word “name,” but authority is a major one we need to be aware of.

In conclusion. In deciding how to translate the REV and omitting the Trinitarian formula from Matthew 28:19, we carefully considered the points above and concluded that the Eusebian version of the Greek text was most likely the original. Hans Kosmala asks the following important question: Would the Gospel suffer any loss by the substitution of the shorter conclusion, or would this conclusion perhaps bring out the Gospel’s message even more clearly? We assert that the shorter version quoted by Eusebius explains why the Apostles never baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; fits with the conclusion of Luke and the words of Paul, and magnifies the name of the Lord Jesus, in keeping with the rest of the message of the New Testament.

28:20. “Remember.” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”). This could have been
translated “Pay attention,” because Jesus was trying to make sure he had the attention of those he was speaking to, but given the circumstances, “remember,” is a good way to translate the word *idou* here (cp. HCSB).

**“I am with you always.”** This is a wonderful promise to believers, especially when we feel that Jesus is not with us. Life is difficult, and there is a universal spiritual war going on between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. God cannot “just make things better.” He will one day, but not right now. Furthermore, we must remember that God has to be righteous and also follow His own promises. For example, He says that as we sow we reap. So if we sow into our lives in such a way as to cause trouble for ourselves, God just cannot step in and override His own law so things will be better for us here on earth. That does not mean that Jesus is not with us, watching us and helping as best he can: he always does that, and we need to trust that he is [For more on God’s help in troubled times, see commentary on Romans 8:28].

Occasionally this verse is used to prove the Trinity because it is said that the only way that Jesus could always be with his Church is if he were God. However, that is an unproven assumption, and is not stated in Scripture. Furthermore, there are different ways of being “with” someone. For example, Scripture shows us that there is a use of “with us” that is spiritual in nature, not physical. Also, we must be careful not to underestimate the power and authority God gave Christ when He set him at His own right hand and gave him a name that is above every name. Just two verses before this one, Christ said he had been given “all authority.” God gave Christ all authority, and made Christ Head of the Church, so it is only logical to conclude that God also gave Christ the power to stay in communion with his Church.
1:1. “The beginning.” Mark is the only Gospel that has anything like the phrase, “the beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ.” Yet when we understand that Mark is the Gospel that portrays Jesus Christ as the Servant of God, we can see that the phrase fits perfectly with the purpose of Mark (see commentary on “the gospel” on Mark 1:1 as to why there are four Gospels). Jesus Christ’s ministry as the obedient and suffering Servant of God came to an end with his death, which is why in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus never appears after his death. He was resurrected, not as a servant, but as Lord of all. But the Good News of Jesus Christ did not end with his death. It continued with his resurrection, his ascension, and now with his ministry from heaven. Thus Mark, which portrays Jesus as the Servant of God, only gives us the “beginning” of the Good News concerning him. In contrast to Jesus’ ministry as a Servant, which came to an end, his ministry as King (Matthew); human man (Luke); and Son of God (John) continues to this day, and Matthew, Luke, and John all have post-resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ.

Some scholars have suggested that the word “beginning” is referring to the start of Jesus’ ministry, as if the verse read, “This is the way the Good News of Jesus begins.” However, that cannot be correct. The “Good News” of Jesus began many years before John the Baptist came on the scene. At his birth about 30 years before, the angel announced that Jesus birth was “Good News” (Luke 2:10).

“The gospel of Jesus Christ.” It is sometimes asked why there are four Gospels. Part of the answer is likely that for any testimony to be validated, there needs to be 2 or 3 witnesses (Deut. 17:6, 19:15; Matt. 18:16; 1 Tim. 5:19; Heb. 10:28), and the four Gospels provide that, especially since Matthew and John were eyewitnesses. Nevertheless, the accounts by Mark and Luke have been recognized by most Christians not only as authentic historical documents, but also as God-inspired records of the life of Christ just as Matthew and John are.

The second reason there are Four Gospels is that each is written from a different perspective, and together they comprise a very profound, prophetic and precise fourfold pattern of the Messiah. We will see that the pattern in the four Gospels is that Matthew portrays Christ as a king, Mark as a servant, Luke as a man, and John as the Son of God. This pattern had already been set forth and foreshadowed long before by the Old Testament prophets. This fourfold pattern has its roots in an important Hebrew term used in the prophecies of Christ, which is tsemach. Tsemach means “sprout” or “offspring,” and is often translated “Branch,” and the vital “Branch,” and center of Old Testament prophecy is the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Tsemach paints a mental picture of a new sprout or shoot coming up out of a dead-looking stump, certainly an appropriate picture of the Messiah, because just when it looked like Israel was cut down and dead, out of it sprang the Messiah. In the Old Testament, tsemach is used five times in direct prophetic reference to the Messiah and aspects of his life. Although “the branch” was a common term for the Messiah, five Old Testament verses in particular lay out a fourfold prophetic picture of him. In two verses the Branch is shown to be a king (Jer. 23:5; 33:15), also the Branch is shown as a servant
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(Zech. 3:8), also the Branch is shown to be a man (Zech. 6:12), and also, the Branch is shown to be “the Branch of the LORD (Yahweh)” i.e., one directly from LORD God (Isa. 4:2).

These four descriptions of the Messiah subdivide according to one of the most basic distinctions we can make about any person: who he is and what he does. Two of the four terms refer to his person—Son and man, while the other two relate to his work—King and servant. Intrinsic to these terms is another important distinction in the life of the Messiah: he is humbled and he is exalted, that is, both “sufferings” and “glory” will characterize his life. We see Jesus’ humility in the designations man and servant, we see his exaltation in the terms king and Son of God. Although the four Gospels are in many ways the same, they are also unique, each having its own vocabulary and style.

Matthew has a number of unique characteristics that point to Christ as King. Matthew’s genealogy presents Jesus as a King from the line of David, and starts out with the “record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David,” and then gives the genealogy from Abraham, the one who was promised the land, through King David, who was promised the kingdom in a covenant of salt with God (2 Chron. 13:5). Matthew mentions the humble birth of Christ in one sentence (1:25), but then skips forward almost two years until the Magi arrive and ask “...Where is the one who has been born king...?” (Matt. 2:2). Then the Magi present the royal Son with gifts appropriate of his status as king. The phrase, “the Kingdom of Heaven” is associated with the specific reign of the Messiah on earth. It occurs more than 30 times in the gospel of Matthew, but not once in any of the other Gospels, which use the phrase, “Kingdom of God.” The title, “Son of David,” occurs ten times in Matthew and only six times in all the other Gospels combined. There are a number of parables that are unique to Matthew, and most of them have a clear reference to the Kingdom. These include: the Darnel (13:24-30); the Hidden Treasure (13:44); the Pearl (13:45); the Dragnet (13:47); the Unmerciful Servant (18:23-35); the Laborers in the Vineyard (20:1-16); the Two Sons (21:28-32); the Marriage of the Kings Son (22:1-14); and the Ten Virgins (25:1-13). Only Matthew records the “sheep and goat judgment,” when the king lets the righteous into his kingdom but excludes the unrighteous (Matt. 25).

The Gospel of Mark, which presents Christ as a servant, is short, simple and forceful, emphasizing Christ’s works more than his words. Unlike the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John, the Gospel of Mark has no genealogy at all, which makes sense because a servant’s genealogy is not relevant—the work he does is what matters.

Commentators have long noticed that Mark focuses more on what Jesus did than what he said, which makes sense because obedient action is the sign of a good servant. Mark also moves quickly from one event to another. Even the vocabulary reflects this pattern. The Greek word eutheos (“immediately”) occurs 40 times in Mark but only 27 times in all the other Gospels combined. That statistic is made even more vivid when one realizes that there are only 16 chapters in Mark, but 73 chapters in the other three Gospels.

A valued servant is quick to obey. E. W. Bullinger, who also saw the fourfold portrait of Christ, notes that Jesus “is addressed as ‘Lord’ in the other three Gospels 73 times,...he is addressed as such in the Gospel of Mark only twice” (Companion Bible; intro to Mark). Bullinger notes that of these two uses of “Lord” that appear in the KJV, one was by a Gentile woman and was simply the title equivalent of “sir” (7:28), and one is 9:24, which is not even in the earliest Greek texts, but was a later addition. So actually,
Jesus is never called “Lord” in Mark by anyone who knew he was the Messiah, a clear indication of the emphasis in Mark on Jesus’ role as God’s servant. Appropriately, more than a third of Mark takes place in the last week of Jesus’ life, which places special emphasis on his obedience and the fact that he was the suffering Servant foretold in the Old Testament.

Mark also opens with the phrase that Mark gives the “beginning” of the Good News of Jesus (Mark 1:1). That is true, because the Good News of Jesus continues to this day with Jesus sitting on the right hand of God. Jesus’ role of King, human man, and Son of God, all continue to this day, but Jesus’ role as the Servant of God ended with his death. Since Mark portrays Jesus as the Servant, it is appropriate that Jesus does not appear in Mark after his resurrection, when he is no longer the Servant, but “Lord of all.” All three other Gospels have accounts of Jesus after his resurrection, but Mark does not (see commentary on Mark 16:9). Thus the Gospel of Mark only gives us the “beginning” of the Good News about Jesus, it does not continue with Good News about him after his resurrection.

The Gospel of Luke, which portrays Christ as a man, presents the Messiah and his relationships in a way that highlights his humanity as the Last Adam. The gospel of Luke has a genealogy that traces Jesus back to Adam, the first man. Luke opens with information on the parents and birth of John the Baptist, giving information we would expect to find in a “human interest” story. It then gives details about Joseph and Mary and the circumstances of Jesus’ birth, including his being presented at the Temple. These details show that Jesus was born in normal human circumstances (see commentary on those specific verses), and subject to the same laws and regulations as every other Jewish child.

Luke has an emphasis on both prayer and praise to God, which is appropriate for all mankind. Jesus is shown praying in 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 29; 11:1; 22:32, 41, 44; and 23:34. Luke has four great praise hymns that are unique to Luke: the Magnificat of Mary (1:46-55); the Benedictus of Zechariah (1:68-79); the Gloria in Excelsis of the angels (2:14), and the Nunc Dimittis of Simeon (2:29-32), and praise to God is mentioned in many other verses.

Luke clearly portrays Jesus’ great love for all mankind, and describes him as a warm and loving person. Commentators note that the book of Luke portrays Jesus’ special concern for the poor, sinners, women and the family more clearly than any other Gospel. Luke has a unique emphasis on women, and speaks of women in a way not covered in the other Gospels, for example, Elizabeth, Anna, the widow of Nain, the repentant woman (7:37-50); the women who ministered to Christ (8:2, 3), the daughters of Jerusalem (23:27, 28), and Mary and Martha (10:38-42). Also, Luke shows Jesus sympathetically acknowledging the Gentiles. The parables that are unique to Luke emphasize human traits such as love for fellow man (and the importance of an individual), wisdom, and foolishness. Parables unique to Luke include: the Two Debtors (7:41, 42); the Good Samaritan (10:30-37); the Persistent Friend (11:5-8); the Rich Fool (12:16-21); the Lost Coin (15:8-10); the Forgiving Father (15:11-32); the Wise Manager (16:1-12); the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31); the Persistent Widow (18:1-8); the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9-14).

The Gospel of John, which portrays Christ as the Son of God, starts out by saying that God, in the beginning, had a plan, purpose or wisdom (the logos) that became flesh,
that is, the Son “comes from” the Father. This is a very short genealogy: the Father had a Son, an only begotten Son, and since Jesus’ father is God, any portrayal of his earthly birth would only take emphasis away from the true Father. Jesus’ intimacy with his Father is uniquely portrayed in John. For example, the word “father” occurs as many times in John as in all the other Gospels combined.

The narrator writes the Gospel of John from the standpoint that Jesus is already exalted and in heaven, something both unique to John and appropriate to his status as the Son of God (cp. John 3:13 and commentary). Theologians have long noticed that John is different from the other Gospels and truly unique. This fits with our expectations, because, as “the only begotten Son of God,” Jesus is truly unique.

John is also unique from the standpoint of what it leaves out. For example, there is no temptation in the wilderness. Kings, servants, and humans need to demonstrate their qualifications and be proven for the job they do, but as the Son of God, Jesus is qualified to be the Messiah without being tempted first. Similarly, there is no record of the event called “the Transfiguration,” because, as we have already said, John sees Jesus from the perspective of already being risen and in glory, not the perspective of preparing for his glory.

It should catch our attention that when the Messiah does a miracle in his role as King, Servant, or Man, the act is called a “miracle” (dunamis). The Greek word dunamis (miracle; power) occurs almost 40 times in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but it does not occur at all in John. In contrast to the other Gospels, when Jesus does a miracle in the Gospel of John, the work is called a “sign” (simeion). A “sign” is something that gives information and points to something else. For example, a road sign with a curved line on it points out that there is a curve in the road ahead. The eight “signs” in John that are clearly miracles are called “signs” because they point to Jesus as the Son of God. Thus, Jesus could say, “though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is united with me, and I am united with the Father” (John 10:38); and “Keep on believing me, that I am in the Father, and the Father in me, or else keep believing me because of the works themselves” (14:11). The eight miracle signs in John are:

1. Water to Wine (2:1-11; called a sign in v. 11)
2. The Ruler’s Son Healed (4:46-50; called a sign in 48, 54)
3. Sick Man at the Pool of Bethesda (5:1-47; not specifically called a sign, but in 6:2 Jesus’ healing the sick was called a sign)
4. Feeding the 5,000 (6:1-14; called a sign in 14)
5. Walking on the Sea (6:17-21; not specifically called a sign, but obviously included in the plural “signs” in 6:26)
6. Man Born Blind (9:1-39; called a sign in 16)
7. Lazarus Raised From the Dead (11:1-45; called a sign by the Jews in 47, and called a sign in 12:18)
8. Multitude of Fish (21:1-11; Although the word “sign” is not used in John 21, the sign of the fish occurs immediately after John 20:30 and 31, which speak of “these” signs that are written, and thus certainly includes the sign that follows immediately afterward)

Besides these specifically mentioned signs, there are other places in John that refer to signs Jesus was doing, such as 2:23; 3:2; 7:31; and 12:37. The signs that Jesus
was doing shows the prejudice and spiritual blindness of the Jews, who a number of times asked Jesus to show them a sign of who he was (John 2:18; 6:30).

The fourfold portrait of Christ given by the Four Gospels is good evidence they are the God-breathed Word of God, and not just the writing and memories of four men. There is no way the four different writers could have collaborated on their individual Gospels and produced this remarkable fourfold portrait of Christ. Like all the different writers of the Bible, they each wrote independently of one another, separated by both time and space. They could not have agreed upon what to include together and what to emphasize individually such that the wonderful fourfold portrait of Christ that was foretold in the Old Testament was laid out in the Four Gospels. The Four Gospels, like the rest of the Bible, are the God-breathed Word.

“The Son of God.” This phrase, which is only two words in the Greek text, is missing from some early and important manuscripts. The variety of manuscripts that do not have the phrase is such that many scholars have concluded that differences in the manuscripts is not due to an accidental deletion that was simply re-copied, but rather was a deliberate change. That fact has not ended the debate; it has just shifted the question. Is it more likely that the phrase was original, but adoptionist scribes (those who say Jesus “became” the Son at his baptism) deleted it to add support for their position; or is it more likely that the phrase was not original, but scribes added it, following their general tendency to expand titles. At this point there is no conclusive evidence for either position, and since the adoptionist view is erroneous, whether the phrase “Son of God” was added to simply expand the title of Jesus Christ, or whether it is original, the fact remains that Jesus was the Son of God from his conception, so we left the phrase in.

1:2. “As it is written in Isaiah.” The quotation is from both Malachi 3:1 and the book of Isaiah 40:3. This is not “a mistake” or “error,” as some people claim, as if Mark thought the whole quotation was from Isaiah. Verses 2 and 3 are run together as if they were one quotation, not two. By just mentioning the part quoted from Isaiah, Mark is using a literary device that puts the emphasis of the extended quotation on the part that Isaiah wrote, which says what we are to do in light of the Lord’s coming. Hendrickson writes: “Mark tells us that he is going to quote from Isaiah. He does exactly that, though not immediately.” Had Mark quoted only Isaiah, we would be left knowing only that a “voice” was crying in the wilderness. By quoting Malachi before Isaiah, we know to whom the “voice” belongs: to none other than the messenger who will begin to prepare the way of the Lord.

The quotation from Malachi has been adapted to fit the Messiah. A more literal quotation of the Hebrew of Malachi 3:1 would be, “Behold, I [Yahweh] am sending My messenger, and he will clear the way [road] before me.” In Mark, the verse has been modified so that the messenger prepares the road for the Messiah. Hence here in Mark the verse means, “Look!, I am sending my [Yahweh’s] messenger before your [the Messiah’s] face, who will prepare your [the Messiah’s] way.

This is not the only place two places in the OT are quoted but only one prophet is cited. For example, Matthew 27:9 and 10 come from Zechariah and Jeremiah, but only Jeremiah is quoted. This same pattern occurs in the OT in 2 Chronicles 36:21, which says it quotes Jeremiah, but actually quotes both Jeremiah and Leviticus. When God quotes two sources, but only gives credit to one, He is telling us where to place the emphasis in what he is quoting so there is no guesswork about it.
In light of the fact that the extended quotation comes from Malachi and then Isaiah, it is easy to see why copyists would change “Isaiah the prophet” to “in the prophets.” The earliest texts from both the Alexandrian and Western text families have Isaiah the prophet, and the change to “the prophets” is “an obvious correction” (Roger Omanson, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament*).

“Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“prepare the road.” See commentary on verse 3.

1:3. “Make the road ready for the Lord! Make his paths straight!” This quotation, which comes from Isaiah 40:3 (and the quotation in Matt. 3:3 and Luke 3:4) is from the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament. [For more information on the Septuagint and the original NT texts being in Greek, see commentary on Luke 3:4].

The word “road” is *hodos* (#3598 ὁδὸς). Like our English word “way,” it can refer to a road or path, or it can refer to a specific way of doing things. Many times, such as here, its primary meaning is “road,” and it is helpful to translate it that way.

In the Old Testament times (this verse is quoted from Isaiah, roughly 750 BC), there was not much attention paid to the condition of the roads in a country. Even in Roman times, usually only the very important central roadways, and the roads in cities, got any real attention. Nobody owned the roads, and nobody profited from spending time repairing them. It was just repeated use that made the terrain into dirt paths, some wider than others, that then were referred to as roads. Books on the customs of the Bible lands (especially those from the 1800’s or earlier), are replete with stories of the horrors of traveling on roads. They were full of pits, or rocky, or had overhanging foliage that could knock a rider off a mount. They were dark at night and slippery when wet or frozen. They often ascended or descended quickly, and became very dangerous if the conditions were less than ideal. Often thorn bushes grew near the road such that unwary travelers were scratched or had their clothing torn. Added to all this was that there were no road signs to tell travelers where they were, or what road to take if they came to a crossroads. This caused a lot of anxiety to travelers, who did not want to waste time going the wrong way, and could be quite dangerous if the road went to an area that was inhabited by robbers. When Jesus said, “I am the road,” (usually translated, “I am the way”), he was being clear that if a person did not want to get lost trying to get to God, that Jesus was the road to travel on.

When a king (or sometimes a high official) was going to go on a journey, he would send out messengers before he traveled. They would announce to the farmers and villagers who lived close to the road to take the time to go out and prepare it to make the king’s trip easier. The villagers would clear the rock and bushes, fill in ruts and pits, and generally make the road safer and easier to travel. “Make his paths straight” does not refer to taking winding sections of the road and re-routing them, although that might have been done on a small scale if the road went around something that was no longer an obstacle. The word “straight” can also mean “level,” and in this context refers to filling up the pits and holes that developed in the road so it was level and easy to ride on.

1:4. “John came baptizing...” There is a textual variation in this verse concerning whether or not John came baptizing or John the Baptizer came. Some versions read, “John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness” (ESV); while others read, “John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness,” (NRSV). The difference depends on the addition or deletion
of the single letter for the article ho, (#3588 ὁ), meaning “the.” It is most likely, however, that the ho is not original and the preferred reading is “John came baptizing.” The reason for this is that John is frequently elsewhere called John the Baptist, but never John the Baptist. This leads credence to viewing the participle “Baptizing” as descriptive of John’s action and not a title (Cp. Metzger, Textual Commentary).

“A baptism that symbolized repentance.” The Greek word translated “repentance” is, metanoia (#3341 μετανοια), and it means to change one’s mind, and therefore life and lifestyle. It is ceasing thinking and doing things that are contrary to God, and instead thinking and behaving in the way that is in obedience to God.

“repentance” is in the genitive case, so literal translation is: “baptism of repentance.” Daniel Wallace points out that the genitive is so ambiguous that it can have many meanings, and therefore he says, “it may well be best to be non-committal: ‘baptism that is somehow related to repentance’” (Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, p. 80). While Wallace’s statement is accurate, it is unsatisfying. It leaves us with the same problem we started with, which is that we do not know the meaning of the phrase. We should be able to draw a conclusion about the meaning of the genitive from the scope of Scripture. Of course, the denominations vary greatly about their interpretation of the scope of Scripture, and the scholars do also. On one extreme, for example, is saying the genitive is one of production, so the meaning would be “a baptism that produces repentance.” We assert that the baptism did not produce the repentance, or “complete” it in any way, except perhaps cementing in the mind of the person who had been baptized that since he had made a public declaration before God and people, he better honor his vow and life a godly lifestyle.

In his list of possible interpretations, Wallace himself gives what may be the best way to understand and translate this verse and the concept behind it: “baptism that symbolized repentance.” In the same way that animal sacrifice was a symbol that pointed to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ, water baptism and washing rituals were part of the Old Testament and pointed to and symbolized the coming of the greater baptism, which was baptism in holy spirit. Many Old Testament prophets foretold the coming of the spirit, which they universally said would be poured out from heaven (Isa. 32:15, 44:3; Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28, 29; Zech. 12:10). Then, John the Baptist was the first person we know of to refer to that pouring out as “baptism,” and then Jesus also referred to the pouring out of the holy spirit upon people as a “baptism” in the holy spirit (Matt. 3:11; Acts 1:5).

A number of translators and scholars have seen that the genitive in this sentence is a genitive of relation, and the relation that best is being expressed is that when a person repents before God, he demonstrates that repentance by a public ceremony of baptism. Thus the outward act of water baptism symbolized the inner act of going from the old to the new, or from death to life, in the heart. C. S. Mann writes: “An alternative rendering of this Semitism would be, ‘A baptism which symbolized repentance’” (The Anchor Bible: Mark). F. Grant writes: “This baptism was the symbol of repentance” (The Interpreter’s Bible). Walter Wessel writes: the baptism indicated the repentance had already occurred of was being accompanied by it” (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary; F. Gaebelein general editor). Ann Nyland translates the last part of Mark 1:4 as: He [John] preached that people should be baptized as a symbol that they had changed their minds, and this resulted in their sins being cancelled” (The Source NT). Charles Williams translates: “a baptism conditioned on repentance” (The NT in the Language of the
People). *The New Testament in Modern English* by J. B. Phillips translates the last part of the verse: John came... “proclaiming baptism as the mark of a complete change of heart and of the forgiveness of sins.”

**“repentance resulting in the remission of sins.”** The Greek word *eis*, here translated as “resulting in,” has many meanings, primarily purpose or result. The translation in most versions, “for” is somewhat ambiguous although accurate. A major theme in the Bible is that if a person will repent he will be forgiven. Over and over God tells people that if they will humble themselves and come to Him for forgiveness, he will indeed forgive them (1 John 1:9 is very clear, but also see such verses as: Neh. 9:7; Ps. 32:5; 103:11-13; Prov. 28:13; Jer. 5:1; 36:3; Luke 6:37). There is no place where God says something such as: “If you confess your sin I will consider forgiving you.”

The *eis* can be translated “because,” a less frequent but very valid meaning of *eis* (cp. Wuest, *Word Studies*). In that case, people were baptized as a symbol because their sins had been forgiven. However, that is actually just another way of understanding the *eis* as a result clause—it would be saying the people were baptized because their repentance led to remission. That concept can be worded as a result clause, as we have in the REV: “baptism that symbolized repentance resulting in the remission of sins.” In other words, the people were baptized as a symbol that they had repented, a repentance which had, as always, resulted in the remission of their sin.

The people came to John to be baptized so they could enter the Kingdom of God. As they stood by John they confessed their sins and repented. That confession and repentance resulted in their sins being forgiven (remitted), and John baptized them as a symbol of that repentance and forgiveness. Ann Nyland translates the phrase: “baptized as a symbol that they had changed their minds, and this resulted in their sins being cancelled” (*The Source NT*).

1:5. **“the whole country of Judea, and all Jerusalem.”** A good example of oriental hyperbole (exaggeration). Not everyone went to John to be baptized, but a great many did.

1:8. **“in holy spirit.”** There is no definite article. This holy spirit is the gift of God. (cp. Matt 3:10). [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

1:10. **“immediately as he was stepping up.”** The words in many versions, “coming up out of the water,” do not make it clear that the Greek text of Matthew and Mark do not refer to Jesus breaking the surface of the water of the Jordan, but rather to him walking out of the water, up the bank, and away from the river after the baptism was completed. The Greek text of Mark reads, *anabainōn ek tou hudatos* (ἀναβαίνων ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος), “coming up out of the water,” where the word “ek” means “out of,” in the sense that he was getting “out of” the water, not standing in it. The water was below the level of the bank, as it is in all rivers, so in order to get out of the water, Jesus had to “come up” out of the Jordan. We need to become clear about the fact that someone standing waist deep in water is not “out of” the water, but very much in it. However, the text says that Jesus was coming “out of” the water.

The Gospel of Matthew makes the action of Jesus crystal clear, especially when combined with Mark. Matthew 3:16 reads, *anebē apo tou hudatos* (ἀνέβη ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕδατος), “he came up away from the water.” This is the same basic vocabulary as Mark but inflected differently, except Matthew uses the preposition *apo*, “away from,” not *ek,*
“out of.” Thus while Mark says Jesus was coming “out of” the water, Matthew emphasized that he was moving “away from” it, walking up the bank and away from the Jordan River.

The Greek word anabainō (#305 ἀναβαίνω) means “to go up,” “to come up,” and so saying, like many English versions, that Jesus “was coming up” out of the water is a very literal translation, and the REV could have used the translation “coming up from” in Mark, and “coming away from,” in Matthew. However, these translations are too often misinterpreted to mean that Jesus was still in the Jordan River with John when the heavens opened, so given the context, saying he “was stepping up” out of the water is a very acceptable translation, especially in light of the fact that it exactly describes what he was doing. It is also the translation preferred by Hendrickson (New Testament Commentary). The noted commentator R. C. H. Lenski writes:

“The descent of the Spirit occurred after the baptism had been completed, while Jesus was walking up onto the bank of the river. We should not picture it as the artists do, as though it occurred while Jesus was being baptized or while he was standing knee-deep in the water. Matthew 3:16 has apo, Jesus went away from the water; Mark has ek...Jesus stepped out of (ek) the water onto the bank and walked away from (apo) the water up the bank” (The Interpretation of St. Mark’s Gospel).

But why is it important to know that John’s baptism was finished and Jesus was walking away on the bank of the river? After being baptized by John, Jesus was truly ready to start his own ministry as the Messiah apart from the ministry of John or anyone else. By making it clear that the baptism of John was over and Jesus had left John, we can clearly see that the heavenly vision and voice were not connected with John, but were specifically and individually to Jesus (cp. notes on Matt. 3:16 by W. Davies, and D. Allison, The International Critical Commentary). It is appropriate that God would put holy spirit upon Jesus just as he started off to do his own ministry, and not as he was standing in the water with John, as if the two ministries were somehow related. The work of the Messiah could only have been done by the one man, the true Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Another time people stepped up and out of the Jordan was in Acts 8:38 and 39, when Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch. Acts makes the getting into and out of the water of the Jordan River a little more clear because it speaks of them both getting in the water and coming back up from it. We can mentally picture them as they “went down into the water,” getting out of the chariot, walking down the bank into the water, and then Philip baptizing the eunuch. Then Acts 8:39 says they “came up out of the water” (“stepped up out of the water;” REV) coming up the bank and back toward the chariot, at which point Philip was miraculously transported away from there to Azotus (the Ashdod of the OT). [For more, see commentary on Matthew 3:16; Acts 8:39].

1:11. “You are my beloved Son.” The verb in this phrase, translated “are,” is in the present tense and is ontological: it is declaring who Jesus is. The second phrase is God declaring that He is pleased with Jesus, which makes perfect sense because Jesus had prepared himself through his life and now was ready to step into his public ministry.

Some people have tried to say that Jesus somehow “became” the Son when he received holy spirit, but that argument fails on a number of points. Grammatically it fails because to state that Jesus became the Son at his baptism, the text should say, “You have become my Son.” God uses the present tense verb in 1:11, and He uses the present tense
verb again at the Transfiguration, when He says, “This is my beloved Son” (Mark 9:7). Both statements are ontological, stating a fact. There is no evidence that either is announcing a change that had occurred.

It also fails because Jesus had been called the “Son” before his baptism, based on his birth and that God was his Father (cp. Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:32, 35; John 1:14). It also fails because what happened at the Baptism was that Jesus received the gift of holy spirit, but there is no other change than that recorded about him. However, Moses, Joshua, and the prophets of the Old Testament all had the gift of holy spirit put upon them, and there is no evidence that then made them “Sons” of God.

1:13. “being tempted.” The Bible does not record what these temptations were, but they certainly included hunger and danger from wild animals. The Bible records that at the end of the forty days the Devil himself came and tempted Jesus (Matt. 4:3).

“the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς). The term means “Adversary,” and it was borrowed from the Aramaic, Satana (ךָתָנָא) which originally referred to one who laid in ambush [as an adversary], and then became used as a proper name meaning “Adversary” (see Vocabulary of the Greek NT, by Moulton & Milligan). The word “satan” means “adversary” in all the biblical languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, although sometimes it is used just as “an adversary,” and sometimes, especially with the article, it is used as an appellative, a name, for the Devil. Being an adversary to God and the things of God is a major part of the Devil’s character and strategy. “Satan” can refer to the direct work of the Devil as in Job 1, or it can refer to indirect work as in Matthew 4:10 when Jesus called Peter “Satan.” Usually the word “Satan” places the emphasis on the indirect work of the Devil. As the great adversary of the true God, the Adversary is the indirect cause of people’s problems by way of situations or circumstances or other people, which he arranges and controls. He is the influence of these situations, circumstances, and people. It has been generally unhelpful that satanas has been transliterated as “Satan” rather than translated as “Adversary.” Anyone reading Hebrew or Greek knew what the word meant, but almost no Christian knows that “Satan” is not just a name, it is a word that became used as a name, and its meaning, Adversary, is important. For information of the names of the Devil and their meanings, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

“were ministering.” The Greek verb is diakoneō (#1247 διακονέω), and it is in the imperfect tense, thus indicating an action in the past which occurred over a period of time. Although a number of commentators state that they believe that Satan had already left Jesus’ presence when the angels came, that does not seem to be the sense of the Greek text or a simple reading of the verse itself. The flow of the verse clearly seems to indicate that the angels were with him at times while he was in the desert, just as the wild animals were. If we read the verse as it stands, the wild animals were certainly with Jesus during his time in the desert, and the verse simply continues on and says that the angels were ministering to him, as if they also were there at times during his temptation in the desert. Jesus’ desert experience would have been like life: the hardships of life (the desert), the presence of physical enemies (the wild animals), the hordes of Satan (including Satan himself), and God’s angels, all around one man who needed to resist temptation and walk in wisdom and power. There is no reason to believe that the presence of angels somehow meant that Jesus was not really tempted. For one thing, it is unlikely that the angels were there all the time, any more than he was constantly
surrounded by wild animals. They would likely come and go. Also, the angels did not keep Jesus from being tempted, but their presence helped remind Jesus how much was at stake in his living a sinless life.

The Word specifically says that it was the Spirit, God, who led Jesus into the desert (Matt. 4:1; Luke 4:1). The Gospel of Mark is even more forceful, saying that the Spirit “drove” Jesus into the desert (Mark 1:12). But why? Why the need to be in the desert? It surely makes a parallel between Jesus in the desert and Moses and Israel in the desert. Jesus was 40 days in the desert fasting just as Moses was 40 days fasting on Mt. Sinai (Moses was there twice: Exod. 24:18; 34:28), and Israel was 40 years in the desert. There was an angel of the Lord in the desert who helped Israel in its wanderings (Exod. 14:19; 23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2) and so too Jesus had angelic support. It was Moses’ and Israel’s disobedience in the desert that led to the death of a generation of Israelites, the deaths of Israel’s great leaders, and by dividing the Twelve Tribes to both sides of the Jordan River, put an end to the vision of a united Israel in the Promised Land. In contrast, Jesus’ obedience in the wilderness, and his resisting physical, mental, and spiritual temptation, contributed to his being able to restore and give life to the nation of Israel once again.

1:14. “Good News of God.” The words “of the kingdom” were added by copyists, to conform this verse to many others that appear in the Four Gospels. This is the only use of “Good News of God” in the Gospels, and from the context it is clear that it does indeed refer to the Good News of the Kingdom.

1:21. “Capernaum.” Capernaum would become Jesus’ home town when he left Nazareth. [For more information, see commentary on Mark 2:1].

1:24. “What do we have in common with you.” See commentary on Matthew 8:29.

1:25. “subdued.” Verse 25 has a couple words that have technical meanings relating to Greek magical arts (which we understand is actually part of the spiritual battle), that we must pay attention to in order to understand the verse. In every language, there are words that have a technical meaning as well as having a standard or usual meaning. In this verse, the Greek word translated “subdued” is epitimaō (#2008 ἐπιτιµάω), which usually means to express strong disapproval of someone: rebuke, reprove, censure; or to speak seriously, and thus warn in order to prevent or end an action; or “punish” (cp. BDAG Lexicon).

That is not its meaning here, however. For one thing, the demon would not respond to being “rebuked.” It is too arrogant to know, or it does not care, that it is doing evil. Jesus would have certainly followed the wisdom of Proverbs: “a mocker does not listen to rebuke” (Prov. 13:1. Cp. Prov. 9:7, 8; 15:5, 12; 17:10; 23:9; 29:9). In this context, epitimaō is used in the technical sense in which it is in Greek religion of gaining control over a spirit, a demon.

The technical sense is not common in the Greek literature that has survived to this day, and so does not show up in many Greek lexicons (cp. Bullinger, BDAG, Thayer, and Vine). That fact helps explains why not many Bible teachers are aware of the technical use of the word that refers to subduing rival powers in the spiritual battle between good and evil. Robert Guelich (Word Biblical Commentary: Mark) translates the opening phrase of verse 25: “Jesus subdued him....” and notes that in contexts like these, epitimaō is “a commanding word uttered by God or by his spokesman, by which evil powers are brought into submission.” (cp. A. Nylan, The Source NT). Greg Boyd writes: “...the term
denotes an authoritative exercise of God’s power in subduing his enemies. It accomplishes what it speaks” (*God at War*; p. 207).

*Epitimaō* also occurs in the records of Jesus “rebuking” the storm on the Sea of Galilee, after which there was a great calm (Matt. 8:26; Mark 4:39; Luke 8:24). Jesus subdued the storm by superior spiritual power. Greg Boyd writes: “It thus appears that, in “muzzling” this storm, Jesus is muzzling yet another demon” (*God at War*; p. 206). It seems clear that the storm was caused by a demon. Many of Jesus’ apostles who were with him on the boat when the storm came up were experienced fishermen and would not have risked their lives if the weather looked threatening. The Devil was trying to take advantage of Jesus being in a supposedly vulnerable position and kill him or the apostles by drowning them.

In the spiritual battle there are some spirits that are more powerful than others. Strength and authority are real among spiritual beings, just as they are real on earth among creatures of the flesh. In Daniel 10:1-13 there is a spiritual battle in which an angel of God is prevented by a demon from answering Daniel’s prayer until a stronger angel shows up and assists in the fight. Revelation 12:7-9 describe a war in heaven in which the Devil is the weaker one and loses the fight, resulting in his being thrown down to earth.

Describing the spiritual battle, or any spiritual reality for that matter, is difficult. Therefore the Bible uses vocabulary that describes the spiritual battle that the Greeks would be familiar with—sorcerer against sorcerer and god against god—so the people could understand that Jesus was subduing evil spirits by using greater spiritual power. Jesus wielded the power of the true God, and thus was able to subdue the demon by that power, expressed through words. Jesus did not gain control over the demon by virtue of some “magic words” or formula that he used, as if he was some sort of Greek sorcerer. “It is not a magical incantation...it is powerful Word of the Son” (Gerhard Kittle, *Theological Dictionary*, ἐπιτιµάω Vol. 2, p. 626). The power came from God and was used by Jesus, who then instructed the Twelve Apostles (Matt. 10:5-8), and the Seventy Two (Luke 10:1-17) in casting out demons in the spiritual battle. Every Christian has the inherent power through the gift of holy spirit to subdue and cast out demons.

**“Be bound.”** As with the word “subdued” (Mark 1:25 above), the Greek word *phimoō* (#5392 φιµόω) has a technical meaning in this context that relates to the spiritual battle. Ordinarily *phimoō* means to close the mouth with a muzzle or to silence. For example, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain” (1 Cor. 9:9). However, it was used in Greek magic to denote the binding of a person with a spell. Moulton and Milligan write that it can refer to “the binding of a person by means of a spell, so as to make him powerless to harm” (*The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*. Cp. Ann Nyland, *The Source NT*; footnote on Matt. 22:12 and her translation: “Be bound!”).

While it is true that the translation, “Be quiet” or “Silence,” which most versions have, is part of the meaning, the real force of the command, *phimoō*, is about binding the power of evil. Thus, the Greek conveys a spiritual power which binds evil that is much better expressed by the command “Be bound,” than it is by the English, “Silence,” which does not convey any of the spiritual binding of evil that is the real point of the command. Jesus did not just command the demon to be quiet—although that is included in what he did—he bound it with the power of his word. That he commanded the demons not to speak can be gained from the sense of the word, the context, and scope of Scripture, as
we see in verse 34. Another indication that Jesus’ command was not an immediate
demand for silence was that the demon came out with a shriek. If Jesus had in fact
commanded by the power of God that there be “silence,” the demon would not have even
shrieked.

1:27. “so amazed that.” The Greek reads more literally, “amazed so that,” using ἠστε
(#5620 ὡστε) to indicate the result of the amazement. We would not typically say that
people were amazed so that an argument arose, we would say that they were so amazed
that an argument arose. A more literal translation might be: “they were amazed, resulting
in an argument” or, “they were amazed, therefore an argument arose.”

1:32. “they brought to him everyone.” This verse shows the great dedication the people
of the time had for obeying the Law, and it sets a great example for us. The day being
spoken of, that had just ended, was a Sabbath, as we learn from Mark 1:29. On the
Sabbath people could not walk very far (a Sabbath day’s journey” was just over ½ mile
or .8 km), and they could not carry a burden, so carrying a sick person could not be done.
If the people did not put the Law above their own desires, they would have said, “Forget
the Law! I need help now!” and they would have ignored the Law and brought the sick to
Jesus as fast as possible. The fact that they waited until sundown to bring the sick to Jesus
shows their dedication to God and the Law.

1:41. “touched.” The Greek verb is ἁπτό (#681 ἁπτῶ), a word that has two distinct
meanings. It properly means “to fasten to, make adhere to; hence, specifically to fasten
fire to a thing, to kindle, set on fire, (often so in Attic Greek); cp. Luke 8:16; 11:33; 15:8.
However, when it is used in the middle voice (hapto; #680 ἃπτοµαι) it means “to
make close contact with,” and has a very wide range of applications. It can mean, touch,
take hold of, hold; cling to; to have contact with, or partake of something with cultic
implications, (often used of touching as a means of conveying a blessing or “touching” or
partaking of an unclean thing, including eating, almost like we would say, “you have not
touched your food”); it can be used almost idiomatically for intimate touch, sexual
contact (1 Cor. 7:1; we use “touch” the same way today); and it can be used for contact
with someone with a view to causing harm, i.e., injure (Job 5:19 LXX, “no evil shall
touch you.”) (BDAG; Thayer).

In this verse, there is little doubt that Jesus did more than just make a light
physical contact with the leper. He would have at the very least placed his hands on him
as any priest or healer would do to convey a blessing. He may have even gone so far as to
hug the leper, but that is less probable, especially given the culture and cultural
expectations of both the leper and the people.

On a lexical note, there is some confusion that can occur when studying haptó
because most lexicographers recognize it as one Greek verb that has different definitions
in different voices, something not uncommon. Nevertheless, James Strong, author of
Strong’s concordance, assigned a different Strong’s number to hapto, the middle
voice of the verb. Thus there appears to be two words in Strong’s Concordance and The
Englishman’s Greek Concordance, but only one word in Thayer and most other Greek
lexicons.

1:44. “See that you say nothing to anyone.” Jesus often said this when he healed
people. (cp. Matt. 9:30, blind men; Mark 7:36, a deaf person; Luke 8:56, a dead girl). On
the other hand, he told some of the people he healed to spread the news (cp. Mark 5:19).
The reason Jesus told people to not talk about their healing is never explicitly stated, and
there are likely various reasons for it. One reason would be the often infectious doubt and unbelief that comes from scoffers who hear of the deliverance which could adversely affect the person who was healed. Another reason would be the personal privacy of the individual, who would often be immediately elevated to “movie star status” in their community, as happened to Lazarus. Still another reason would be likely especially in cases such as this healing, the need for Jesus to not be thought of as “unclean” or worse, as “contagious,” in his culture. Touching a leper made the person unclean (Lev. 15:7), and since the cause of leprosy was unknown, not only were people with leprosy scrupulously avoided, but no doubt sometimes people who touched lepers were looked upon with suspicion and avoided.

“as a testimony to them.” Jesus’ healing the leper would be one more testimony that he was the Messiah. However, the Greek wording can, and often is, understood in a negative sense, “as a testimony against them” (see Robert Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary: Mark*). The priests were against Jesus, and their not seeing the miracles that he did as proof of who he claimed to be was against them.

### Chapter 2

#### 2:1. “at home.” The Greek phrase is *en oikos*, and it does not mean “in a house” or “in the house,” as if it was Peter’s house. The phrases *en oikos* and *eis oikos* (Mark 3:20) are standard Greek phrases or idioms equivalent to our “at home.” Jesus moved to Capernaum after the people of his hometown, Nazareth, tried to kill him (Luke 4:29-31; cp. Matt. 4:13). Jesus either bought or rented a house in Capernaum, because John 2:12 indicates he even moved his family there. Shortly after Jesus moved to Capernaum, it became known as his “own city” (Matt. 9:1).

According to Mark 2:1, Jesus was “at home” when the people crowded his house to such a degree that men had to let a paralyzed man down through the roof (2:4). This was one of the times that the amazing love and compassion that Jesus had for people was clearly visible, because he was much more concerned about the man and amazed by the trust in God those men had than he was concerned about any damage that was done to his house, which was no doubt repaired reasonably quickly.

One of the reasons Jesus likely picked to move to Capernaum was that it was on the Via Maris, the “Road of the Sea,” which was the great trade route from Egypt in the south to Damascus in Syria and on to Mesopotamia (see commentary on Matt. 4:15). The fact that the Via Maris passed by Capernaum helps explain why that city had a centurion, which meant having Roman troops stationed in town, and a tollhouse so revenue could be collected from the passing caravans (Matt. 2:14). Capernaum was thus a cosmopolitan town with much commerce and opportunity. No wonder, Jesus was so disappointed at the overall reception he got in Capernaum, despite the fact the people were so proud of their town and Jesus referred to it as “exalted.” So many people, yet such a small group of them really believed. Thus he said, “And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will go down to the grave, for if the mighty works had been done in Sodom that were done in you, it would have remained until this day.”
Jesus Christ chose Capernaum to be his home town after he left Nazareth; he chose a cosmopolitan town where there would be plenty of opportunity to share the Word and reach others, as well as opportunity for others to more easily reach him.

2:4. “uncovered the roof.” This record contains an unspoken lesson in ministry and life that is important to learn. Jesus was teaching the Word of God to the crowd, as verse 2 says. He was interrupted by this man and his friends who very badly wanted the man healed. The word of God does not tell us about what Jesus was teaching, it tells us about him be interrupted and changing direction to take care of the man and teach the crowd and Pharisees about what is really important and about his authority on earth. The unspoken lesson has to do with interruptions. Although we generally do not to be interrupted from something we are doing, we should look to see if there is an opportunity to do God’s work when we are interrupted, rather than just being annoyed or always assuming that interruptions are from the Devil.

2:7. “He speaks defaming words.” The Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημέω) is transliterated (not translated) from the Greek into English as “blasphemy.” In English, “blasphemy” is only used in reference to God. However, in Greek, blasphēmeō and blasphēmia (the noun) did not have to refer to God or a god, although they could, but were common words that were used of someone speaking against another. The primary meanings were showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. In this case, the religious leaders thought it was insulting to God’s reputation that Jesus would forgive sins. [For more information on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

“Who is able to forgive sins but God alone?” The religious leaders thought that by forgiving sins, Jesus was harming the reputation of God, who was alone thought to be able to forgive sins. It is important that we realize the Bible never says only God can forgive sins. The rabbis taught that, but that does not make it true: it was just their tradition. In truth, only God can forgive sins, but God’s representatives, to whom God delegates the authority to forgive sins, can forgive them, or declare that they are forgiven if they get the revelation to make that declaration.

The religious leaders were used to prophets speaking for God, but not forgiving sins, although they should have been open to that. Nathan came very close when he said to David, “Yahweh also hath put away thy sin” (2 Sam. 12:13; Rotherham), and the author/agent aspect of the Hebrew language and culture would have allowed Nathan to say, “Your sin has been forgiven.” It should be especially clear to us that God delegated to Jesus the authority to forgive sins, because Jesus taught that very explicitly. “For the Father does not judge anyone, but he has given all judgment to the Son….I am not able to do anything on my own. As I hear, I judge. And my judgment is righteous because I do not seek my own will, but the will of him who sent me” (John 5:22, 30).

Forgiving sins, or knowing that one’s sins have been forgiven, is essential to having a peaceful life. Great anxiety, and both mental and physical sickness, can come from feeling unforgiven and in danger of judgment. Jesus knew that, and loved the man in the record and told him his sins were forgiven, which opened the door for the person to be healed. Experience tells us that many times people are not healed because they do not think they are forgiven, or they do not forgive others.

Jesus’ action in stating that the man’s sins were forgiven were not meant to prove that he was God, rather, it is to show that God “has given [Jesus] authority to execute
judgment, because he is the Son of Man” (John 5:27). Notice that the onlookers were amazed that such authority had been given to men. They did not conclude from what Jesus did that he must be God. They drew the simple conclusion that God must have given authority to this man to forgive sins. Elsewhere, Jesus delegates the authority to the apostles saying, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld” (John 20:23). If being given the authority to forgive sins means the person is God, then we should conclude the apostles were God also. But this is surely absurd. Instead we should acknowledge that the authority ultimately comes from God who has given it to people.

2:9. “Which is easier?” Which is easier to say and accomplish, declaring someone’s sins are forgiven, or divine healing? They are equally easy. See commentary on Luke 5:23.

2:14. “Levi.” This is another name for the Apostle Matthew.

2:15. “his house.” Matthew’s house. Luke 5:29 makes it clear that it is Matthew’s house (Matthew is called Levi in Mark 2:13-17, and Luke 5:27-30). Matthew was a tax collector, and so it makes sense that his friends were tax collectors and “sinners,” which is why so many people like that were at the dinner. [For more information see commentary on Matthew 9:10].

2:16. “and drinks,” which appears in many versions, was added by copyists, prob. to harmonize with Luke 5:30. There is strong evidence that it is not original.


2:26. “Abiathar.” The name “Abiathar” is questioned because in the record in 1 Samuel 21:1-9, Ahimelech is the priest. Although many commentators simply assume Mark made a mistake, we believe the Word of God is “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16), and that “Abiathar” is not a mistake. There are several ways this apparent contradiction might be solved. One of them is that both men may have been referred to by both names. That would be one good explanation why 1 Samuel 22:20 refers to Abiathar as the son of Ahimelech, but 2 Samuel 8:17; 1 Chronicles 18:16; 2 and 4:6 refer to Ahimelech as the son of Abiathar. It was quite common for someone to be referred to by different names. But it also has been suggested that Abiathar had a son named Ahimelech who was a priest, and that could explain the Old Testament verses that seem to switch the names. Another solution, frankly, a more likely one, is that both Ahimelech and Abiathar were present when David came. It is even possible that due to Ahimelech’s age Abiathar had started to take on the duties of the priesthood and Mark recognized him for that. That would be similar to the position of Annas and Caiaphas at the time of the ministry of Christ. Annas was the elder and still called High Priest, but Caiaphas was the man actually running the priesthood and he is also called High Priest. But even if that was not the case, we know it was common for priestly families to live together, just like Eli did with his sons (cp. 1 Sam. 2:12ff), and the city of Nob had at least 85 priests (1 Sam. 22:17). When Doeg the Edomite killed 85 priests, Ahimelech was killed and Abiathar escaped and went to David (1 Sam. 22:20), and became High Priest under David. This could be why Mark says that David entered the house of God “in the days of Abiathar” (KJV; NIV), or “in the time of Abiathar” (ESV; NASB). Since Abiathar would have taken over the priesthood de facto as soon as his father died, David did in fact enter the house of God “in the days of Abiathar,” the well-known High Priest under David.
Chapter 3

3:3. “Stand up in the midst of the people.” Christ told the man to stand up in the middle of the crowd. The healing would be performed by a word, not by a touch. He did not ask the man to come up front, but healed him in the middle of the crowd, right where he was.

3:4. “life.” The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-kay’), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. [For a more complete explanation of psuchē, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”]

3:9. “crush.” The Greek thlibō (#2346 θλίβω) is to press (as grapes), press hard upon (Thayer, Lexicon). The versions are split between “press upon” and “crush,” but the people were already pressing upon him (v. 10). He wanted to be sure they did not crush him.

3:16. “Peter.” Jesus continues the tradition of God and other ancient rulers by changing the names of those whom he rules. Historically, changing someone’s name might be done to prove your power over someone, but Jesus would not have done it if Peter, James and John were not sold out to him. Notice that he does not change Judas’ name. Cp. Gen. 17:5 and 15; 32:28; 2 Sam. 12:24 and 25; Jer. 20:3; Gen. 41:45; 2 Chron. 36:4; 2 Kings 24:17; Daniel 1:7).

3:19. “into his home.” The Greek phrase is eis oikos, and it does not mean “into a house” or “into the house,” as if it was Peter’s house. The phrases eis oikos and en oikos (Mark 2:1) are standard Greek phrases or idioms equivalent to our “at home” [For more information see commentary on Mark 2:1].

3:21. “those who were close to him.” The Greek is para (#3844 παρά), a preposition usually meaning “beside.” Thus the book of Mark is vague here, saying only that these people were those who were beside him. This is a case when we have to rely on other parallel records to give the details, and we learn what happened from the scope of Scripture. Matthew 12:46 and Luke 8:19 let us know that this group of people is his mother and brothers. This verse is a clear indication that Jesus’ step-father, Joseph, was dead, otherwise he would have been leading the group. That means Joseph died between the time Jesus was 12 (Luke 2:42) and the time he started his ministry. He had worked with his father, the carpenter, and had become a carpenter himself (Mark 6:3). This group “set out” to take him. They arrive in verse 31.

3:22. “Beelzebul.” The Greek is Beelzeboul (#954 Βεελζεβούλ), which gets put into English as “Beelzebul.” He is called the “prince of demons” in Luke 12:10. “Beelzeboul” is “lord of the dunghill.” This comes from the Hebrew zebul (dung, a dunghill). [For more on the name Beelzebul and other names of the Slanderer (the Devil), see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”]

The versions differ as to whether this is one statement by the scribes, or two statements. The context seems to support two statements, because it says they “were saying…,” so there was a lot of talking going on.
“the ruler of the demons.” This phrase is used in part to describe Beelzebul, in the first part of the verse, so from it one thing we know is that the Jews were considering Beelzebul to be the ruler of the demons or to us, another name for the Slanderer (Devil). The Greek word translated “ruler” is archon (#758 ἄρχων), which is from archē, “first,” and it means the one who is first, thus the “ruler, commander, chief,” etc. [For more on the names of the Slanderer, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

3:23. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

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3:27. “binds.” The word “bind” (deō) was a common word for bind, and one of its uses was “to describe the ‘binding’ power of curses” (Moulton and Milligan, Vocabulary of the Greek NT). The context is the casting out of demons (v. 28), so the “binding” in this verse refers to binding a demon and making it powerless by the power of God. See commentary on Matthew 12:29.

3:28. “defaming talk...defame.” The Greek noun blasphēmia (#988 βλασφημία) and the verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημέω) are transliterated (not translated) from the Greek into English as “blasphemy.” In English, “blasphemy” is only used in reference to God. However, in Greek, blasphēmeō and blasphēmia (the noun) did not have to refer to God or a god, although they could, but were common words that were used of someone speaking against another. The primary meanings were showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3]. The two uses of “defame” in this verse inflected differently is the figure of speech polyptoton. See Bullinger’s Figures of Speech Used in the Bible.


“the Holy Spirit.” “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].


3:32. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

Chapter 4

4:1. “facing the lake.” The crowd was on the land, and Jesus was in the boat on the Sea of Galilee, so the crowd was “facing the lake.” (cp. Lenski).

“Listen!” The Greek is akouō (#191 ἀκούω), which means to hear, to listen, or to understand, and it is in the imperative mood. Coupled with idou (“Pay attention!”) it is an extremely powerful way to say that we better pay attention to what Jesus is saying in the parable.

“Pay attention!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

4:9. “Anyone who has ears to hear had better listen!” This is almost the same Greek phrase as occurs in Matthew 11:15, and for an explanation of the exclamation, see the commentary on that verse. This verse is longer, reading, “Anyone who has ears to hear had better listen,” while the occurrences in Matthew read, “Anyone who has ears had better listen!”

4:11. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 µυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

4:12. Quoted from Isaiah 6:9, 10. Some texts such as the Byzantine Text from which the KJV was translated, read “of sins” at the end of the verse, but scholars are now aware that this is an explanatory gloss that worked its way into the text.

“so that…” For this quotation from Isaiah and the purpose of parables, see commentary on Matthew 13:13. The “so that” is the Greek word hina plus the verb in the subjunctive mood, which shows this to be a purpose-result clause: see entry on Matthew 2:15, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.” To fully understand this passage, we must see how Matthew’s record portrays the human side of the events, John’s the spiritual side, and Mark and Luke’s records combine the two into one.

4:15. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

4:23. “Anyone who has ears to hear had better listen!” This is the same Greek phrase as occurs in Mark 4:9 (see commentary there), and almost the same Greek phrase as occurs in Matthew 11:15. For an explanation of the exclamation, see the commentary on that Matthew 11:15. Jesus emphasized his teaching that everything we do will be disclosed on Judgment day with this solemn command and warning.

4:31. “mustard seed.” For more information on this parable, see commentary on Matthew 13:32.

4:36. “just as he was.” This is a very important verse that shows us how hard Jesus pushed himself to serve and bless people. He was exhausted from serving. That is why he went right to sleep in the boat. The Devil knew he was exhausted, and tried to kill him off, thinking he might be too weak to really defend himself and calm the storm.

4:39. “having fully awakened.” In v. 38 he was awakened, the verb in v. 39 is stronger. He was not “sleepy” or “just coming to his senses” as so many do when they are awakened. He became fully awake.
“subdued.” In this context, *epitimaō* (#2008 ἐπιτιμάω) has a technical meaning: it is used in Greek religion of gaining control over a spirit, a demon. Jesus subdued the storm, which was no doubt caused by a demon, by the power of God he wielded, which he expressed in words. The power came from God and was used by Jesus. Jesus did not gain control over the storm by some “magic words” or formula that he used. “It is not a magical incantation...it is powerful Word of the Son” (Gerhard Kittle, *Theological Dictionary*, ἐπιτιμάω Vol. 2, p. 626). For a more complete explanation, see commentary on Mark 1:25.

“Hush!” The Greek *siopao* (#4623). “To refrain from speaking or making a sound, keep silent, say nothing, make no sound” (BDAG). Although this word gets translated “Peace” in many versions, it is not the standard word for peace.

“Be bound!” As with the word “subdued” (above), the Greek word *phimoō* (#5392 φιµόω) has a technical meaning in this context. Ordinarily *phimoō* means to close the mouth with a muzzle or to silence. However, it was used in Greek magic to denote the binding of a person with a spell. Moulton and Milligan write that it can refer to “the binding of a person by means of a spell, so as to make him powerless to harm” (*The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*. Cp. A. Nyland, *The Source NT*; footnote on Matt. 22:12 and her translation: “Be bound!”). The Greek conveys a spiritual power behind the command that the English, “Be still,” simply does not convey. Jesus did not just command the storm—and the demon causing it—to be still—he bound it with the power of his word. See commentary on Mark 1:25.

Chapter 5

5:3. “in the tombs.” The Greek word “in” (en) can be “in” or, as many versions, “among,” but since the hillsides of that area east of the Sea of Galilee are steep and have many cave-tombs, it is not likely he lived “among” the tombs. That would be akin to living on a hillside with some cave-tombs around. It is much more likely that he lived inside a cave-tomb, but what the state of dead bodies he would be around were we are not told. They could be rotting, or have turned to dust.


5:12. “Let us enter into them.” This is a command clause composed of *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood in Greek. See commentary on John 9:3, “let the works of God be revealed in him.”

5:23. “Come.” Lenski points out that in certain cases the Greek word *hina* [untranslated] simply introduces an imperative, not a purpose clause. Here, it is the imperative of prayer, which is why some versions, fill in the “ellipsis” with “I pray.”


5:28. “was saying.” She talked to herself (cp. Matt. 9:21) over and over.

5:34. “made you whole.” The Greek *sōzō*, in the context of sickness, is to be made whole or to be healed. In the context of everlasting life, it is to be “rescued, saved.”
“Go in peace.” Had Jesus simply let the woman take her healing and leave, she would likely have been wracked by guilt. Jesus knew not to let that happen, and in doing so set a wonderful example for us. We need to take care of people emotionally as well as physically.

“affliction.” The Greek mastix (#3148 μάστιξ) is literally a whip, and was used metaphorically of a whipping, affliction, disease, etc.

5:39. “sleeping.” The Greek verb is koimaō (#2837 κοιμάω), to fall asleep, to be asleep. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.

5:42. “for she was twelve years old.” This describes why she could walk even though she had been referred to as “little” in this and other Gospel records.

“amazed…with a great amazement.” This is the figure of speech polyptoton, the repetition of both noun and verb forms together (Bullinger, Figures of Speech). It highlights the degree of astonishment, they were greatly amazed.

Chapter 6

6:1. “his own city.” The context is clear that this is referring to Nazareth, even though he had moved to Capernaum, and that was now considered his home (see commentary on Mark 2:1).

6:2. “being done.” Present tense. Astonishingly, the people of Nazareth, who did not have trust in him, were able to admit that Jesus was doing miracles.

6:8. “staff.” In Matthew and Luke, it seems Jesus said not to take a staff. For the apparent contradiction, see commentary on Matthew 10:10.

6:14. “out from among the dead.” For an explanation of this phrase, see commentary on Romans 4:24.

6:15. “Elijah.” For information on why the people thought that Elijah would come, and why John the Baptist was called “Elijah,” see commentary on Matthew 17:10.

6:16. “whom I beheaded, has been raised.” The Greek is more emphatic than just, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.” The way it is written, Herod had no doubt that John was both dead (because he had killed John) and raised. Wuest says: “raised out from among those who were dead.”

6:20. “feared.” Better than “was afraid of” here because there is an element of holy awe with the fear.

“liked to listen to him.” The Greek we translate as “like to” is hēdeōs (#2234 ἕδεος; pronounced hay-de-ōs) and it means with pleasure, with delight, gladly. This shows that people can hear the Word of God taught and enjoy it, but not have it change their lives (see commentary on Mark 12:37).


6:33. “knew where they were going.” (Cp. Brown and Comfort Interlinear, and Lenski). It is not that the people “recognized them.” Jesus had just been with them. They knew both Jesus and the apostles well. And, had they been sensitive at all, they also would have known why he was leaving—to get some privacy. But they were selfish, and knowing where he would go to be alone, got there before he did.
"went before them." This, and the start of verse 34, which is translated in many versions as "came ashore" or something similar, creates a contradiction with John 6:3-5. The crowd was not waiting on the shore for Jesus. If it were, he would have seen the people long before he came ashore. John makes it clear that the crowd, even if it was ahead of Jesus and the group with him for a little while, eventually lagged behind. Thus, Jesus arrived with his disciples on the shore and spent some time with them before the crowd assembled. Jesus “came out” of his retreat and saw the multitude assembled, and had compassion on them.

6:45. “immediately he compelled.” The feeding of the five thousand (much more when you include the women and children who were there) is one of the few events that is recorded in all four Gospels. It is watershed time for Jesus Christ, and needs to be studied from all four Gospels to really understand it and what happened after it. After the feeding, the huge crowd became convinced that Jesus was their Messiah and they were going to come and take him by force and make him their king (John 6:14, 15). Jesus had to act swiftly to avoid a potential revolution which would have certainly also included charges against him by the Romans that he was a revolutionary, which would have no doubt landed him in prison.

As well as realizing the intent of the crowd, he recognized that his apostles were basically of the same mind as the crowd. They too were tired of Roman domination, Jewish perversion of religion, and the cares of the world, and they too were anxious for the Kingdom of God to come, which Jesus had been saying was at hand ever since he started his ministry. It was a very real possibility that the apostles could have been swept away with the emotion and conviction of the crowd and joined in the revolt. To prevent this, Jesus acted decisively. First, “immediately he compelled” his disciples to leave the scene (Matt. 14:22; Mark 6:45). He made them get into a boat and head west to Gennesaret (Matt. 14:34; Mark 6:53), and the next day they went from there a few miles northeast to Capernaum (John 6:59). Then he dealt with the crowd and sent it away (Matt. 14:23; Mark 6:45). This was not easy to do. The people had to be calmed down and convinced to leave. Mark 6:45 says Jesus “was sending” the crowd away, the verb being in the present tense, indicating the action was ongoing, taking some time. It was not as easy as saying, “Go home now.” Jesus worked with the people to convince them to leave.

Now finally alone, with no disciples and no crowds, Jesus went to a mountain to pray (Matt. 14:23; Mark 6:46; John 6:15). He needed wisdom and needed God’s help to keep his ministry on track, he needed to keep defeating the temptation to avoid the cross and try to become king immediately, and no doubt he prayed hard for his apostles that they would not be led away by false Messianic expectations. We get a glimpse of the wisdom and direction that God gave Jesus in his teaching and action when we read John 6:22-70, which occurred the day after the five thousand were fed (John 6:22). Jesus made a decisive shift in his ministry from just demonstrating the power of God for people and teaching them, to starting to require commitment from them (John 6:29, 53-58).

The reaction of the crowd was about the same then as it is today: most people talk about loving God and living the Word, but when you really require them to do it, they refuse. The people in Jesus’ audience said, “This is a hard saying: who is able to hear it?” (John 6:60), Even Jesus’ disciples grumbled about it (John 6:61). Jesus challenged his disciples about their unbelief, and many of them left (John 6:66). Jesus, most likely hurt and
angered by the selfishness of the crowd and many of the disciples, turned to the twelve and asked, “Will you also go away?” Thankfully, they did not.

There are many lessons that can be learned from this account. One is that people are selfish. They are now, and they always have been. Jesus did not convince them otherwise, and neither will we. We must do what Jesus did: work with the people who want to work and let the others go. Another lesson is to not allow ourselves to be tricked and trapped by worldly aspirations. No doubt Jesus would have loved to have come into his kingdom without the pain of rejection and crucifixion, but it was not the will, nor the way, of God. Selflessness, humility and giving are the godly way forward.

Another thing we can learn from the account is that sometimes quick and decisive action is needed to keep us out of trouble. Had Jesus not compelled the disciples to immediately leave the scene, he could have been fighting a battle on two fronts and had a hard time indeed. Another lesson is that prayer is essential for success. If Jesus needed to pray, surely we do too. One more thing we can learn is that the wisdom from God may be to change the direction of what you are doing. The result of what happened after Jesus’ great miracle, the potential revolt against Rome, and his hours of prayer was to change the direction of his ministry by adding that he require things from his disciples. This seemed to have the wrong effect because many disciples left, but the history of the early church shows us that those who stayed were tried and tested, and able to carry on the work of Christ after he ascended.

“toward Bethsaida.” Jesus sent them “toward” (the Greek is pros, “toward”) Bethsaida, which is nearer to Capernaum than they were on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, but the eventual destination was Capernaum (John 6:16). Bethsaida was almost a suburb of Capernaum, which was a major city, and site of a tax office and Roman troops, so for travel purposes, the names Bethsaida and Capernaum are synonymous. However, the boat landed at Gennesaret (see commentary on Matt. 14:34).

6:48. “fourth watch of the night.” The fourth watch of the night started at our 3 AM.

At the time of Christ, in both Jewish and Roman reckoning of time, the “day” was divided into 12 hours (John 11:9, “Are there not twelve hours in the day?”). The first hour started at roughly 6 AM. That made the “third hour” about our 9 AM (cp. Matt. 20:3; Acts 2:15, 10:3); the “sixth hour” about our noon (cp. John 4:6; John 19:14; Acts 10:9); the “seventh hour” about our 1 PM (John 4:52), the ninth hour about our 3 PM (cp. Matt. 27:45, 46; Mark 15:34; Acts 3:1; 10:3); and the tenth hour about our 4 PM (John 1:39); and the eleventh hour about our 5 PM (Matt. 20:6).

Also, both the Jews and Romans divided the night into four “watches,” each being three hours long. This was true even though the Jews started their new day at sunset, at the start of the first watch of the night, and the Romans reckoned their new day at midnight, at the start of the third watch of the night (our day beginning at midnight comes from the Romans). The names of the four night watches were “evening,” “midnight,” “cockcrowing,” and “morning” (Mark 13:35: “So keep watch, for or you do not know when the lord of the house will come, whether during the evening watch, or the midnight watch, or the cockcrowing watch, or the morning watch.”). Sometimes, however, the watches were just called by “first watch,” “second watch,” “third watch,” and “fourth watch.” On occasion, the “watches” were not accurate enough, and so even the night was divided into hours. This is why Paul was taken to Caesarea at the “third hour of the night,” our 9 PM (Acts 23:23).
The hours of the day in Roman times were often approximations, because there was longer daylight in the summer and shorter in the winter. However, in both seasons the day was divided into 12 hours. Thus we would say that the “third hour” of the day was around our 9 AM, not 9 AM exactly.

The feeding of the 5,000 took place in the area we know as Bethsaida-Julius, on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee (Luke 9:10). The disciples left that general area in the evening and headed for “Bethsaida” (Mark 6:45; cp. “Bethsaida in Galilee, John 12:21), which was apparently a small fishing village to the southwest of Capernaum (it can be confusing that the disciples left the area of Bethsaida and sailed toward Bethsaida. “Bethsaida” means “House of fishing,” and there were a couple of them on the Sea of Galilee). Thus the total distance the apostles had to row was likely somewhat less than 5 miles (8 km). This should have been an easy journey, but the wind was so against them they had rowed for hours and were no doubt incredibly frustrated and near exhaustion.

6:49. “an apparition.” The word phantasma means “something that appears,” from phaino, to appear. Thus an apparition. The only other appearance of the word is in Matthew 14:26, where it is used in a sentence and translated “ghost.”

6:53. “Gennesaret.” This is where Jesus and the disciples landed, and it is confirmed in Matthew 14:34 (see commentary there).

Chapter 7

7:1. “And the Pharisees and some of the experts in the law…” Mark can be read to mean that only the scribes came from Jerusalem, but Matthew 15:1 is clear that the entire delegation came from there.

7:3. “to the wrist.” The Greek literally reads “with the fist.” This is a good example of a custom being so obscure that translating it into the text would only confuse the reader. Edersheim gives the best explanation we have seen, and Young’s Literal Translation renders according to his explanation.

“The water was poured on both hands…. The hands were lifted up, so as to make the water run to the wrist, in order to ensure that the whole hand was washed, and the water polluted by the hand did not again run down the fingers. …But there was one point on which special stress was laid. In the ‘first effusion,’ which was all that originally was required when the hands were Levitically ‘defiled,’ the water had to run down to the wrist. Fn. “The language of the Mishnah…can only refer to the wrists. Fn. The rendering ‘wash diligently’ gives no meaning; that ‘with the fist’ is not in accordance with Jewish Law; while “up to the elbow” is not only contrary to Jewish Law, but apparently based on a wrong rendering of [the Hebrew]” (Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah).

The general uncertainty among commentators, however, about what the Greek texts, “with the fist” means, explains the huge number of variations in the translations: “oft” (KJV), “carefully” (NASB), “ceremonial washing” (NIV), “thoroughly” (NRSV), “to the wrist” (YLT), etc. “wash.” Greek = nipto, to wash.

7:4. “they bathe themselves.” The Greek is baptizō (#907 βαπτίζω), which means “…Properly, 1. to dip repeatedly, to immerse, submerge. 2. to cleanse by dipping or
submerging, to wash, to make clean with water; in the middle and the 1 aorist passive to wash oneself, bathe; so Mark 7:4 ….metaphorically, to overwhelm, as … to be overwhelmed with calamities, of those who must bear them, Matt. 20:22f Rec.; Mark 10:38 f; Luke 12:50 (Thayer). Many commentators have had problems with this verse, believing that even the religious Jews did not bathe themselves each time they came from the marketplace, but the text seems clear, and we must assume that some people did that, because his audience did not charge him with an absurdity.

Some versions have “and couches” (YLT) or “and tables” (KJV) after “copper vessels,” Metzger (Textual Commentary) writes, “It is difficult to decide whether the words…were added by copyists who were influenced by the legislation of Leviticus 15, or whether the words were omitted (a) accidentally because of homoeoteleuton or (b) deliberately because the idea of washing or sprinkling beds seemed to be quite incongruous. In view of the balance of probabilities, as well as the strong witnesses that support each reading, a majority of the Committee preferred to retain the words, but to enclose them within square brackets.” We decided to leave them out, following the original translation of the ASV.


“doctrines.” The Greek word is didaskalia (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse we felt “doctrine” was better than “teaching.” For more on didaskalia see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13).

7:9. “tradition.” The Greek word is paradosis (#3862 παράδοσις), and it means something that is handed over, or something that is handed down. Thus it can mean surrender or arrest, or it can refer to a “tradition.” Traditions can be a great help to people. God established traditions in the OT, such as keeping the Passover feast every year. Jesus himself started the tradition of “the Lord’s Supper.” However, there are Christians who believe that any tradition created by man is an offense to God and should not be practiced or condoned. How should Christians view traditions? It seems clear that we should view traditions the same way Jesus did. There were hundreds of traditions in the Judaism of the time of Jesus (cp. Mark 7:4), but the ones he spoke against fall into several categories.

One category that Jesus spoke against was traditions of men that had, in the minds of the religious leaders, become equal to the commands of God. No matter how helpful they are or holy they seem, and no matter how many years they have been observed, traditions are only traditions, they are not commandments, and should not be treated as such. When traditions are treated like commandments, first, the words of man become elevated to the status of the word of God, and second, someone who is unable or unwilling to keep the tradition is almost always treated badly by those who do.

Another category of tradition that Jesus spoke against was traditions that could not be kept without ignoring or rejecting the commandments of God (Mark 7:8, 9). These traditions, by their very nature, are harmful. Jesus cited the tradition of giving “to God” the support that elderly parents needed (Mark 7:10-13). Of course, the support that was supposedly given “to God” ended up enriching and empowering the religious leaders, and the honor that God commanded that children give to parents was ignored.
A third category of tradition that is harmful is a tradition that has become a burden to a Christian’s life and walk, instead of being a blessing. The religious leaders had many burdensome traditions that they enforced (Matt. 23:4). A godly tradition is to be a blessing and bring people closer to God. A tradition that makes living a godly life into a burden should not be kept.

There are many traditions in the Church, and very few are kept by all Christian denominations. Most are not harmful, and can be helpful. For example, dressing up for Sunday church is a tradition in some denominations, and is not harmful unless it takes on the force of a command and someone who comes not dressed up is scorned or rejected. It can be helpful in that it helps some people take their worship time more seriously. On the other hand, the tradition of praying to “the saints” is practiced in some denominations, but is against the command of God and therefore harmful.

Christians should view traditions like Christ did. Even if a tradition is not “in the Bible,” it can still bring people closer to God in a very meaningful way. However, if a tradition begins to take on the force of a commandment, or if it makes godly living a burden, or especially if it contradicts the Bible or can only be kept at the expense of ignoring a biblical command, then the words spoken by Isaiah more than 2500 years ago still apply: “in vain do they worship me” (Mark 7:7; cp. Isa. 29:13).

7:16. This verse is omitted in REV. This verse is absent from some important early texts such as K, B, and L. It seems to be a scribal addition, perhaps to parallel 4:9 or 4:23. There seems to be much more likelihood that the verse was added to later texts than removed from earlier ones. See Metzger, Textual Commentary.
7:22. “evil eye.” The “evil eye” was idiomatic in Semitic languages for someone who was greedy, covetous, and stingy, which is why some versions translate it as “envy” or “stingy” (cp. HCSB; ESV, NASB; NET; NIV; NRSV). In Western cultures, the “evil eye” was a look or glance that meant harm and brought harm, but there is no evidence it was used that way in the Bible. See commentary on Matthew 6:22.

“insults.” The Greek noun is blasphēmia (#988 βλασφηµία; pronounced blas-fay-me'-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmia, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].
7:30. “having gone out.” Greek = exerchomai (ἐξέρχοµαι 1. to move out of or away from an area. a. of animate entities go out, come out, go away, retire). Demons can inhabit the mind or body, and thus when they leave they are “gone out.”

Chapter 8

8:9. “Now about four thousand people were there…” This is the shorter reading represented in the Nessle-Aland Greek text, 27th edition.
8:11. “And the Pharisees came out.” The Bible says that everyone who lives a godly life will suffer persecution. These religious zealots did not wait for Jesus even to come to where they were, but came out to him to argue with him and defend their religious turf.

8:18. Quoted from Jeremiah 5:21.

8:28. “Elijah.” For information on why the people thought that Elijah would come, and why John the Baptist was called “Elijah,” see commentary on Matthew 17:10.


“have in mind.” The Greek phronein means to have in mind something that sways the thinking (Cp. Lenski).

8:35. “life” (2x). The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. [For a more complete explanation of psuchē, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

8:36. “life.” The Greek word is psuchē, as in verse 35. It is used twice in verse 35 of the life of the body, and it is expanded in this verse to be life in general, both here and the hereafter, which is why many versions translate it “life” in verse 35 but “soul” in verse 36 and 37. We felt it was better to translate the word the same way in Mark 8:35, 36, and 37 and point out that “life” can be just our physical life or our physical and everlasting life [For a more complete explanation of psuchē, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

8:37. “life.” The Greek word is psuchē, as in verse 35 and 36. See commentary on Mark 8:36.

Chapter 9

9:2. “transfigured.” For an explanation of the Transfiguration, see Matthew 17:2.

9:6. “say.” The Greek is apokrithē (ἀποκριθῇ), technically, “answer,” but in this case he was “answering” the situation, not a question. Hendrickson (New Testament Commentary) states: “Here, as in verse 5 and often, the verb ἀποκριθῇ has a wide meaning, so that τί ἀποκριθῇ means, “what he should say,” or “what to say.”


9:10. “And they kept the matter to themselves, discussing…” The disciples did not expect Jesus to be killed and then raised from the dead. That is simply not what most first-century Jews believed about the Messiah, so they did not understand what Jesus was speaking of when he spoke of being raised from the dead (see commentary on Luke 18:34).


9:12. “come first to restore.” If the text is to be translated and understood as if John did restore everything, then the restoration has to refer to a spiritual restoration. However, it seems apparent that John did not restore everything. In fact, that John did not manage to restore everything sets the stage for Jesus’ question, “how is it that it is written of the Son of Man, that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt?” In other words,
the disciples need to understand that John did not restore everything, which is one reason
the Messiah must suffer and die.

It is a well-known aspect of the Semitic languages that an active verb can
represent an attempt to do something, not an accomplishment of something. In other
words, instead of John “restoring” everything, he “tried” to restore everything. This use
of the Hebrew verb is well documented and even appears in places such as the “Hints and
Helps to Bible Interpretation” section in the front of the Young’s Concordance (Wm. B.
Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1970, hint #70). Young’s has, “Active
verbs frequently express only an attempt to do the action,” and one of the examples it
gives is the verse about Elijah restoring everything.

It is because of the Semitic idiom that versions such as the ESV, NRSV, and
RSV, say “to restore all things.” John came to restore all things, but could not accomplish
that task, which is a reason that Jesus had to suffer and die.

“and yet.” (Cp. Lenski, NASB). Jesus was asking the question, without answering it,
how it could be that if Elijah came and restored everything, there was any need for the
suffering of the Messiah. The disciples did not believe that the Messiah would die (and
did not truly understand that until after his resurrection). Thus, Jesus is just trying to get
them to open their mind to other possibilities for the Messiah than they had learned in
Synagogue. The question is a good one, because although the death of the Messiah was
veiled to the disciples, the fact that he would suffer should have been clear to them. But
why even that if John did indeed restore all things? The restoration of John was a spiritual
restoration, turning people’s hearts back to God. It was not a political restoration, or a full
restoration in which the Devil and his minions were defeated, the curse removed from the
earth, etc.

“and restores.” The Greek uses just the participle, “restoring.”

9:18. “strong enough.” The Greek is ischūō (#2480 ἵσχω), which means strength. This
verse gives us a glimpse into the spiritual battle that can wage when demons live inside a
body. It takes spiritual strength to cast them out. That strength comes from trust (Matt.
17:20), which is connected to one’s prayer life (Mark 9:29). Another example of strength
in the spiritual battle is Revelation 12:8. The Devil and his demons wanted to remain in
heaven, but they were not strong enough to fight against Michael and the angels. To say
the apostles “could not” cast out the demon is correct, but not helpful, because then we
have no idea why. The Greek is more helpful, saying that the spirit did not come out
because the apostles were not spiritually strong enough. Spiritual power in the life of a
believer is usually not a matter of either having it or not, it is usually a matter of how
much power one has, and do we have enough to get the job at hand done for the Lord.


In this context, epitimaō has a technical meaning: it is used in Greek religion of
gaining control over a spirit, a demon. See commentary on Mark 1:25.

9:31. “is being delivered.” The Greek is paradidōmi (#3860 παραδίδωμι), and in this
context it means to give into the hands of another; to deliver up treacherously; by betrayal
to cause someone to be taken. It is present tense, but is an example of the “prophetic
present,” meaning the present tense is stated, but it is prophetic of something that will
happen in the future. Thus, some versions render the verb, “will be delivered over” or
something similar. The prophetic present has “the note of certain expectation” (Lenski),
because it is spoken as if the action is occurring at that very time. Jesus’ betrayal was not
9:32. “But they did not understand the saying.” Jesus taught about his suffering, death, and resurrection many times. However, in spite of Jesus’ clearly stating he would suffer, die, and be raised from the dead, the disciples never understood what he meant. This gives us some very important insight into the how the Jews at the time of Jesus viewed their Messiah. Just as they never expected a virgin birth (note Mary’s reaction to the angel’s message--Luke 1:34), they never expected their Messiah to suffer and die. This verse and others, such as Luke 18:34, make that plain. Even after his death and resurrection, upon seeing the empty tomb, they did not understand what had happened (John 20:9). It took Jesus personally appearing to a number of people for the disciples to believe he had been raised from the dead. Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20:16), then to the women who came to the tomb (Matt. 28:9), then to Peter (this appearing is not recorded in Scripture; we are only told that it happened; Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5); then to the two men on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:31), then to the disciples as a group (Luke 24:36ff). Even with all that evidence, Thomas, who was not with the disciples when Jesus appeared, still did not believe until he had personally seen the resurrected Lord (John 20:26-28). Ultimately, it took both understanding the Scriptures and seeing the resurrected Christ to fully confirm their belief in the resurrected Christ (Luke 24:45; and see commentary on Matthew 16:21).

9:34. “greatest.” This is not “greatest” in the sense of who had done the most miracles, or had the greatest trust (“faith”). Jesus telling them that the one who is greatest must be the servant of all (v. 35), shows us that “greatest” refers to the person with the most authority. In the patron-client society of the biblical culture and Greco-Roman world, the “greatest” person was the one who had the most authority and ruled the others (cp. 10:42). Jesus was trying to instill in his followers that we must have a servant’s heart, and the greatest one of all must be the most willing to serve.

9:40. “For whoever is not against us is for us.” This is said in the opposite way (and perhaps more clearly) in Matthew 12:30: “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me, scatters.” Although they are worded differently, both have the same message and neither statement allows for a neutral ground. There is no neutrality in the spiritual battle: we are either for or against God. Both ways of saying that people were either for you or against you were attested in the ancient world, and Jesus’ disciples were no doubt familiar with the concepts. The world in ancient times was very tough and there were many situations in which neutrality was not acceptable and people had to choose which side they were on. When the Roman philosopher Cicero (106-43 BC) defended the people of Pompeii to Caesar, he quoted Caesar’s own words back to him, saying to Caesar, “Let that maxim of yours, which won you your victory, hold good. For we have often heard you say that, while we considered all who were not with us as our enemies, you considered all who were not against you as your friends” (quoted in The New International Commentary on the New Testament: Mark by W. Lane)

We are all either “for” or “against” God and Jesus. If we are not “against” him then we are for him. If we not “with” him then we are against him. Someone might say, “Well, I am not against him, but I am not ‘for’ him either.” That statement only shows an ignorance of the spiritual battle and the reality behind the spiritual battle. God created the
world, and us, and He demands our allegiance. Someone who is unwilling to recognize God to the point of getting saved is an enemy of God and will end up in Gehenna. Someone who recognizes God to the point of getting saved is part of the Kingdom of God. There is no place where “neutral people” go on the Day of Judgment. The sheep go into the Kingdom, the goats into the Lake of Fire. Being unwilling to commit to being “for” or “against” God is actually part of the Devil’s plot to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). Especially to our modern ears, not being for or against something sounds so reasonable and good-natured that it is easy to think that God must be some kind of Ogre for demanding that we believe in Him. But in the End we will not be able to sweep under the rug the fact that He is our creator, and He created us for a purpose; a purpose that is intertwined with His own purposes, and if we do not want to support Him, then we are in fact against Him.

There is a story about a man who was sitting on a fence, with the Devil on one side and God on the other. God and the Devil were both trying to get the man to come down off the fence to their side. The arguments and pleas went on hour after hour, but the man would not make a decision or come down from the fence. At the end of the day God went home to heaven and the Devil said to the man, “OK, come down and come with me.” The man said, “But I am still on the fence; I have not made a decision yet.” The Devil replied, “Come down. You obviously don’t understand. I own the fence.” How true. If you are not “for” God, you are against Him.

9:42. “lake.” From the context, he was teaching in Capernaum, right beside the Sea of Galilee, which is actually a lake.

9:43. “Gehenna.” See commentary on Matthew 5:22. [For information on annihilation in the lake of fire, see Appendix 5: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”.


9:46. This entire verse (and v. 44) was an addition to the text, and so is omitted in the REV, just as it is omitted in many other modern versions as well. Metzger (Textual Commentary) simply makes the comment that these verses are “lacking in important early witnesses” [i.e. manuscripts] and “were added by copyists from v. 48.” In other words, the evidence that this verse, as well as verse 46, were added by copyists is so strong that it is not even debated by scholars. See commentary on 9:48.

9:47. “Gehenna.” See commentary on Matthew 5:22. [For information on annihilation in the lake of fire, see Appendix 5: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”.

9:48. “Where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” This verse is quoted from Isaiah 66:24, and it has been used to prove that people “burn in hell forever,” but that is not what it is teaching. Both in Isaiah and here in Mark it is teaching that unsaved people are totally destroyed. Jesus specifically uses the word Gehenna, which is
where people will be destroyed (Mark 9:47), while Isaiah does not mention the place, but simply says people will “go out” (of the city) and see the dead bodies. We know from the book of Revelation that the destruction of the wicked will occur in the Lake of Fire (see Rev. 20:14 and 15).

Gehenna was the garbage dump of Jerusalem. [For more information on Gehenna, see commentary on Matthew 5:22]. All kinds of garbage, and even dead animals, were thrown into Gehenna and destroyed. The fires in the valley burned up everything that could be burned, and the maggots and worms ate up the vegetable and animal waste. Everyone in Christ’s audience knew this. No one thought that the wood, rags, or other burnables that had been thrown into Gehenna burned forever in the valley, or that animal and vegetable garbage lasted forever, eternally being consumed by worms. Christ’s point in comparing the Valley of Gehenna to the future Lake of Fire was graphic and clear: if a person was thrown into Gehenna on the Day of Judgment, he would never be restored, he would be totally consumed; he would be annihilated.

One thing that helps us understand Jesus’ teaching is knowing that Isaiah 66:24 is not speaking of living people suffering, but dead bodies in the process of being destroyed. This is clear from paying attention to the context and vocabulary of the verse. Isaiah 66:24 says, “And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.” From this we can see that this verse is not talking about living people being tortured. It is talking about dead people being totally destroyed.

In reading Isaiah chapter 66, we can see that the closing verses are about God’s judgment on the wicked, and how He will destroy them with fire and sword (Isa. 66:16). This is a general picture of God’s judgment, and could refer to either to the Battle of Armageddon just before the Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 19:19-21) or to the Final War at the end of the Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:7-10), or even to both. At some point after the battles, the unrighteous people go to the place where God has thrown the bodies of the unsaved, and they are all dead, they are not suffering. Isaiah said the righteous will look upon the “dead bodies,” and the Hebrew word peger (#06297 פֶּגֶר) is always used of dead bodies, never living ones. Those dead bodies were being consumed by worms and fire, and eventually would be completely gone. So we see that Isaiah is not portraying the suffering of the wicked, but their final fate: destruction.

When Jesus quoted Isaiah 66:24 in his teaching, he quoted it to reinforce his point, which was the same point that Isaiah was making: that there is no restitution for the wicked, only complete annihilation. Jesus was not modifying or correcting what Isaiah wrote. Rather, Jesus was teaching about Gehenna, and quoted Isaiah to help emphasize the point he was making about the destruction of the wicked. In another teaching, Jesus made it clear that God would destroy both “body and soul” in Gehenna (Matt. 10:28).

The phrase, “their worm does not die,” does not mean the worms never die. “Immortal worms” would not have made sense to anyone in biblical times. Neither Isaiah nor Jesus was teaching or explaining a new doctrine that worms somehow lived forever. This is not picturing everlasting torment, but rather that the worms and fire will not stop until everything in Gehenna has been annihilated. People who vermapost (that is, compost by using worms), are very familiar with the fact that as long as they keep adding garbage to the worm-bins, the worms there do not die off, but multiply. Individual worms die, but collectively the worms eat and multiply until all their food is gone, at which point
they starve and die. Of course there cannot be literal worms, as we know worms, in Gehenna, because they could not survive, so they may just be a metaphor for total destruction, but it is possible that God would miraculously keep worms alive to be part of the destruction of the wicked. Most orthodox teachers do not believe the worms are literal, but believe they are a figure to portray horrible suffering. However, as we saw, the people were “dead bodies,” they were not alive.

Similarly, the phrase “is not quenched,” does not mean the fire burns forever, it means it is never purposely put out. Firemen today are very familiar with house fires that “cannot be quenched,” and do not go out until the house is consumed to ash. We disagree with Lenski and other commentators who insist that these words portray everlasting torment. For example, Lenski writes, “A fire that is ‘unquenchable’ is by that very fact eternal.” We disagree. The text simply states the fire is “not quenched.” No one puts the fire out, but that does not mean the fire does not go out when the fuel is gone. “Not quenched” does not mean “eternal.” The phrase “not quenched” would only refer to a fire that burned forever if the other biblical evidence showed that the fuel for the fire lasted forever, but in fact the other biblical evidence supports the eventual destruction of the wicked.

When people are thrown into Gehenna after they are judged on the Day of Judgment, the fire there will not be able to be put out, and the worms there will not die until there is nothing left to consume and all the sinners have been annihilated [For more on annihilation, see Appendix 5, “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”].

The Bible does not describe people’s suffering in the Lake of Fire, it simply notes that there will be some suffering there. Nevertheless, as the teaching about “eternal hell” continued to be developed and embellished throughout Church history, there was a tremendous fascination and emphasis on “hell.” This is well represented in Christian art through the centuries, and in literature such as the epic poem, Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri (the first part of which is titled “Inferno,” which is Italian for “Hell”). It is worth noting that there was such a fascination with hell that somehow the phrase about the worm not dying and the fire not being quenched was added two more times in some manuscripts of Mark. Thus, both Mark 9:44 and 9:46 were added to some manuscripts, but those two times are not in the original text and are not in most modern Bibles.

Chapter 10

10:1. “from there.” From Capernaum (9:33).
10:7. Quoted from Genesis 2:24, occurs also in Matthew 19:5.

“be glued to.” The Greek is proskollaō (#4347 προσκολλάω), and it literally means to glue to or to glue upon. Thus it was used to join oneself to someone, or to cleave or stick to that person. We still use the idiom of glue today to express extreme attachment, and say things such as “He stuck to his coach like glue,” or “He is glued to the TV set.” In this verse the meaning of “glue” becomes very important. When a man and woman marry, they become “one flesh.” That is a spiritual reality and has important physical

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implications as well, so it is important to bring the meaning of the Greek text fully into the English.

10:17. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [For more information, see Appendix 3: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”]

10:19. Quoted from Exodus 20:12-16.

10:23. “will be.” The future tense “will be” is supplied from the verb “to enter” which is a future tense. A more literal rendering of the verb, and one that would maintain the future tense of “to enter,” would be to say, “How difficult it will be to enter the Kingdom of God for those who have wealth!” But this is more difficult in English.

10:27. “With people...with God...with God.” The key to understanding this passage, and the parallel passage in Matthew 19:26, is the word “with,” which is the Greek preposition para (#3844 παρά). In this case, the preposition para is modifying “people” and “God,” which are both in the dative case (and all three uses in Matt. 19:26 are in the dative case). When para is with the dative case in reference to people, it means “beside” or “with.” The point that Jesus is making is that when it comes to getting saved, human effort alone will never get anyone saved. There is no amount of human effort, even if others are “with” you and helping, that will get a person saved and into the Kingdom of God. Robertson writes: “The impossible by the side of men becomes possible by the side of God” (Word Pictures in the New Testament). Vincent writes: “Man cannot save himself or his fellow” (Word Studies; Matt. 19:26).

   If a person wants to be saved, if he teams up with God, his salvation becomes not only possible, but assured, because, along with God, all things are possible. Peter responds to Jesus’ statement by pointing out that he and the others have certainly teamed up with God, saying, “We have left everything and followed you.”

   This verse shows that salvation is indeed a team effort between God and the sinner. It is not, like some theologians teach, that God saves who He wants and rejects who He wants, or that salvation is totally accomplished by God apart from human will. In that light, the preposition para should not be translated “for,” because that significantly changes the meaning of the verse. When salvation is “with” God, it is a team effort. The sinner is working “with” God, and salvation can be accomplished. If we change the “with” to “for,” then the meaning of the verse totally changes: “For people it is impossible, but not for God, for all things are possible for God.” Now the verse says nothing about teamwork, but just makes the point that people cannot be saved by their own efforts, but God can save anyone. However, that is not what the verse is saying, or the Greek text means. We know that God wants all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), and if He could save people without them wanting or asking for salvation, then everyone would be. The reason God wants everyone to be saved but not everyone will be, is that salvation is a team effort—the person must want it and ask for it before God can save the person, and not everyone wants to be saved.

10:28. “See.” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

10:30. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”]

10:32. “amazed...afraid.” The amazement and even fear that the disciples were experiencing is natural. For some time now the Jews in Jerusalem had been trying to
arrest and kill Jesus. At the Feast of Dedication (in our December), the Jews were trying to arrest him (John 10:39). Then, when Jesus went back to the Jerusalem area to raise Lazarus from the dead, the Jews made plans to kill him (John 11:12). After that, Jesus made one last itinerary.

10:33. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

10:34. “will be raised.” The Greek verb is anistēmi (#450 ἀνίστημι; pronounce an-hiss’-tay-me). Here the verb acts like a passive (see BDAG Greek-English lexicon) and it means to be raised from the dead. Like many verses say, God raised Jesus from the dead. The translation “rise again” is confusing, because Jesus was never raised before.

10:45. “life.” See commentary on Matthew 20:28, which is a similar verse.

“ransom.” The Greek word is lutron (#3083 λύτρον; pronounced loo’-tron). In the Greek literature, the lutron, “ransom” was the price paid for the release of a slave or prisoner of war. There has been huge debates in Christendom about to whom the ransom is paid. Before summarizing some basics, it is important that we realize that the Bible never says to whom the “ransom” is paid. This should speak volumes to us. God certainly could have told us. The word ransom is specifically used in Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45, and the closely related word antilutron, also translated “ransom,” is used in 1 Timothy 2:6. The New Testament tells us that we, by our sin, earned “death.” “The wages of sin are death” (Rom. 6:23). Then to magnify the work of Christ, we are told that Christ paid the price that we owed and died in our behalf (cp. Rom. 5:6, 8; Heb. 2:9). The sinner is “ransomed,” “redeemed,” “bought with a price” “declared righteous,” etc.

God could have told us “to whom” the ransom or price of redemption was paid. He did not clearly say it. This should tell us that we should not put our emphasis there. We can talk about it, surely, but the obvious emphasis in the Word is that redemption is done. It is accomplished. To go beyond “It is finished” is to drift from the realm of certainty into, to some degree anyway, into the realm of speculation. That can be seen at once simply by studying the “theories of atonement.” Dozens of books have been written on the subject specifically because there are unclear issues involved. What is clear is that we are ransomed, we are redeemed, the price has been paid on our behalf, and when we have trust (“faith”) in Christ we are saved and promised everlasting life.

That having been said, it may help to briefly cover a few points. One is that many unbelievers reject the theory of atonement altogether and say that it in and of itself disproves Christianity. They say that no matter to whom the ransom is paid, how can one man righteously die for another? We answer that by saying that unbelievers did not create the universe nor the rules by which God governs it or the people who live in it. It is clear from the sacrifices in the Old Testament that God righteously accepts substitutionary sacrifice, and if He does, He does.

The Church Father Origen said that the ransom paid by the death of Jesus was paid to Satan, and many people still believe that. However, it seems clear that both righteousness (holiness), and the penalty for acting and becoming unholy and unrighteous was established by God. Satan has power today only by virtue of the fact that he is a liar and murderer. He lied his way into getting his power, and will end up destroyed in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:10). Satan was not owed any ransom just because he tricked mankind into sin; mankind did not break any of his laws; and Satan cannot, in fact, would not, accept the blood of Christ as a ransom. He cannot because he does not have the
power to release mankind from the penalty of sin, he did not give the laws or set the penalty in the first place. Furthermore, if a person is jailed in lieu or payment of a fine, would he pay it to the jailer? No, he would pay it to the court, the system that put the law in place. Lastly, Satan would not accept the ransom of Christ because it is against his purposes: he does not desire mankind to be saved; he desires the destruction of all mankind.

That having been said, there are two more theories of atonement that should be mentioned. The first is that the ransom or redemption price is paid to God. That theory in and of itself has so many variations that books have been written on that alone. The basics of the theory that the payment is made to God as expounded by Anselm, Bishop of Canterbury (1033-1109) is that because God is righteous He must respond with anger and punishment when His laws are broken, thus the payment of breaking those laws is made to Him. Adding to the logic of this theory is that under the Law of Moses, the sacrifices for sin were offered to Yahweh (cp. Exod. 12:48; Lev. 4:3, 4, 14, 15, 24; 5:6, 7, 15; 22:24; 23:12; etc.), and the Passover, and sacrifices, were shadows of Christ. In contrast, sacrifices to the Devil or demons was strictly forbidden. It foreshadowed nothing (cp. Deut. 32:17; 1 Cor. 10:20). It is this theory of atonement that has dominated the orthodox Church for some 1000 years.

Another theory of atonement is that the payment was not actually made to anyone. God set up the laws, and His justice required death for sin. When Christ died, that fulfilled the law, it did not actually “pay” anyone. In that sense, the word “ransom” is understood figuratively, as if “Justice” was personified. We can best understand this in terms of someone paying for his crime by being imprisoned. If a person is in prison for a year and “pays his debt to society,” who gets paid? Not society, they do not receive a dime. Not the jailor (Satan), not the Judge (God). The debt is “paid” in a figurative sense simply by fulfilling the law. The strongest evidence for this argument is that of all the scriptures that refer to the death of Christ, atonement, ransom, redemption, substitution, being “bought with a price,” etc., not once is anyone said to be paid. Not God, and certainly not the Devil. The simple biblical truth would be that Jesus paid the legal price required by mankind’s sin, which was death, and thus fulfilled the legal requirement that the wages of sin is death.

10:50. “tossing aside his garment.” This is an indication of how badly Bartimaeus wanted to be healed. The heavy outer cloak was essential to stay warm and protected from the weather. It was so important to a poor person that if he needed to borrow money and gave his cloak as collateral, even if he could not repay the debt, the cloak had to be returned to him by nightfall, so he could use it (Deut. 24:13). But the cloak was heavy and long, and if someone wanted to move quickly it could get in the way. Bartimaeus did not want anything to get in the way of his healing, and he did not want to be so slow that Jesus moved on before he could be healed. So he risked losing his valuable cloak so he could get his healing, which was of much greater value to him.

Chapter 11
11:2. “in front of.” Jesus was traveling from Jericho on what is known as “the Jericho Road,” the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. It is only about a 15 mile journey, and thus a person can walk it in one long day, however, it is a steep climb. Jericho is more than 800 feet below sea level, and the Mount of Olives, which Jesus had to climb and from which he would get the view of Jerusalem (Luke 20:41) is over 2,500 feet high, making the ascent well over 3,000 feet. Jesus would reach Bethphage and Bethany before he reached the summit of the Mount of Olives.

“colt.” This “colt” is not a young horse, but a young donkey (Matt. 21:2-5).


“Hosanna.” The people who were shouting praises to Jesus as he entered Jerusalem were for the most part not the same group as the group that shouted, “Crucify him” only a few days later. See commentary on Luke 23:21 and 27.

11:13. “indeed, it was not the season for figs.” The question this verse poses to the average reader is, “Why would Jesus curse the fig tree for not having figs if it was not the season for figs?” The answer to that question lies in understanding that, although there were a couple varieties of fig tree in Israel, the common variety produces two crops of figs per year. An early fig grows on the old branch stock that grew the preceding year. This early fig often begins to grow even before there are leaves on the fig tree, although sometimes these early figs and the leaves start to grow at the same time. These early figs usually start developing in March, but may be a little earlier or later depending on the climate, and the circumstances of any given tree (Israel has many different climates, usually somewhat depending on elevation). These early figs mature in June, and the leaves grow and mature along with them. A second crop of figs starts on the new tree growth that sprouts that year, and they generally ripen in August.

Since Mark is recording events around Passover, Jesus would have approached the fig tree in April. Although it was not yet the season for figs, Jesus noticed that this particular tree was in full leaf. If the leaves were fully formed, that meant he could expect the figs of this particular tree to be early too, or at least be far enough along to be somewhat satisfying to eat. This should not surprise us. It often happens in horticulture that a plant is a few weeks earlier than the “regular season.” However, when Jesus got to the tree, the situation was not just that the figs it had were not yet ripe, it did not have any figs at all!

This fig tree was a fitting parable of Israel. It was in full leaf and looked very promising, even ahead of the rest of the trees. It should have been a source of great blessing for those who looked for early sustenance coming out of the winter months. Instead it was a liar, promising much but delivering little, deceiving weary travelers and giving them false hope. Jesus cursed it, foreshadowing the curse and destruction that would come upon Israel.

“indeed.” The Greek is gar (#1063 γάρ), and is usually translated “for” or occasionally “because,” and it usually gives the reason for something. However, that use of gar does not fit this verse. Jesus did not find only leaves on the fig tree “because” it was not the season for figs. This phrase is letting us know that, indeed, it was not the general season for figs. But if that was the case, why would Jesus expect figs in the first place? The answer is that this particular tree had leaves, so Jesus could expect to find them on this tree. This use of the gar is what some scholars refer to as the “confirmatory
“will ever eat.” The Greek word translated “eat” is phagō (#5315 φάγω (φάγομαι)), in the optative mood, but as Lenski points out in his commentary, here the optative is equivalent to the imperative mood, a command. Jesus is not saying, “May no one eat,” as if he was making a request, but rather, “No one will eat!” He is commanding something to happen. He is cursing the fig tree [For “curse,” see 11:21 and see commentary on Luke 6:28]. A. Nyland (The Source New Testament) gets the sense correctly: “No one will ever eat fruit from you again!”

“came into Jerusalem.” The exact meaning of “came into” (erchomai eis) must be determined from the context because it is used for “come to,” “come into,” “arrive at,” etc. In this case, Jerusalem was a walled city, so they literally “came into” it. They did not just “come to” it. Although the eastern wall of the Temple was part of the outer wall of Jerusalem, the main entrances to the Temple were from inside Jerusalem, especially from the south (which had both a double and triple entry gate) and from the west.

Quoted from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11.

“faith.” To properly understand faith in this verse, see the commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:9, “faith.”

“snatched up.” The Greek is airō (#142 αἴρω; pronounced eye-rō), and it is passive voice, imperative mood. Although it would be very literal to say, “Be taken up,” the imperative mood combined with the context, moving a mountain at your command, gives the sense that the mountain is being snatched up out of its place and thrown into the ocean (cp. The Source New Testament, which also uses “snatched”).

“sea.” In this context, Jesus is teaching in Jerusalem, and the Mediterranean Sea and Dead Sea were the closest and best known bodies of water.

“does not doubt.” The Greek is diakrinō (#1252 διακρίνω). In the middle voice, as it is here, it refers to being undecided within oneself. It is the indecision that causes one to hesitate or waver. Nyland (The Source New Testament) makes the case that “doubt” is not a good translation here, saying apisteō or aporeō would be “doubt,” and “undecided” would be better. While it is true that we often use “doubt” in the sense of a specific and steady state of mind, such as when we “doubt” that what someone says is true only because we cannot “prove” them to be lying, it is also true that we use “doubt” of the times we doubt ourselves and waver between doubt and trust. Also, “undecided” might seem to say we are undecided about obeying God, which is not what the verse is saying. This verse makes a strong point about the manifestation of faith (which is the full context here. It takes revelation from God, and then the manifestation of faith to move a mountain). When God gives us revelation that something can be done at our command, of course it will not happen if we doubt we can do it. But even if we are “undecided” and waver between faith (trust) and unbelief, we will not be able to carry out the will of God. Like Abraham, we must be strong in our faith, our trust in God.

“believe that you have received them, and you will have them.” This verse contains great truth, and great potential to be misunderstood and wrongly applied. Certain faith teachers have taken it to mean that through faith we instantly receive what we ask for, even though it may clearly seem to not be the case, we must nevertheless believe that we have already received what has been asked for. Often, this can lead to unhealthy
situations where Christians must pretend that circumstances are not as they are, or feel that they are not having “faith.”

This comes from a misguided understanding of the verse. The second half of the verse should settle any thought as to whether the requests have been received—it assumes they have not. This is why it says, “and you will (future tense) have them.” An understanding of the Greek behind this phrase will further clear things up. To properly understand this verse we must understand the tense of the verb translated “you have received.” It is not the present tense, as the KJV can give the impression with their rendering, “believe that ye receive them.” Rather, the verb is in the aorist (past) tense. So understood literally, the verse would not be asking us to believe we have presently received anything, but to believe that we have already in the past received what we are presently praying for; then, perplexingly, it ends with the promise that if we so believe, we will in the future receive what we believe has already been received before we even asked for it.

How are we to understand this? Why would God put the verb is the aorist tense? The reason is this verse contains as idiom known as the proleptic aorist (under the category of the idiom of the prophetic perfect, see commentary on Eph. 2:6). The proleptic aorist is a form of the figure of speech heterosis, where one tense is used instead of another for emphasis. In this case the aorist tense is used for the future tense, speaking as though a yet future event had already come to pass. Wallace explains the proleptic aorist as follows: “An author sometimes uses the aorist for the future to stress the certainty of the event. It involves a ‘rhetorical transfer’ of a future event as though it were past” (Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, p. 564). Here in Mark 11:24 the event of receiving what is prayed for is yet future, but it is put in the past tense (“have received”) to emphasize it certainty.

When we understand that this phrase is the idiom of the proleptic aorist, we see that God is not asking us to believe we have already in the past received something we do not really yet have, nor is he asking us to believe we have presently received something we have not yet received; rather, he is asking us to believe we will receive our requests in the future. This saves us from the harm of turning biblical belief into make-believe.

11:25. “stand praying.” The indicative mood of the Greek verb “stand” (stēkō #4739 στήκω) indicates that Jesus is thinking of this as something the disciples do; it is not just a hypothetical. Standing up to pray was an ancient practice, and reflected the belief that our Creator deserved the honor of standing before Him when making supplications and requests.

11:26. We omit this verse as do most modern versions as being an addition to the text in order to harmonize Matthew and Mark. Metzger, Textual Commentary: “Although it might be thought that the sentence was accidentally omitted because of homoeoteleuton, its absence from early witnesses that represent all text-types makes it highly probable that the words were inserted by copyists in imitation of Mt 6.15.”

11:27. “came again into Jerusalem.” Jerusalem was a walled city, so they literally “came into” it. They did not just “come to” it. See commentary on Mark 11:15.

Chapter 12
12:1. “And he began to speak to them in parables.” This parable is a clear reference to the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7, except in Isaiah the vineyard is itself Israel, and is wicked, while in Jesus’ parable the vineyard is God’s and it is the people who are hired to tend it who are evil. Jesus was using thinly veiled language to speak of the leaders of the Jews, who had been entrusted by God to take care of His vineyard, i.e., His people, but were evil. The Jews got his point (v. 12), and wanted to arrest him but were afraid of the people. This shows the boldness and honesty of Jesus. He did not just ignore the evil of the Jews, but informed them and any disciple that was paying attention. This parable appears in Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12, and Luke 20:9-19.

12:2. “of the fruits.” This is an example of a partitive genitive. We would say, “Some of the fruit.”

12:10, 11. Quoted from Psalm 118:22, 23.

12:14. “poll-tax.” The Greek word is κῆνσος (κῆνσος; pronounced kane'-sos). In the New Testament it referred to the tax or tribute levied on individuals, and it was to be paid yearly. It is not an income tax, a property tax, or a toll. Since it is a tax on every adult we would call it a poll-tax or capitation tax. The Jews especially hated this tax, because it was seen as a specific sign of servitude to Rome, and therefore the Rabbis had many disputes among themselves and with others about paying it. This was a well thought through trap. It is recorded in three of the four Gospels: Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; and Luke 20:20-26. This event occurred in the last week of Jesus life, and especially in those latter days of Jesus life the authorities were actively seeking a way to discredit and arrest him, and the subject of taxes could provide a way for them to trap him.

Paying taxes was always a “hot topic,” and most people hated to pay them. To heighten the tension of the situation (and thus the chance of Jesus making a misstatement and being trapped) the Pharisees, who took issue with Rome on many issues, brought with them the Herodians, who were Jews who supported Rome and supported paying taxes to Rome (cp. Matt. 22:16; Mark 12:13). There was a natural animosity between these two groups, but it also seemed natural that they would ask Jesus, a teacher from Galilee with no party affiliation, about taxes, something that no doubt the Pharisees and Herodians argued about regularly. Thus, although the Jews were trying to trap Jesus by asking him the question, people in the crowd would not have thought it out of character for them to ask Jesus about paying the poll-tax.

They began the trap by flattering Jesus and telling him how they knew he only cared about teaching the true way of God (Mark 12:14; Luke 20:21). This was more than just flattery. It was designed to make sure that Jesus would not simply dodge the issue and refuse to answer the question. If he did not care about what people thought, and taught the way of God, he would answer clearly and directly—something basically guaranteed to get him in trouble either way he answered. If he answered it was lawful to pay, the people would have doubted his being a teacher from God. If he answered it was not lawful to pay, he would have been in trouble with the Roman authorities.

The Pharisees then asked Jesus if it was “lawful” to pay taxes to Caesar. The main idea behind the word “lawful” seems to be if paying the tax, and thus acknowledging Rome’s authority over people individually, broached God role as the sole true authority over the people. Jesus’ answer was godly and wise: the money belonged to Caesar, so give back to Caesar what was his. This answer, of course, amounts to paying the tax, but
with a different emphasis. It is not that in paying the tax Jesus recognized the authority of Caesar over him, it was simply that the money was not his to begin with. It belonged to Caesar. Jesus demonstrated over and over in his ministry that if people would trust God, then God would take care of them. It was okay with God if people used money borrowed from Caesar to help make life easier, but God also could take care of people without borrowed money, something He did regularly, for example in multiplying food for hungry people.

There is quite a bit on paying taxes in the Bible, and Jesus addressed it on a couple different occasions. For example, besides this poll tax, he spoke of the half-shekel temple tax in Matthew 17:25-27. Never did Jesus support not paying taxes for the reason most people do not like to pay taxes—that the government wastes the money or spends it unwisely. The fact is that in biblical times the government was not answerable to the people. There were no elections, and certainly no promises of being “fair,” being “transparent” with the tax money, or using it for the good of the people and the education of children. The ruler used it any way he wanted, and that was the way it had always been. In biblical times people had no recourse from unfair taxes, they paid them or suffered. They could be sent to jail or sometimes be sold into slavery. Today taxes are as hated as they have ever been, but in many countries, such as the USA or Great Brittan, the people have the right to vote for representatives who will recognize their right to keep that which they have worked for. Sadly, the number of people who want a free ride on the backs of others keeps growing, so it is harder and harder to get a majority to vote to allow a person to keep the money he works for. The standard communist idea, “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need,” is more and more the global standard, which means that those people who work hard and should have more just have more taken away from them by those in power.

In spite of that, God’s way is not lying and cheating on taxes, but realizing that mankind does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; and storing up treasure in heaven by living a holy lifestyle. Certainly there have been times in history when people revolted against their government and overthrew it, but that is totally different from an individual simply not paying taxes because he thinks they are unfair. Christians need to realize that this world will never be fair, just, or right, and the joy of life is in fellowship with God and Christ, and with likeminded believers.

12:19. Quoted from Deuteronomy. 25:5.
12:24. “Is not this.” This is the figure of speech Erotesis (rhetorical question).
12:25. “out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. (Cp. Wuest)
12:28. “What.” The Pharisee asks this question in a respectful manner, and it was an honest question, and designed to “test” Jesus. Jesus had just silenced the Sadducees on the topic of resurrection, which delighted the Pharisees. The Sadducees and Pharisees also were sharply divided over which commandments were important and which were not. The Sadducees asserted that a commandment had to be in the Torah, the first 5 books of Moses, while the Pharisees had a much broader interpretation. This Pharisee wanted to see how Jesus would answer, and whether it would support a Pharisaical position or not. “first.” The Greek word translated “first” is prōtos (#4413 πρῶτος), and it can mean first in time, first in place, first in rank, honor or power. Here it means first in rank. We would normally say, “most important.” “What is the most important commandment in the
Law?” The answer is important, because it turns out that the most important commandment was not even one of the Ten Commandments, although it is certainly implied because if we have no other gods before God, and if we obey the Ten Commandments, then we clearly love God. Nevertheless, the statement that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, was an amplification and a clarification of the rest of the Law.

12:29. Quoted from Deuteronomy. 6:4. 

“Hear, O Israel!” The verb “hear” means not only to hear, but to pay attention and heed. Thus, some versions have, “Listen.” The verb “hear” is in the imperative mood, hence the exclamation point at the end of the phrase.

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone!” This verse is a quotation of Deuteronomy 6:4, and is most often translated something like this: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord,” or “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” However, in this article we will see that these translations are not the best, and can lead to false conclusions.

The Hebrew words Shema Yisrael (שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל “Hear, [O] Israel!”) are the first two words of Deuteronomy 6:4, and are the title of a prayer that serves as a centerpiece of the morning and evening Jewish prayer services (the title “Shema Yisrael” is often shortened to simply “Shema”). Observant Jews consider the Shema to be the most important part of the prayer service in Judaism. Originally the “Shema” prayer was only Deuteronomy 6:4, but in more modern Judaism it has been expanded to include other sections of the Torah as well. (In this article, we will sometimes refer to Deuteronomy 6:4 as the Shema).

The first thing we should say about the statement, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone!” is that, according to Christ, it was a part of the greatest commandment in the Law. Usually when someone asks, “What are the two greatest commandments in the Law?” the answer is “Love God, and love your neighbor.” But Jesus did not answer that way. Jesus included the Shema in his answer, and by doing so made a very important point: before we say that “Love God” is the first and greatest commandment, we should know who “God” is. The Shema shows us that we do not get to choose who “our God” is, Yahweh alone is God.

Most people think that the great commandment is just “Love God,” partly because the record in Matthew 22:37, which is the same event, does not include the Shema statement. However, it is common that when two or more Gospels record an event that they include different details. In this case, Mark gives the full account, and Matthew leaves out the Shema, which is understandable because the account in Matthew is much shorter than the account in Mark.

The Shema is widely understood by Christians to be about the nature of God and a confirmation of the Trinity and the compound unity of God, i.e., that God is “one,” and therefore He is one God made up of three persons. However, that is not at all what the verse is saying, as we will see by examining both the Old Testament and New Testament texts on the subject.

One thing should be clear to everyone who studies Mark 12:29: no matter how the Greek text of Mark is worded, it is a translation of the Hebrew, because to answer the Pharisee’s question, Jesus Christ would have quoted the Hebrew text of the Old
Testament. Jesus would not have spoken Greek to him. Although we will see as the study develops that the Greek in Mark (and the Septuagint), can mean what the Hebrew OT says, the Hebrew wording is very dense and has a number of secondary meanings built into it, and so the full meaning of the Hebrew is difficult to capture in Greek.

To fully understand the dialogue between the Pharisee and Jesus in Mark 12:28-34, it is helpful to know it is the same record as Matthew 22:34-39, although each Gospel has details that the other Gospel does not include. The Pharisee, who was also a “scribe,” that is, an expert in the Law, asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment in the Law. The conversation that followed gives us a context that helps us properly understand and translate the Shema.

The Old Testament text, like the New Testament, is often used to support the Trinity. But that is not what the verse is saying. For one thing, the Jews do not now, and never have, believed in a Trinity, and yet they have used Deuteronomy 6:4 as the rallying call of the nation of Israel since long before the time of Jesus. Deuteronomy 6:4 can be, and should be, translated close to the way it is translated in a number of modern versions: “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone” (NAB, NLT, NRSV, and the Tanakh; the JPS Bible). The Geneva Bible of 1599, which was the Bible of the Pilgrims and many of our founding Fathers is a translation generally recognized by scholars as a better translation than the King James Version, has: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is Lord only.” The Moffatt Bible has: “the Eternal, the Eternal alone, is our God.”

Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible correctly uses God’s proper name, “Yahweh,” instead of “LORD,” and has: “Hear, O Israel: Yahweh is our God—Yahweh alone.” We believe that using “Yahweh” instead of “LORD” is the most proper way to render the verse, and Rotherham’s translation is about as close as you can get to an English translation that captures the primary meaning of the verse.

Deuteronomy 6:4 is saying that Israel [and believers today] have only one God—Yahweh. That is why the verse says that Yahweh is “our” God.” Other people may have other gods, but the people of God are to have Yahweh alone as their God. This Old Testament truth is confirmed by Christ in Mark 12:29, and reconfirmed by Paul, who wrote that, “to us there is one God, the Father” (1 Cor. 8:6).

Although it is commonly believed that Deuteronomy 6:4 is a statement of “monotheism” and thus the “compound unity” of God, that is not what the verse is saying. Of course it is a statement about monotheism, that there is one God, but that is not its primary emphasis, as we will see below. Furthermore, it is not a statement about the compound unity of God for a number of reasons. First, because the compound unity of God does not appear in Scripture. Second, the Old Testament was given by God to the Jews so they could know and obey Him, and never in the more than 3500 years since the Shema was written have the Jews understood it to refer to a compound unity in God—quite the opposite. They took it to mean that there was only one God, and fiercely fought against polytheism throughout their history. So if the Shema was God’s attempt to reveal a compound unity in God, the attempt was an epic failure. It makes much more sense that God gave the verse to the Jews and intended it to mean what the Jews say it means.

Furthermore, the Jews did not take the Shema as their primary statement of monotheism because many other verses made that point (we will cover that shortly). Third, the context of the Shema in both the Old and New Testaments, backed by the Scope of Scripture,
shows that the Shema is not saying “God is ‘one,’” but rather is saying that Yahweh “alone” is our God.

The context shows us that Deuteronomy 6:4 is using the Hebrew word ‘echad (#259 הֵחָד; “one, only, an, alone”) in the primary sense of “only” or “alone,” in contrast to the number “one,” and the context in Mark 12 confirms this. Note how Deuteronomy 6:4 and 6:5 flow together and thus make a major—and logical—point: “Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone! And you must love Yahweh your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.” It is because Yahweh “alone” is God that we can worship him with “all” our heart, “all” our soul, and “all” our might. If we had more than one God, our worship would have to be divided between all the gods we served, and each god would get only “part” of our heart, soul, and strength. In fact, that is what happens with Trinitarians today: they divide their worship of God into the worship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But that division of worship is what is expressly forbidden by Deuteronomy 6:4 and Mark 12:29.

When Jesus was asked about the first commandment, he quoted both Deuteronomy 6:4 and 5. Interestingly, in both Hebrew and Greek (the Septuagint and Mark 12), these can be one sentence, the second starting with “and,” (or even “and so”). It is traditional to separate the “first commandment” into two sentences, but grammatically it can be one sentence and thus easily seen to be one commandment.

What should be clear is that Deuteronomy 6:4 is a statement about our personal relationship to God. He “alone” is God, so He is to be “our” only God and we must worship Him with “all” that we are and have. Deuteronomy 6:4 is not primarily a statement about monotheism, it is a statement about relationship. Stated another way, Deuteronomy 6:4 is not about the nature of God, it is about our relationship with God. Monotheism is important, and God had established that there was only one God earlier in Deuteronomy. Only about 50 verses before the Shema, God had twice stated that He was the only God. Deuteronomy 4:35 says, “Yahweh is God, besides Him there is no other.” Four verses later Deuteronomy 4:39 establishes that truth and says, “Yahweh is God in heaven above and on earth below. There is no other.” After establishing that there is only one God in chapter 4, Deuteronomy 6:4 then takes that truth and makes it personal: Yahweh who alone is God is to be “our” God, and we are to worship Him with “all” our heart, soul, and strength. Furthermore, after Deuteronomy 4:35, 39, and 6:4 have established that there is only one God, and thus Yahweh alone is to be “our God,” 6:13 then says that we should fear and serve Him, and swear oaths in His name.

The scope of Scripture also shows us that the Shema is about our relationship with God and not the singular nature of God. For example, Zechariah 14:9 uses the word ‘echad and speaks of the future, saying that Yahweh will be king over the whole earth. The last part of the verse says in that day, “Yahweh will be one [‘echad], and his name one [‘echad].” Here we see the same use of ‘echad that we see in the Shema. When Zechariah says that in that day Yahweh will be “one,” it is not making a statement about God’s nature, as if somehow His nature would become “one” in the future but is not “one” now. Rather, it is using “one,” (‘echad) as “alone,” just as in Deuteronomy 6:4. Zechariah is saying that in the future Yahweh will be “alone” and His name “alone,” not in competition with the names of other gods. Unlike today when many “gods” distract us from God, in the future all the competing gods will be cast away and Yahweh “alone” will be everyone’s God. Isaiah says, “On that day people will throw their silver and gold
idols, which they made to worship, to the moles and the bats” (Isa. 2:20 HCSB).
Zechariah says, “‘And on that day,’ says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, ‘I will erase idol worship throughout the land, so that even the names of the idols will be forgotten’” (Zech. 13:2 NLT). Isaiah 2:11 and 17 say that Yahweh alone will be exalted in that Day.

Also, the very first of the Ten Commandments fits with the Shema, saying that Yahweh alone is to be our God. The First Commandment is: “I am Yahweh your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. You must not have any other god but me” (Exod. 20:2, 3; NLT with Yahweh in place of “the LORD”). So the first commandment says in effect the same thing that the Shema says: God alone is to be our God, and we are not to have any other god but Him.

Having seen that the Shema is a statement about our relationship with God and that He “alone” is to be our God, we can now turn our attention to the New Testament text and Jesus’ words in Mark 12:29. As has been stated earlier, there is no doubt that Jesus would have quoted the Shema as it appears in the Hebrew text. He would not have been quoting it in Greek, even though the Gospel of Mark is written in Greek. But when we study the Greek word translated “one” in Mark 12:29, heis (εἷς; pronounced “hace”), we find that just like the Hebrew word ‘echad, can mean “one” or “alone,” so can the Greek word heis. In fact, we see heis being used in the sense of “alone” several times in the New Testament. The BDAG Greek English Lexicon lists Mark 2:7; 10:18; 12:29; Matthew 23:10; and Luke 18:19 as clear examples of heis meaning “alone.”

As has been stated above, the Hebrew text is very compressed and hard to translate. A common translation of the Greek is, “The Lord our God is one Lord.” However, a translation that reflects more of the meaning of the verse is, “Hear, Israel, The Lord our God is the only Lord” (that same basic translation appears in: The Geneva Bible; The New English Bible; Sir Andrews Norton’s, A Translation of the Gospels; The New Testament by William Barclay; and The Source New Testament by A. Nyland).

Another good translation is in the New American Bible (NAB), which follows its translation of Deuteronomy and has, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone!” Still another good translation is God’s New Covenant by Heinz Cassirer. He has: “Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one and only Lord.” Cassirer’s translation should catch our attention because he was born and raised Jewish and taught philosophy at Glasgow University and Corpus Christi, Oxford, and converted to Christianity due to his reading the Greek New Testament. Thus he brings a unique blend of Jewish heritage and a thorough knowledge of both Hebrew and Greek to his translation. He clearly understands that the Shema is making the point that God is the “one and only” God.

How do we know that when Jesus quoted the Shema that he quoted it with the same meaning it had in the Old Testament; that God “alone” was God? We know it by reading the whole account in Mark. We must pay attention to all the elements of the conversation: the question the Pharisee asked, Jesus’ answer, the Pharisee’s commentary on Jesus’ answer, and Jesus’ statement about what the Pharisee said.

First, the Pharisee’s question: “What commandment is the first of all?” We learn from Matthew 22:34 that the question was initially asked to test Jesus. It was a question that the Jews had asked and hotly debated among themselves for centuries, and was a question all the Jews were interested in. It seems clear the Pharisee legitimately wanted to know where Jesus stood on the issue.
Jesus answered the question by quoting both Deuteronomy 6:4 and 5, which shows that Jesus understood that it was not enough to just “love God,” in some generic sense, we must love the “right God,” the true God, the only God, who is Yahweh. Jesus then added the second commandment: love your neighbor as yourself. The Pharisee had not asked for that information, but we can see why Jesus added it: the Pharisees were well known for holding themselves aloof from others, and even the name “Pharisee” means “Separated one,” someone separated from the rest of mankind, who are then relegated by default to a lesser status. Jesus was trying to reach this Pharisee’s heart, and teach him that if he loved God, it would show itself through his love for others.

The Pharisee responded to Jesus’ answer in a way that showed he had grasped what Jesus said and had himself come to a similar conclusion about the central point of the Old Testament Law. The Pharisee started by acknowledging that Jesus’ statement was “well said,” and then he connected the Shema with Deuteronomy 4:35, that Yahweh is God and there is no other God but him. The Pharisee did not have any conception of a “compound unity” in God, but rather spoke back to Jesus the simple message of the Old Testament contained in the Shema: Yahweh alone is God and there is no other God, and that is why we can and must love God with “all” our heart, soul, and might. Furthermore, as the Pharisee acknowledged, loving God and our neighbor was more important that all other religious ceremonies and practices.

Jesus immediately recognized the heart of this Pharisee, and said to him: “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.” If the Shema was teaching the “compound unity” of God, and if Jesus was trying to communicate that to the Pharisee, he would have immediately recognized by the Pharisee’s answer that he did not “get it.” At that point Jesus should have further engaged the Pharisee so he could have a chance to understand the compound unity of God and the doctrine of the Trinity. Why didn’t he? The simple answer is that Deuteronomy 4:35 and 6:4 teach a simple truth: there is one God, Yahweh, and He alone is to be our God. That is the simple point that is being made in both the Old and New Testaments.

Having said that the most pertinent truth in the Shema is that Yahweh alone is to be our God, there are nevertheless some other basic truths that the wording of the Shema shows us. Although the primary meaning is, “Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone,” the wording of the Hebrew text and the word ‘echad also allows for: “Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is unique.” Although not the primary meaning, if we read the verse that way, it is saying that Yahweh, who is “our God,” is unique among the gods, thus superior and worthy of our worship. The usage of ‘echad as “unique” is found in Song of Solomon 6:9, where the king speaks of his 60 queens, 80 concubines, and “young women without number,” but tells his new beloved that she is “unique” (Do you think she believed him?).

Another secondary meaning that can be seen in the very compact wording of Deuteronomy 6:4 is that there is “one” Yahweh. It was common in the cultures of the Middle East that several gods would be known by the same name, or the same god would be assigned different characteristics and worshipped differently in different places. Examples of gods like this include: Astarte, Baal, Cybele, El (a Canaanite god), Isis, Leviathan, Lilith, and Tammuz. In contrast to gods who, in different places had different characteristics and were worshipped differently, Yahweh was only “one” God and was to be known as the same and worshipped the same everywhere.
In the spiritual battle, Satan is always trying to distort God: His nature, His character, His love, and His actions, and God works to prevent that. After the birth of Christ, Satan has worked to distort Jesus too. Thus less than 30 years after Jesus gave his life for mankind, 2 Corinthians 11:4 speaks of those people who preach “another Jesus,” and Galatians 1:6-9 shows that people were perverting the Gospel, saying, “If anyone is proclaiming to you a Good News that is contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.”

In closing, it is helpful to speak a few more words about why the Shema cannot be referring to a “compound unity” in God. If the Shema was making the point that God was a compound unity, then neither verse 4 nor verse 5 would fit with what the Bible actually says. The Old Testament never reveals that “Yahweh” was a compound deity, made up of separate “Persons.” Trinitarian theologians acknowledge that the Old Testament does not reveal the Trinity—a major reason the Jews never believed in one. In the Old Testament, “Yahweh” and the Son are always represented as two separate entities. “Yahweh” is the equivalent of the “Father” (or “God”) in the New Testament. Just as the Father and Son occur together many times in the New Testament and are clearly presented as two (Cp., “The testimony of two men is true: I bear witness about myself, and the Father bears witness of me”—John 8:17, 18), so the Old Testament presents Yahweh and the “Son” (also referred to as the “Lord,” “Servant,” or “anointed”) as two, not “one God” (Cp., Ps. 2:2, 7; 110:1; Isa. 42:5ff; 49:4, 5; 53:6, 10, 11).

Furthermore, it is clear in the Old Testament texts, such as those that call the Messiah the servant of Yahweh, and in the New Testament texts as well (Cp., 1 Cor. 15:28) that the “Son” is subservient to Yahweh. Given that, for the Shema to say that “Yahweh” is “one,” in contrast to many, does not make sense. If the verse were referring to a compound deity, it would have had to say that “Elohim” is one.

Furthermore, if the Shema were saying that “Yahweh” were “one” in the sense of a compound unity, then verse 5 would be incomplete and confusing, rather than helpful. If God were a compound unity, then what the Israelites would need would be instruction as to how to treat each “Person,” i.e., how to worship and serve each “Person” in this compound deity. But instead of offering instruction as to how to worship each “Person,” verse 5 contradicts the idea of multiple “Persons” in God and says to worship “Yahweh” with “all” your heart, soul, and might, clearly treating Yahweh as the one God whom we worship.

Also, Jesus’ answer to the Pharisee, that he was not far from the kingdom of God, shows us that a person does not have to believe in the Trinity to be saved. We can see from the way the Pharisee spoke to Jesus that he did not believe in the Trinity, but Jesus made no attempt to instruct him and instead said he was not far from the Kingdom. If a person had to believe in the Trinity to be saved, Jesus would have taught the Pharisee about it, and would never had said he was close to the Kingdom.

12:30. Quoted from Deuteronomy. 6:5.

“Therefore.” The Greek text has the conjunction kai, which is most often translated “and,” but which can have a number of meanings, depending on the context. One of those meanings is that it introduces a result from a preceding circumstance, thus can mean “and then” or “and so,” or as we would say, “so,” or “therefore” (see BDAG Greek-English Lexicon and Friberg’s Greek-English Lexicon). Rotherham has correctly picked up on the sense of the kai in this case, and seen that it makes a logical connection between the
first quotation from the Old Testament and the second one, and translated it as “therefore” in *The Emphasized Bible*, and the Geneva Bible of 1599 also uses “therefore.” So translating the *kai* as “therefore” more clearly brings out the sense of what Jesus was saying and shows why he prefaced his quotation of Deuteronomy 6:5 by quoting Deuteronomy 6:4.

The original Hebrew phrase taken from Deuteronomy 6:5 also starts with the common conjunction that is most often translated “and” but has a number of different meanings, including “so” and “therefore” (Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon), and the NAB says “therefore.”

The point that we must understand is that the “greatest commandment” is one single command, not two independent statements. Yahweh alone is God so we are to love Him with “all” we are and have. If Yahweh was not “alone” as God, we would have to divide our love between our different gods.

“love.” The verb “love,” *agapao*, (#25 ἀγαπάω) is in the future tense, indicative mood, which here is being used idiomatically as a present imperative (see Robertson, *Grammar*, p. 330). The expert in the Law had asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment, and Jesus gave him (and us), a complete answer. Jesus made it clear that since there is only one God, therefore you must love Him with everything you have: all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

In the Greco-Roman culture surrounding the Jews, the people had many gods, and the people had to divide their love and worship between them. For that matter, many of the Jews had superstitions and regulations that had all but replaced a genuine relationship with the true God. Jesus made it clear that there is only one true God, and “therefore” we must love Him with “all” we have.

Given the implied “therefore,” and the fact that “love” is idiomatically an imperative, it would be correct to translate verses 29 and 30: “Jesus answered, ‘The first is, *Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one.* Therefore you must love Him with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’”

“and…and…and.” The elements in the command are each connected with “and,” which is the figure of speech polysyndeton (“many ands,” see Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*). The figure polysyndeton places an “and” between each item in the list, and by that literary device emphasizes each thing in the list. Thus, when Jesus says we must love God “with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength,” he is specifically emphasizing each point in the list. In normal grammar only the last item on the list has the “and.”

In contrast to the figure polysyndeton, which emphasizes each item in the list, the figure of speech asyndeton (“no ands”) does not have the word “and” at all, even between the last two items in the list. This means that nothing in the list gets specific emphasis, but the readers are meant to see that while the things on the list are important enough to mention, it is the conclusion that God wants to get the emphasis, and He lets us know that by the figure asyndeton. So while the figure polysyndeton emphasizes each item in the list, the asyndeton emphasizes the conclusion (a good example of an asyndeton is the fruit of the spirit in Galatians. See commentary on Galatians 5:22).

There are many good examples of polysyndeton in the Bible, although sometimes the translators do not accurately bring it from the Hebrew or Greek into the English. A
good example is Ephesians 1:21, which says that Jesus is seated at God’s right hand, “far above all rulership, and authority, and power, and lordship, and every name that is named.” In Luke 14:21 there is a polysyndeton in Jesus’ parable, which emphasizes each category of people. The head of the house says, “Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and maimed and blind and lame.” In the same chapter, in Luke 14:13 and 14, Jesus was teaching and used an asyndeton to good effect. He said, “But when you make a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they do not have the means to repay you, for you will be repaid at the Resurrection of the Righteous.” The asyndeton deemphasizes the categories of people and puts the emphasis on the conclusion, “and you will be blessed.”


12:32-33. Quoted from Deuteronomy. 6:4, 5; Deuteronomy. 4:35; Leviticus 19:18.

“by the holy spirit.” David spoke as God directed him to via the gift of holy spirit that was upon David (see commentary on Matt. 22:43). Even though the Greek has both articles with holy spirit, τῷ πνευματι τῷ ἁγίῳ (τῷ πνευματι τῷ ἁγίῳ), it seems to be more of a reference to the gift of holy spirit than it is to the Giver, God. There are many other times the gift of holy spirit has both articles (cp. Luke 3:22; John 14:26; Acts 2:33; 5:32; 10:44, 47; 11:15; 15:8; 19:6; Eph. 1:13; 1 Thess. 4:8). [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

12:37. “liked to listen to him.” The Greek we translate as “like to” is ἠδεῶς (#2234 ἠδεῶς; pronounced hay-de-ōs) and it means with pleasure, with delight, gladly. Some versions catch the sense by saying that the crowds “enjoyed” listening to him. We should not take this to mean that the crowds took to heart what Jesus said and then changed. In Mark 6:20 the same phraseology is used when Herod Antipas used to call for John the Baptist, and “heard him gladly.” Jesus taught openly, but still only had some 120 disciples gathered on the Day of Pentecost. If anything, this shows how people can hear the Word of God taught, even from the Master himself, enjoy it, but not have it change their lives.

12:40. “harsher punishment.” We have taken the sense of krima (#2917 κρίμα)—along with the KJV, NET, NIV, and HCSB translations—to indicate both the judgment and execution of the sentence (Cp. Lenski). Hence, krima becomes “punishment” rather than “condemnation;” and the comparative adjective perissoteros (#4055 περισσότερος) becomes “harsher” rather than “greater.”

12:42. “Two leptons.” The Greek says “lepta” which is the plural of “lepton.” The lepton was a small, common, brass coin minted by the Jews. According to this verse, two leptons = one quadrans (the Roman quadrans was the smallest Roman coin and was worth ¼ of an asssaron, which was 1/64 of a denarius. A denarius was a day’s wage for a common laborer, so if a laborer makes eight dollars an hour for eight hours, or sixty-four dollars a day, a quadrans was worth one dollar. Since two leptons equaled a quadrans, one lepton was worth about a half dollar.

Coins are one area where it is hard to translate. We feel that “penny” is misleading. For one thing, at the rates we assigned here, a lepton is worth $.50. Similarly, while “mite” communicates a small amount, it is unclear, and the reader may think that the Bible is making the point that the woman cast a small amount into the treasury and
not realize that it points out exactly how much she cast in. It was a small amount, but it was exactly described in the Biblical text as being two leptons, not just “a small amount.” This is a case where the best solution is likely to keep the coin in the text and make a text note as to the amount it is worth.

Chapter 13

13:9. “courts.” A good translation of the generic use of “Sanhedrin,” which was not the “great Sanhedrin” that convened in Jerusalem made up of 70 members, but the concept of “lesser Sanhedrin” that were the Jewish courts that met wherever Jews would be tried by other Jews.
13:11. “but the Holy Spirit.” “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]
   “standing where he should not be.” The translations differ as to whether the text should read, where “he” should not be, or where “it” should not be. Some translations support “he” (ASV; ESV; NAB; NLT), while others support “it” (CJB; HCSB; NASB; NET; RSV). The grammar can be argued either way, as anyone who reads a few commentaries on the verse will discover (cp. Lenski; The Interpretation of St. Mark’s Gospel, vs. Lane; The New International Commentary). Blass and DeBunner (A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, ¶ 134) point out that a masculine participle referring to a neuter noun can designate a person.
   Since the grammar can legitimately be “he” or “it,” the meaning of the verse must be interpreted from the scope of Scripture. The “abomination of desolation,” which is referring to an abomination that causes desolation, is not a statue, but a person. Furthermore, not a historical person such as Antiochus Epiphanes (although he may have been type for the Antichrist), but a person who will be manifested in the last days, whom we know as the Antichrist or Man of Lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:3ff), who goes into the Temple of God to show that he is a god.
13:27. “gather his elect.” This is the first resurrection, and includes both the elect on earth (cp. Matt. 25:32) and the dead who are righteous and who will live with Christ in the Millennial Kingdom (cp. Ezek. 37:12-14; John 5:28, 29; Rev. 20:4-6).
13:33. Some Greek texts add prayer to this verse, but it is omitted in some early and important witness, and therefore much more likely added to the text than omitted from it.
13:35. “at the evening watch.” At the time of Christ, in both Jewish and Roman reckoning of time, the “day” was divided into 12 hours (John 11:9, “Are there not twelve hours in the day?”). Also, both the Jews and Romans divided the night into four “watches,” each being three hours long. This was true even though the Jews started their new day at sunset, at the start of the first watch of the night, and the Romans reckoned their new day at midnight, at the start of the third watch of the night (our day beginning at midnight comes from the Romans).

The names of the four watches are named in Mark 6:48, and were “evening watch,” “midnight watch,” “cockcrowing watch,” and “morning watch.” Sometimes, however, the watches were just called by “first watch,” “second watch,” “third watch,” and “fourth watch.” [For more on time in the Bible, see commentary on Mark 6:48].

Chapter 14

14:3. “over his head.” The record of Mary anointing Jesus occurs in Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; and John 12:1-8. Mark says the ointment was poured on the head, while John 12:3 says Mary anointed Jesus’ feet. The key is realizing that she had a lot of ointment, and put it on both Jesus’ head and feet [for more information, see commentary on Matthew 26:7].

14:4. “But there were some indignantly saying to one another…” This verse is hard to translate, and so the versions differ considerably. A literal rendition would be something like, “There were some being indignant with each other.” Of course, they were not being indignant with each other, they were indignant about what they considered a waste of money, and were commenting to each other about it. Some versions say they were indignant “within themselves,” or “said to themselves,” but that can be misunderstood. The ones who were indignant were saying things among themselves, i.e., among their little disgruntled group, but not within their own minds, as we say, “talking to themselves.” The Gospel of John (12:4) lets us know that this verbal poison started with Judas Iscariot, who was a thief and stole from the money that Jesus and the disciples received (John 12:6). From Judas this discontent spread through the room and infected some of the believers. Jesus cut it off quickly and decisively. “Let her alone…” etc. Christians need to learn from this record. A little evil (leaven) goes through the whole loaf of bread. We need to respond quickly to evil.


14:34. “soul.” See commentary on Matthew 26:38.


14:38. “spirit.” This is the use of spirit that refers to the action of the mind, i.e., attitudes and emotions. The Apostles had a willing attitude, but their flesh was weak and unable to stay awake. [For more on “spirit,” including a long list of the ways it is used in the Bible, see Appendix 6, “Usages of Spirit.”]

14:41. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (idōú), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”). 

14:42. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (idōú), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).
14:49. “let the scriptures be fulfilled.” This is a command clause. In the original language this is composed of hina (#2443 ἵνα) and the verb for “fulfilled,” pleroō (#4137 πληρώω), in the subjunctive mood. See entry on John 9:3, “let the works of God be revealed in him.” It should not be translated as a purpose clause, “this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures” (such as NASB; NET; NAB; ASV), but as a command clause: “Let the scriptures be fulfilled.” Reading it as a purpose clause requires the phrase “this has taken place” to be supplied in order to complete the thought, because it is not in the Greek. The fact that the hina with a verb in the subjunctive clause stands alone makes the command clause a less forced reading.

14:64. “defaming speech.” The Greek noun is blasphēmia (#988 βλασφημία; pronounced blas-fay-me’-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmia, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

Chapter 15

15:1. “held a consultation.” The Greek is sumboulion (#4824 συμβούλιον), and it refers to a meeting or the decision that those in the meeting have reached. Hence some translations have “held a consultation” (ESV), while others have something like “formed a plan,” and Lenski has “having passed a resolution.” This was the morning trial of the Sanhedrin. Some of them had met the night before, first at Annas’ house (John 13:18-23) and then with Caiaphas (Matt. 26:57-75; Mark 14:53-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:24-27). However, the whole Sanhedrin was not present then, and besides, a night trial was technically illegal. Now, in the morning, the whole Sanhedrin is present to condemn Jesus, and they do condemn him (cp. Matt. 27:1; Luke 22:66-71). Therefore, it is true that the Sanhedrin both held a consultation, formed a plan, and reached a resolution as to what to do with Jesus, and then they took him to Pilate, who had the authority to execute him.

15:2. “It is as you say.” See Matthew 27:11 note on “It is as you say.”

15:14. “Crucify him.” This is not the same crowd that had said, “Hosanna,” and “Son of David” some days earlier. See commentary on Luke 23:21.


15:25. “third hour.” About our 9 AM. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].

15:28. Metzger, Textual Commentary: “The earliest and best witnesses of the Alexandrian and the Western types of text lack ver. 28. It is understandable that copyists could have added the sentence in the margin from Luke 22.37…”


15:33. “the sixth hour.” The sixth hour is noon our time. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].

15:34. Quoted from Psalm 22:1. [See commentary on Matthew 27:46].
“the ninth hour.” The ninth hour is 3 PM our time. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48]. According to the Hebrew text of Exodus 12:6, the Passover Lamb was to be slain “between the evenings.” The early evening started when the sun could clearly be seen to be falling and the day started to cool off, and the later evening was as the sun was going down or had just gone down. By the time of Christ, the Passover Lamb was slain at the 9th hour, about our 3 PM. Thus Jesus died at the same time the lamb was being slain in the Temple, just a few hundred yards to the west of the Mount of Olives where Christ was crucified.

15:35. “And some of those who stood by, when they heard it…” Christ was so beaten and swollen and so dehydrated from loss of blood that his enunciation was not clear and he was misunderstood by some of the crowd.

15:39. “Truly this man was the Son of God.” The claims of Jesus to be the Son of God would have been well known, as well as the miracles he did, and the fact that the religious leaders wanted him crucified because they envied him. Thus it is not hard to believe that the centurion, upon seeing the love of the Christ (Father, forgive them, etc.), his bravery, and all the miracles and signs that accompanied his death, would be convinced that this man was in fact who he claimed to be, and indeed, who the sign over his head said he was.


15:46. “laid him in a tomb.” This was just before sunset Wednesday evening. [For more information on a Wednesday crucifixion and burial, see commentary on Matthew 12:40].

15:47. “Mary Magdalene and Mary.” The women watched Joseph put Jesus in the tomb, close it, and leave, so they saw that Jesus’ body was not properly prepared for burial, which is why they went and bought spices themselves. See commentary on Matthew 27:61.

Chapter 16

16:1. “And when the Sabbath was past.” This is now Friday, the 16th day of the month Nisan, the day after the “Sabbath.” Mark 16:1 mentions the “Sabbath” being over, but the “Sabbath” in this verse was first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Passover Lamb was sacrificed on the 14th of Nisan in the early evening, and at sunset the 15th of Nisan started, which was a “special” Sabbath, not the regular weekly Sabbath (Jewish days start at sunset). The 15th of Nisan was always a special Sabbath because it was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:7; John 19:31).

The women, having seen Joseph put Jesus in the tomb without properly preparing his body, now went to the market and bought and prepared spices. It is important to see the time break between Mark 15:47 when the women watched Joseph of Arimathea, and Mark 16:1, when they went and bought spices. The women had seen that Joseph of Arimathea did not bury Jesus properly, but they did not have time Wednesday night before the start of the Feast of Unleavened Bread to buy the spices because the Sabbath was so close (Luke 23:54). Even if the women had wanted to buy the spices at that time, the stores would probably have been closed that close to the Sabbath. So the first opportunity they had to buy and prepare the spices was Friday. Nevertheless, they could
not take them to the tomb at that time because the tomb was sealed and guarded. The tomb was guarded for three days: Thursday was day one (this was the special Sabbath that started the Feast of Unleavened Bread); Friday was day two, and Saturday, the weekly Sabbath, was day three. That meant the first day the women could expect to get access to the tomb would be Sunday, which is when they went to the tomb with the spices (see commentary on Luke 24:1).

“bought spices.” The women bought the spices on Friday, the 16th of Nisan. See commentary on Matthew 27:58. Mark 16:1 and Luke 23:56 seem to contradict each other unless we recognize a couple things. First, there are two Sabbaths between the death of Jesus and the time the women took spices to the tomb on Sunday morning: the 15th of Nisan, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the 17th of Nisan, the regular weekly Sabbath. Also, we must remember that “and” connects two events, but not necessarily immediately. There can be a lot of time between two phrases connected with “and.” In the record of Jesus, the women bought the spices after the Special Sabbath (Thursday, the 15th of Nisan), prepared them on Friday, the 16th of Nisan, rested on the weekly Sabbath, Saturday, the 17th of Nisan, and then took them to the tomb after sunrise on Sunday, the 18th of Nisan.

16:2. “And very early on the first day of the week.” This is Sunday, the 18th of Nisan, and the sun had just risen, although it says it was very early, and Luke 24:1 says it was “deep dawn,” that is, when the sun was just up. Mark 16:1 says the women bought spices after the Sabbath (the special Sabbath that was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which fell on Thursday that year). So the women bought the spices on Friday. Now in 16:2 it is Sunday morning just after sunrise and the women are coming to the tomb to properly bury Jesus. They did not know Nicodemus had come and done that already (see commentary on John 19:40). Mary Magdalene had come earlier, while it was still dark, seen the empty tomb, and left (see commentary on John 20:1 and Matt. 27:58). However, the events of the morning had altered Mary’s plans considerably. She did not expect to find an empty tomb and did not expect to meet the Lord. She left the area before these women arrived there.

These women arrived at the tomb “at early dawn” “when the sun had risen,” so they would have gotten together and prepared to go to the tomb at about the same time that Peter and John had seen the empty tomb with their own eyes (John 20:4-9). Had Peter and John come back to this group of women and reported that the tomb was empty, they would not have taken the spices to the tomb in the first place. Luke starts with “they” and does not mention Mary Magdalene at all. That “they” refers to the group of women apart from Mary Magdalene is clear from the fact these women were carrying the spices. There is not a problem with these women coming to the tomb and not meeting with Mary Magdalene, Peter, or the other disciple on their way back to Bethany. There were many footpaths on the Mount of Olives, and it would have been very easy to the women to take one while Mary, Peter, and the other disciple took another.

16:5. “young man.” The women bringing the spices saw an angel at the entryway of the tomb, but he appeared as a “young man,” so they did not realize he was an angel. It was common for tombs to have several rooms. There often is an opening room that is quite large, often with bench seats cut out of the rock, and this room is referred to as a “weeping chamber.” The weeping chamber has another room, or other rooms, that are attached to it, and these have benches or niches for the dead bodies. For example, the
“Garden Tomb” in Jerusalem that many Protestants believe may be the actual tomb of Christ, has an opening room, the “weeping chamber,” and then a second room off of it in which to put the dead body. The women were alarmed when they saw this young man (angel), but he spoke to them and calmed them.

“overwhelmed and alarmed.” The Greek word is ekthambeō (#1568 ἐκθαµβέω; pronounced ek-tham-beh'-oh), and it expresses great emotion; to be alarmed, overwhelmed, astonished, amazed, perplexed. Even though it is only one Greek word, many English versions translated it by two, “amazed and alarmed,” or “utterly amazed,” “greatly alarmed.” The Amplified Bible says, “utterly amazed and struck with terror.” Nothing was “right” about what these women were experiencing. Why was the tomb open? Where was Jesus’ body? How did cloth with spices get in the tomb? And why was a young man sitting alone in the tomb? The women had both a mental and emotional reaction. Mark records more of the emotional reaction: that the women were overwhelmed and alarmed by what they were seeing. Luke records more of the women’s mental reaction, that nothing they saw made sense to them. They were perplexed.

16:7. “Galilee.” For more about Galilee, see commentary on Matthew 28:7. The mention of Galilee in this verse in Mark actually adds to the evidence that the ending of Mark, 16:9-20, is not original. When the angel and then Jesus tell the women that the disciples will see him in Galilee, the next record in Matthew is indeed in Galilee. In contrast, neither Luke or John mention Galilee, and they are the Gospels that have post-resurrection events in Jerusalem, such as Jesus’ meetings with Mary Magdalene, the men on the road to Emmaus, or with the disciples behind closed doors.

In contrast to the internal consistency of the other three Gospels, Mark says the angels tell the women Jesus will see the disciples in Galilee, but then, according to the verses we believe are added, he appears in Jerusalem to Mary Magdalene (v. 9); the two men on the road to Emmaus (v. 12); and to the Eleven (v. 14). This is more evidence that Mark 16:9-20 are not original.

16:8. This is the last verse in Mark that is part of the original texts. The women were understandably frightened and confused by the angel and by all the mysterious things they were experiencing, such as the open tomb, the missing body of Jesus, the unexplained grave wrappings with spices (the women did not know Nicodemus had wrapped Jesus’ body with spices), and Mary Magdalene being nowhere around (she had come to the tomb earlier and was either going to come back and join them or meet them at the tomb). They did what the angel commanded and hurriedly left the tomb and went to tell the disciples.

The apparent discrepancy between Matthew and Mark can be easily explained. While Matthew says that they were going to tell the disciples, Mark says that they did not say anything to anyone. The key to the apparent discrepancy is understanding that Mark is referring to talking to people that they met on the road. Especially since it was just after Passover season, and the day after a Sabbath, it is likely that the women passed many people on their way to tell the disciples what they had just seen, and it would be customary to do at least a cursory greeting to many of those people. Furthermore, ordinarily if a group of people saw an angel, they would be so excited that they would tell everyone they met. However, the terrible events involving Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion, combined with all the unexplainable things the women saw that morning, combined with the “unbelievable” news that Christ had risen from the dead, caused the women not to tell
anyone on the road, but to wait until they got to the disciples. However, Luke 24:9 and 10 let us know that when the women did tell the disciples what had happened to them and that Jesus was raised, the news seemed so outlandish they did not believe the women. 16:9. When we look carefully at the last twelve verses of Mark (Mark 16:9-20), the evidence shows that they are not part of the original God-breathed text, but were added to the original text of Mark, nevertheless, we have made some commentary notes below because those verses are so well known. The Gospel of Mark portrays Jesus as the Servant of God (see commentary on Mark 1:1), and Jesus’ work as the Servant foretold by the OT prophets ended at his death. He was resurrected as “Lord,” and so it is appropriate that Mark does not portray Jesus in his resurrected state.

There are many lines of evidence that lead us to conclude that the ending of Mark that is found in almost every Bible is not original, but is a later addition. The evidence falls into two major categories: external manuscript evidence and internal evidence in the verses themselves. What we will see is that both the manuscript evidence, and the internal evidence shows that Mark originally ended with verse 8, and that short and abrupt ending fits with the rest of Mark and the scope of Scripture. All these points will be examined below.

The first line of evidence we must examine when considering whether or not the closing twelve verses of Mark are original is the external evidence of the ancient manuscripts. When we do this, what we find is that the Greek manuscripts have four major different endings to Mark (Bruce Metzger, Textual Commentary on the New Testament). Obviously, not all four of them can be original, and in fact the evidence shows that none of the four of them is original. While it is true that the majority of the manuscripts have the traditional ending of Mark, that is for a good reason. After it was added, the subsequent manuscripts included it. It is never the largest number of manuscripts that establishes which reading is original, but rather the date of the manuscripts, the manuscript families that include or exclude a text, and any historical evidence that shows us why a text was added or omitted. Hendriksen sums up the manuscript discussion: “It cannot be denied that ever so many Greek manuscripts do contain these words, but when the manuscript evidence is properly evaluated instead of merely counted, the balance swings heavily toward the omission of the contested verses (New Testament Commentary: Mark. Emphasis his).

In the case of the ending of Mark, not only do the earliest manuscripts of the different textual families not have the ending, but the theologians who lived back then testified that the manuscripts they were using did not have it either. The noted textual scholar Bruce Metzger writes:

The last twelve verses of the commonly received text of Mark are absent from the two oldest Greek manuscripts (8 and B), from the Old Latin codex Bobiensis (itk), the Sinaitic Syriac manuscript, about one hundred Armenian manuscripts, and the two oldest Georgian manuscripts (written AD 897 and AD 913). Clement of Alexandria [c. 150-215 AD] and Origen [Origen Adamantius of Alexandria, Egypt; 184-253 AD] show no knowledge of the existence of these verses; furthermore Eusebius [263-339 AD] and Jerome [347-420 AD] attest that the passage was absent from almost all Greek copies of Mark known to them. The original form
of the Eusebian sections (drawn up by Ammonius) makes no provision for numbering sections of the text after 16:8. Not a few manuscripts that contain the passage have scribal notes stating that older Greek copies lack it, and in other witnesses the passage is marked with asterisks or obeli, the conventional signs used by copyists to indicate a spurious addition to a document. (Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* pp. 102, 103.)

As was stated above, there are other endings to Mark besides the well-known one that appears in most Bibles. Sometimes the Greek manuscripts that have traditional long ending also have the most well-known short ending, but this short ending is rarely translated into our English Bibles. Since the short ending is not original, and since it is not usually included in our Bibles, it was never assigned a verse number. The Greek manuscripts that do have both the long and short endings usually place the short ending before the longer one, between verses 8 and 9, which is more evidence that both endings were added to Mark. The New American Standard Bible includes the short ending, but puts it at the end of Mark, after verse 20. According to the NASB, the short ending is translated as follows: *And they promptly reported all these instructions to Peter and his companions. And after that, Jesus Himself sent out through them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.*

The reason that someone would write a “more complete” ending to Mark is clear: it seems to end abruptly. The note in the *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* says it well: “Most scholars believe that this [verse 8] is indeed the point at which the original Gospel probably ended and suggests that the other endings very likely developed during the second century, after the Gospel of Mark was read alongside the other Gospels and appeared, by comparison, to lack a satisfactory conclusion.” Actually, when we understand the purpose of Mark, we will see that its ending at verse 8 is perfectly satisfactory, a point we will make later.

Having examined the external manuscript evidence and seen that the evidence leads us to conclude the ending of Mark is not original, we now turn to the internal evidence of the passage. The internal evidence is in two broad categories: the grammatical and syntactical evidence, and the evidence of what the verses actually say. When it comes to the vocabulary, syntax, and grammar, of the last twelve verses of Mark, it is beyond the scope of this short work, and beyond the ability of most Bible students, to do a thorough study. That kind of evidence involves complex analysis of Greek vocabulary and grammatical patterns, and requires experts who thoroughly understand the Greek language. Thus, we will leave the more complete lexical analysis of the ending of Mark to other scholastic works. A few such works which cover the ending of Mark in much more detail are: B. F. Wescott and F. A. Hort, *Introduction to the New Testament in the Original Greek*, Appendix 1, pp. 29-51; Bratcher and Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of Mark*, pp. 506-522; Roger Omanson, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament*; William Lane, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Mark*.

For the purposes of this study we will only quote some of the scholars who study the grammar and syntax of the ending verses of Mark, and acknowledge that they testify that it is significantly different from the rest of Mark. For example, the text note in the
NET First Edition Bible says of the closing verses of Mark: “Their vocabulary and style are decidedly non-Markan.” William Lane writes: “the form, language, and style of these verses militate against Marcan authorship” (The New International Commentary on the New Testament). Even scholars like Lenski, who defends the closing verses of Mark as probably original, admit that the grammar and syntax of the closing verses does differ from the rest of Mark. Thus the evidence of the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, of the closing verses of Mark is in harmony with the manuscript evidence, which is that the ending of Mark was not written by the same person who wrote the rest of Mark.

The other category of internal evidence that the closing verses of Mark are not original is what the verses say; the information that the verses contain. What we find is that there are statements in the ending verses of Mark that contradict the other Gospels and the scope of Scripture. For example, Mark 16:13 says that the two men (Cleopas and another disciple) who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus went back to Jerusalem and joined the rest of the disciples, but the disciples “did not believe them” when they said Jesus was alive. This contradicts the Gospel of Luke. Luke is the Gospel that has the full account of the men on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32), and it says that when Cleopas and his friend arrived at Jerusalem, the apostles and disciples were already convinced Jesus was alive. In fact, before Cleopas and his friend could even tell the apostles about seeing the resurrected Lord, the apostles and disciples said, “It is true! The Lord has risen” (Luke 24:34). Only after the Apostles and disciples in Jerusalem told Cleopas and his friend that Jesus was alive did the two men get a chance to report their own experience with Jesus, confirming that Jesus was indeed alive. Thus Mark 16:13 and Luke 24:34, 35 blatantly contradict each other, and the best explanation for the contradiction is that Mark 16:13 is not original.

Similarly, Mark 16:14 seems to contradict the other Gospels, and is the only verse in which Jesus reproves his disciples when he first appears to them. This conflicts with Luke 24:36, which says that when Jesus appeared to the disciples he said, “Peace be with you.” By the time Jesus appeared to the disciples who were behind closed doors, they were already saying he had been raised, so why would he reprove them? Reproof certainly does not seem to be the tone of Jesus’ communication with the disciples according to Luke 24:36-49 and John 20:19-23. Again, the best explanation of the contradiction is that Mark 16:14 is not original. We should remember that as the orthodox Church developed, the loving Christ of the Gospels became a much more harsh and judgmental Christ (God suffered the same degradation), so a Jesus who would enter and reprove the disciples even though they believed in him and even though he had just said, “Peace be with you,” fits well later in Church history.

Still more evidence that the ending of Mark is not original is the unusual material about picking up snakes and drinking poison. The ordinary experience of Christians who are bitten by snakes or who drink poison is that it does hurt them. It is extraordinary and miraculous when it does not. However, as the Church developed, mystical statements and beliefs became more common. Two more good examples of mystical beliefs that developed in the Church are the belief that sex made a person less spiritual, which led to the celibate clergy of the Roman Catholic Church; and also the belief that the communion bread actually became the body of Christ, rather than just symbolized it. The fact that it is not experientially correct that a believer can be bitten by a snake or drink poison without
Mark

being harmed, and it is also out of harmony with the general wisdom that is taught in Scripture, the material about snakes and poison can be seen to be an addition to the text.

The phrase about speaking in tongues also clearly seems to be an addition to the text. Jesus would have never mentioned that to his followers just before his ascension. They would not have understood what he was saying. But we can see why it would have been added by a scribe as the Church developed because speaking in tongues was part of the early Church.

Still more evidence that the ending of Mark is an addition is that it has an event that is out of chronological order. Sometimes a Gospel will have an event that is out of chronological order, that is true, but in the record of events after the death of Christ, Mark is the only Gospel that has any event out of order. While that in itself would not be conclusive, given all the other evidence that the last verses in Mark were added, the out-of-order verse in Mark is simply more evidence that the verses are not original. Mark 16:9 about Mary Magdalene chronologically comes before 16:2. It is almost as if the person who wrote the ending of Mark wanted to reintroduce us to Mary Magdalene even though he ends up bringing her into the record at the wrong time.

Also, Mark is the only Gospel that mentions anything that happens after the Day of Pentecost. Matthew ends with Jesus talking to the disciples before his ascension; Luke ends with the disciples waiting in the Temple before the Day of Pentecost; and John ends with Jesus speaking with Peter, and then a conclusion about Jesus’ works. In contrast, the traditional ending of Mark has information about the expansion of the Church and the Word being preached “everywhere,” which occurred many years after the Day of Pentecost.

When we remove the last twelve verses of Mark, and simply end Mark as the oldest manuscripts do, with verse 8, we have a very abrupt ending. Scholars are divided into several broad camps about the abrupt ending of Mark. Many assert that Mark simply ended at verse eight; some scholars think there was an ending to Mark that is now lost; and some scholars think that Mark was in the process of writing an ending but was interrupted by persecution or death and thus did not finish his Gospel.

Although we can see why people want a “better conclusion” to Mark than 16:8 seems to be, as we have seen, the evidence is that Mark ends with verse 8. There is no actual evidence that there ever was another ending that is now “missing.” Mark is like the book of Jonah, which ends in an abrupt manner. Both Jonah and Mark leave us wanting a “better ending,” but when we think about it, there are many things in the Bible we would like to have more information about. Some scholars have tried to say that Mark cannot end with verse 8 because the Greek syntax would then be unusual, but arguments such as those have been ably answered. (One person who does a good job answering that kind of argument is: Ned B. Stonehouse, The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ, pp. 86-118.)

It has also been asserted that Mark 16:8 cannot be the ending of Mark because it makes the women become disobedient to the angel’s command to go and tell the disciples. But it is speaking about the women as they left the tomb, and should not be extrapolated and made to imply that the women did not go tell the other disciples. Since the manuscript evidence, the grammatical and syntactical evidence, and the internal evidence from the verses themselves, all point to the fact that the Gospel of Mark does end with verse 8, is there evidence of God’s design in that abrupt ending? Yes, there is.
The abrupt ending of Mark fits with the subject of Mark, and it also parallels the beginning of Mark. Mark portrays Jesus as the Servant of God (see commentary on Mark 1:1). The Gospel of Mark begins with Jesus being baptized and starting his work as the Servant of God. There is no genealogy like Matthew and Luke have, no explanation of how Jesus was the plan of God, the *logos* becoming flesh, like John has. There are no accounts of his childhood as in Matthew and Luke, or introduction of his person, as in John (“Look!, the Lamb of God”). A good servant needs neither genealogy nor introduction; he is qualified by his obedience and the quality of his work.

Mark starts with Jesus getting immediately to his work. By the end of chapter one (45 verses), he has been baptized by John; tempted for 40 days in the desert; preached the Good News of the Kingdom; called some Apostles; delivered people from demons; healed people of diseases; showed his devotion to God by getting alone and praying; and healed a man of leprosy, which was both a disease and an Old Testament type for sin, thus showing his authority over sin and his ability to heal both the body and soul. In contrast to the fast-Servant-start of Mark, after the first 45 verses of Matthew, Jesus was still a baby; after the first 45 verse of Luke, Mary was still pregnant with Jesus; and after the first 45 verses of John, John the Baptist had pointed out that Jesus was the Lamb of God and Jesus had asked some men to follow him.

When Jesus gave up his life for mankind, that ended his ministry as the Servant of God. In his resurrected body he was no longer the suffering Servant foretold in the Old Testament, but had become the resurrected Lord. That is not to say that Jesus no longer serves God and people, for he certainly does, but he serves in his capacity as Lord.

Not nearly enough work has been done comparing the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah as God’s “Servant” to Mark’s picture of Jesus Christ as that Servant. Part of the reason for that is the doctrine of the Trinity, which sees Christ as “eternal God of eternal God,” and never really recognizes Jesus Christ as the truly human servant of God. Zechariah 3:8 foretells that the “Branch” will be a servant, but the whole chapter of Zechariah 3 is typological of Jesus Christ, right down to the name of the High Priest, which is “Joshua,” the Hebrew name for Jesus.

Similarly, the four “servant songs” of Isaiah, the four well-known and specific prophecies of the Messiah as the Servant of God, are certainly fulfilled by the Servant-Messiah that Mark portrays (Isa. 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12). According to the prophecies, the Servant receives holy spirit; he does not raise his voice or cry out in the streets; he takes care of the bruised reeds and smoldering wicks (i.e., the weak and infirm); he is upheld by Yahweh; he gives sight to the blind and releases the captives from their prisons; he is a light to the nations; he gives his back to those who strike him; he does not hide his face from spitting and humiliation; his appearance is marred; he is a man of sorrows; he bears the sin of us all; and he is “cut off out of the land of the living.” That is a lot for any servant to bear, but Jesus knew it was coming (It is written!), and obeyed God to the end—his death on the cross.

Since Jesus completed his role of the “Servant” when he died, and in any resurrection appearance would no longer be in that role, it is appropriate that Mark ends with Jesus dying and being buried, then the announcement by the angel that he had risen from the dead and the traumatic effect that announcement had on the women. The Resurrection was not a carefully conceived plot by the disciples to deceive mankind, it was God Almighty breaking into history in a way that no one expected; an awesome and
profound way that was both shocking and baffling. God showed His love for mankind by raising His Son from the dead and providing a way for all people to have everlasting life.

The commentary on Mark by David Smith also makes a good point. He says, “This ‘ending without an ending’ forces all readers to evaluate what they would do in a similar situation” (Mark: A Commentary for Bible Students). The very abruptness of the ending of Mark causes us to think about what happened. Like the women at the tomb, we have good evidence that Jesus has been raised from the dead. Will we believe it?

“after he rose, early on the first day of the week.” We believe this verse is not part of the original text [See commentary on Mark 16:9 above]. In spite of that fact, we have translated the Greek text of the ending of Mark because it is so well known. We believe the translation in the REV is the accurate way to translate the Greek because Jesus was raised from the dead Saturday evening before sunset.

Some versions of the Bible translate the verse as if the Greek text read: “When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene,…” (NIV). Translating the Greek that way makes Jesus get up early Sunday morning, which is why many commentators say Jesus got up when there was an earthquake and an angel rolled the stone away from the tomb door. We know that Jesus was “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40, so he could not have been raised Sunday morning, especially if, as tradition says, he was buried Friday evening. Many commentators assert that bibliically, any part of a day is called a “day,” so they say Friday is day one, Saturday is day two, and Sunday is day three. While that way to count days would work if Jesus had just said he would be buried “three days,” it is not a proper understanding of how to count Jesus’ words, “three days and three nights.” There are not three days and three nights from Friday just before sunset to Sunday while it is still dark. We can reconstruct the chronology very accurately from the information in the New Testament. Wednesday was the 14th of Nisan, the day the Passover Lamb was killed, and thus the day Jesus died. Thursday was the 15th of Nisan, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, always a Special Sabbath. Friday the 16th of Nisan fell between the Special Sabbath and the weekly Sabbath. Saturday, the 17th of Nisan was the weekly Sabbath, and Jesus was in the ground three days and three nights just before the sun set on Saturday, so his resurrection was on Saturday evening. Sunday, the 18th of Nisan was the first day of the week, and the day he appeared to Mary Magdalene and the rest of the Apostles and disciples.

The confusion about the burial of Jesus is due to the fact that the Bible makes it clear that Jesus was buried before the Sabbath. Not realizing that the “Sabbath” was a High Day, a Special Sabbath, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (John 19:31), people assume Jesus must have been crucified on a Friday, and that is how the traditional account of the crucifixion got started.

When trying to translate and punctuate Mark 16:9, the Greek quite literally reads, “Having risen early on the first day of the week he appeared first to Mary Magdalene...” The question is whether the words, “early on the first of the week” refer to when he arose or when he appeared. The fact is that in the Greek text it could be either, so we need to discover the meaning from the scope of Scripture. One of the most, or perhaps the most, capable Greek grammarian in modern times is A. T. Robertson, who says, “It is probable that this note of time goes with ‘risen’ (αναστας), though it makes good sense with ‘appeared’ (εφανη)” (Word Pictures in the New Testament). There are cases in the NT
where time phrases are unclear, so this is not solid proof that this verse is not original, however, if someone were to press the fact that the natural reading of the Greek made the resurrection on Sunday morning, then this verse would be one more piece of evidence that it was not part of the original text of Mark.

16:10. “mourned and wept.” Although it is likely that the disciples did mourn and weep, this seems to be more evidence that the end of Mark is fanciful and not original. No other Gospel mentions the disciples gathered mourning and weeping. Although they certainly missed Jesus, and were afraid and confused, they were caught up in the confusion about his death in light of the fact that they had been so sure he was the Messiah. The mourning and weeping is more like imagery from a later time, as if the disciples were saying, “They killed the Messiah.” Actually, they were saying, “They killed Jesus, who we thought was the Messiah, and now what are we going to do?”

16:14. “And afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they reclined to eat, and he rebuked them…” This verse contradicts Luke 24:34, because when Jesus appeared to the disciples behind closed doors, they were already saying he had been raised, so why would he reprove them? The disciples did not believe the women, that is true, but in the biblical culture the testimony of women was not allowable in court. The disciples did believe Peter and the two men on the road to Emmaus, so Jesus would not reprove the disciples for “not believing those who saw him after he was raised.” They did believe the three men whose testimony was credible in that culture. Furthermore, reproof certainly does not seem to be the tone of Jesus’ communication with the disciples according to Luke 24:36-49 and John 20:19-23. The best explanation is that the closing section of Mark is not original. (See commentary on Mark 16:9).

16:16. “He who believes and is baptized will be saved.” Mark 16:16 is the only verse in the New Testament that clearly says a person has to be baptized to be saved. Although some people say verses such as Acts 2:38, “repent and be baptized,” say the same thing, that is not actually the case. Acts 2:38 is simply saying if a person did repent and get baptized he would receive the holy spirit, which is true, but different from saying one had to do those things to get the holy spirit.

Salvation is the most serious subject in the Bible, and thus this verse requires our attention. However, studying it in light of the scope of the New Testament, it seems unreasonable that water baptism is necessary for salvation, but it is only mentioned here and not in any of the other clear verses about salvation. For example, Romans 10:9 says very clearly: “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” That fact, along with all the evidence that the closing section of Mark is not original, is very solid evidence that this verse is not original, but was added, and that makes sense because as Christianity developed in the decades after Christ’s ascension, the doctrine that water baptism was necessary for salvation became a part of Church doctrine, even though it had never been a doctrine before then.

If someone did want to insist that Mark 16:16 is original and a person had to be “baptized” to be saved, then the “baptism” in the verse would not refer to baptism in water but to baptism in holy spirit. In that case, the statement “Whoever believes and is baptized [in holy spirit] will be saved” would be true, because at the time a person believes, he is baptized in holy spirit, and then his salvation is assured. See commentary on 16:9.
16:17. “And these signs will accompany those who believe.” This verse was almost certainly added to Mark from a later time when speaking in tongues was better known and understood (see commentary on 16:9).

“speak with new tongues.” For an explanation of speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:5.

16:20. “They went out and preached everywhere.” This verse is more evidence that the ending of Mark is not original. The other Gospels all end before the Day of Pentecost and the start of the Christian Church. However, this verse clearly ends later in Church history. Hendrickson writes that this verse is “a statement which one would naturally associate with a period of Church history considerably later than Pentecost” (New Testament Commentary: Mark). The actual fact is that, for years after the ascension, the Jews did not catch the vision of the Great Commission as this verse seems to imply.

First and foremost, the Jews did not really start to even minister to the Gentiles until the middle of Acts. Although Peter was told to go to the house of the Gentile soldier Cornelius in Acts 10, there is no record of Jews pointedly going to the Gentiles until Acts 11:20 when Jews talked to the Gentiles in Antioch of Syria. As importantly, the Jews took a long time to go “everywhere.” The Apostles stayed in Jerusalem and outreach much beyond that was very slow at first. Although a few of the Jews who came to the feasts at Jerusalem may have believed and taken that belief home with them, one of the first major outreach events occurred when Saul was persecuting the Church and “those who had been scattered [by the persecution] went around telling the Good News” (Acts 9:4). Thus, Mark 16:20 is more like a summary verse of Acts than a conclusion of the Gospel of Mark.
Chapter 1

1:1. “compile an orderly account.” For why there are four Gospels, see commentary on Mark 1:1, “gospel.”

1:5. “priestly division of Abijah.” 1 Chronicles 24:1-19 recounts how King David organized the priests, the sons of Aaron, into 24 divisions. The eighth division was the division or “course” of Abijah (2 Chron. 24:10). Each division was on duty twice a year for a one-week period, and also served at the three major feasts of the year: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. After the Babylonian captivity only four divisions returned (Ezra 2:36-39), but these four were divided into twenty-four divisions, given the names of the original twenty-four, and then continued on with their duties according to the traditional timing (Hendriksen). The eighth division of Abijah that Zechariah was serving would have been the last week of May, 4 B.C.

1:6. “before God.” This phrase is an idiom where doing something “before the Lord” means to do something in service to him, to act as his servant. This can be seen when Elijah says, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word” (1 Kings 17:1; cp. 18:15; 2 Kings 3:14; 5:16). Elijah is saying he stands in service to God. (For more examples see: Gen. 7:1; 17:1; 24:40; 37:10; Luke 1:6, 8, 15, 75; Acts 4:19; 8:21; 1 Tim. 5:4; Heb. 13:21).

1:7. “they both were advanced in their days.” The Levites could only work from 20 to 60, but the priests could work as long as they were able. There is a very good chance that both Elizabeth and Zechariah were over 60. It is almost certain that they both died before John started his ministry.

“barren.” In a culture in which children were considered the blessing of the Lord, and the death rate was so high that each couple had to have 5 children to keep the population number stable, being barren was considered a curse. In fact, the situation highlights the character of Zechariah, who was no doubt under pressure to divorce her. There were people who considered it a religious duty to divorce a barren wife (Edersheim, Life and Times, book II, p. 137).


“in his division’s turn.” See Luke 1:5 note on “priestly division of Abijah.”

1:9. “lot.” The priest who got the privilege of burning incense on the golden altar in the Temple was chosen by the casting of lots. The honor was so great that a person was only allowed to do it one time in his life, and after that he was called “rich” (Edersheim, Life and Times, book II, p. 134).

1:10. “of the people.” No Gentiles were allowed just outside the sanctuary, in what was called the court of men and women. The use of laos for “people” here refers specifically to the Jews. See entry on “the people” in Luke 2:10.


1:15. “in the sight of the Lord.” Biblical custom. The literal is “before the Lord” (ESV). This is an idiom where “before me” means “in my sight.” Just like “thou shalt have no other gods before me,” meaning I do not want to see any other gods in your life (Deut. 5:7, literally, “before my face”). For a sampling of OT examples of this custom see:

There is so much in this little phrase: “great in the sight of the Lord.” John’s life is mostly unknown, and his ministry was short. He died in prison as a result of having made enemies because he dared to speak the truth. So many people take pride in being great in the eyes of the world, but in the end that greatness will mean nothing. John’s light is still burning, although his life ended 2,000 years ago. Every Christian should strive to be great in the sight of the Lord.

“wine or beer.” John was to be a Nazarite, as was Samson. For the Nazarite vows and commitments, cp. Numbers 6. The Greek word translated “beer” is sikera (σίκερα). It was not a distilled beverage, like our whisky, rum, vodka, etc., today. Distilled liquor was unknown in the ancient world. It was a fermented drink, hence our translation as “beer.” The Akkadian word was sikaru, barley beer, from whence the Hebrew word shekhar almost certainly came, and the Greek word is obviously related.

Because “beer” does not occur in most translations of the Bible (although that is changing in some of the more modern versions; cp. HCSB, NET), it is worth saying something about it. Biblical Archaeological Review (Sept./Oct. 2010, Vo. 36, no. 5), has a very informative article by Michael Homan, titled, “Did the Ancient Israelites Drink Beer?” Homan writes:

In ancient Near Eastern cultures, beer was in many ways a super-food. By producing and drinking beer, one could dramatically multiply the calories in harvested grains while consuming needed vitamins; that alcohol was also effective at killing bacteria found in tainted water supplies. Given the difficulty of producing food in the ancient world, beer gave you a lot of nutritional bang for your buck.

…Nobody disputes the importance of beer in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, where it was the national drink. Beer was used to pay laborers and the fathers of brides. It was used medicinally for stomach ailments, coughs, constipation; an ancient Egyptian prescription calls for a beer enema. Hammurabi’s Law Code regulates the price and strength of beer. Many ancient temples had their own brewers. …Moreover, beer did not keep well, so it was made for immediate consumption.

The article goes on to discuss how beer was not made like we do it today with hops or carbonation, and that was often made from a mixture of things, including mixed grains instead of just one grain, and it could be sweetened with many different things, such as grapes, figs, honey, and fruit, and also spices may be added.

The Greek word refers to a fermented drink that was almost certainly some kind of beer, whether barley beer, date beer, mixed-ingredients beer, etc. In contrast, it does not refer to distilled liquor, which is what the English “strong drink” implies, so we did not use that term in the REV.

“filled with holy spirit.” No article “the”. This holy spirit was the gift of God that He gave to some believers before Pentecost. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”]

1:17. Quoted from Malachi 4:6. The reference to the “spirit and power of Elijah” is a clear indicator that when Malachi 4:5 says that “Elijah” will be sent, it is the figure
antonomasia, “name change,” where the name “Elijah” is put for someone who has many of the same characteristics as Elijah, in this case, John the Baptist. For example, in Revelation 11:8, the city of Jerusalem is called “Sodom” to make the point that it is full of ungodliness and immorality.

“their children.” Cp. NIV. In the text there is no word for “their,” however, the possessive is implied.

“good sense.” The Greek is phronesis (#5428 φρόνησις). This is not the Greek, sophia, wisdom, but rather “a word for practical intelligence” (Robertson, Word Studies).

1:18. “sign.” Literally, Zechariah says, “according to what will I know it?” This is to be understood as asking for a sign. As Lenski writes, “it asks for a norm or sign in accord with which the promise will be fulfilled.” This is the same phrasing that Abraham uses in Genesis 15:8. Interestingly, scripture says that “Jews ask for signs” (1 Cor. 1:22), as was the case with Abraham, Gideon, and Hezekiah when they were promised things from the Lord. The difference with Zechariah was that he asked out of unbelief—as verse 20 makes clear—while these others asked from a desire to strengthen the faith they had (See Hendriksen). One must be careful what one asks for, however, because the angel answered Zechariah’s unbelieving demand for a sign—he would be mute until the child was born.

1:20. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“proper time.” Kairos (#2540 καιρός) can mean time in the sense of “proper, right, or appropriate time” (BDAG). Much like a parent might say to a fifteen year old, “you’ll be ready to date when it is time,” or “when it’s time, we’ll know.” In these cases “time” means, the right time, the appropriate time. The Greek word for “time” was also used in this sense.

1:26. “a city of Galilee named Nazareth.” The reason Luke says “a city named” Nazareth, is because the town was such that few people would have heard of it. No other extra-biblical work such as the Talmud mentions Nazareth. When Luke mentions well-known cities he just says the name—“Damascus” (Acts 9:19), “Iconium” (Acts 14:1)—rather than indicate the region and say “a city called.”

1:28. “Greetings.” The Greek is chairō (#5463 χαίρω) and in this context was a standard greeting of the Greeks just as we today say “Hi!” “Hail” persists in some versions, but is outdated, not being used as a greeting today, so “Greetings” as we have makes the meaning clear.

The KJV adds to this verse, “blessed art thou among women.” However, this phrase was not in the original text (Metzger, Textual Commentary).

1:31. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“conceive in your womb.” The translation is correct, even though the Greek phrase sullēmpse en gastri (συλλῆμψεν ἐν γαστρί) can also be understood as an idiom and translated “become pregnant in your womb.” Genuine conception did occur in Mary. We know from many verses of Scripture that Mary had to contribute the egg and God fertilized the egg. There is no indication in Scripture that when Jesus was said to be of the line of David, that that just meant he was adopted into that line. To fulfill the prophecies he had to be born as a true descendant of David. Mary was not a surrogate mother, she was a real mother who made a real genetic contribution to Jesus Christ.
The prophecies were that Jesus was going to be a true lineal descendant of David. He was known as the “Son of David,” a title he recognized of himself, because he was a true descendant of David. Also, Psalm 132:11 says, “Yahweh swore an oath to David, a sure oath he will not revoke: “One of the fruit of your body I will place on your throne.” To fulfill that prophecy Jesus Christ had to be a genuine descendant of David, and he was not David’s descendant if he was God. Jesus Christ is the Son of his father, God, and his mother, Mary. Romans 1:3 is one of the many New Testament verses that speaks of Jesus being of the line of David. Most commentators ignore this clear truth in the Bible in order to maintain the tradition of the Trinity.

1:33. “he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.” This verse is a good example that just because something in scripture is said to last forever, doesn’t mean it starts immediately. Likewise, even though we have eternal life (John 3:15-16, 36), it does not mean it comes into effect immediately; because if the Lord tarries we will still die and need to be resurrected into that eternal life: “Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40, NIV).

1:35. “The Holy Spirit.” “The Holy Spirit” (capital “H,” capital “S”) is a name used for God when His power is in operation. In a very Hebraic way, this verse equates the Holy Spirit with “the power of the Most High.” The angel was speaking to Mary, a young Hebrew woman, in terms she could understand. It was common in the Hebrew language to say something and then repeat it in different words so the meaning would be clear. This occurs throughout the Hebrew Old Testament, and can especially be seen in books such as Proverbs in which something is stated and then restated using different words.

Since Mary told the angel she was not having sexual relations with human men, and knew she would then have to be impregnated by God, she would naturally understand “the Holy Spirit” to be the name of God which emphasized His invisible power in operation. God has many names in the Bible, and “the Holy Spirit” is one of them. It is easy to tell that in this case “the Holy Spirit” is a name of God because Jesus is called “the Son of God” and “the Son of the Father” (2 John 1:3), but he is never called “the Son of the Holy Spirit.” Mary understood that “the Holy Spirit” was another name for God, and thus she told her cousin Elizabeth that she rejoiced in God, and that “the Mighty One” (another name for God) had done great things for her (Luke 1:47-49). [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

1:36. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!’

1:37. “For nothing will be impossible with God.” Zechariah and Elizabeth are being paralleled with Abraham and Sarah. Here we have a direct allusion to Genesis 18:14, “Is anything impossible for the LORD? At the appointed time I will come back to you, and in about a year she [Sarah] will have a son” (HCSB). Earlier in the chapter we saw how Zechariah employed the same question as Abraham (see entry on “sign” in Luke 1:18), and now this phrase originally regarding Sarah is applied to Elizabeth, who is barren and past fertile years. Like Sarah, she too will miraculously have a child. In Genesis the phrase was put as a question (expecting a negative answer), “Is anything impossible with the LORD?” (μὴ ἀδύνατει παρὰ τὸ θεόν ῥῆμα). Here in Luke it is as though the angel replies, answering in the future tense, “Nothing will be impossible with God” (οὐκ ἀδύνατησαι παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ πάντα ῥῆμα). This allusion would have been a great faith booster for Mary, who was about to have a child without sexual intercourse with a man.
Only the ASV prefers the translation, “For no word from God shall be void of power.” This is grammatically possible, and perhaps implied as a double meaning. Rather than simply “word,” the Greek word rhema (#4487 ῥῆμα) also means “thing, object, matter, event” (BDAG). Luke uses rhema to mean “thing” elsewhere: Luke 1:65; 2:15; 2:19; 2:51; Acts 5:32; 10:36.

1:38. “Lo!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”). Although most usually translated “Look!” in the REV, in this context that made it seem like Mary may have been rude to the angel, which was certainly not the case. We went with “Lo,” like Rotherham and Young’s Literal Translation.

1:39. “a city of Judah.” The Greek word translated Judah comes from Iouda (#2448 Ἰούδα). A number of versions have “Judah” (NASB; ESV; HCSB; ASV; NET; NAB), and a few versions say “Judea” (NIV; YLT). But Judea is incorrect from the Greek, as Lenski writes, “When Luke refers to the province he writes Ἰούδα [not Ἰουδά] (10 times in the Gospel, 12 times in the Acts).” “Judea” is the territory ruled over by Herod, while “Judah” refers to the ancient area of the tribe of Judah. Lenski also makes the point there may have been a city we know nothing about called “Judea,” which could be the case but is less likely.

1:41. “filled with holy spirit.” There is no definite article. This holy spirit is the gift of God. (cp. Matt 3:10). [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]

1:44. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

1:45. “from the Lord.” The phrase “from the Lord” could also be translated “by the Lord.” In either case the preposition para (#3844 παρά) is to be understood in the sense of expressing source [see Appendix 11: “Greek Prepositions”]. These were words that originated in and were spoken from the Lord.

1:46. “My soul magnifies the Lord.” Similar to Psalm 34:2a. The “soul” here refers to the emotions, feelings, attitudes, and even thoughts. Mary is magnifying the Lord with all that is within her. [See Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’.”]

1:47. “my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.” This is a powerful verse because it shows Mary’s deep trust in God. On the surface she seemed to have many problems at this time, chief among them being that she was pregnant before having sex with her husband in a culture that was scandalized by that. Even Joseph had thought about divorcing her. Only a few people knew of her divine conception, and since no one was expecting a virgin birth she could not have convinced them of it anyway. In spite of her difficult circumstances she rejoiced in God, and thus has set a wonderful example for us and how we should rejoice even in our difficult circumstances.

There are Trinitarians who believe that, because this verse calls God “Savior,” and Jesus is also called “Savior,” that Jesus must be God in the flesh. However, that belief is not correct. There are many references to God the Father being called “Savior.” That makes perfect sense because He is the author of the plan of salvation and is also very active in our salvation. For example, God, the Father, is called “Savior” in Isaiah 43:11, 1 Timothy 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Titus 3:4, 25. In contrast, Jesus Christ is called “Savior” because he is the agent who carried out God’s plan, and without whom it could not have come to pass.
The term “savior” is used of many people in the Bible. This is hard to see in the English versions because, when the word “savior” is used of people, the translators almost always translated it as “delivered.” This in and of itself shows that modern translators have a Trinitarian bias. The only reason to translate a word as “Savior” when it applies to God or Christ, but as “delivered” when it applies to men, is to make the term seem unique to God and Jesus when in fact it is not. This is a good example of how the actual meaning of Scripture can be obscured if the translators are not careful when they translate the text.

God’s gracious provision of “saviors” who help God’s people is not recognized when the same word is translated “Savior” for God and Christ but “delivered” for others. Also lost is the testimony in Scripture that God works through people to bring His power to bear. Of course, the fact that there are other “saviors” does not take away from Jesus Christ, who is the only one who could and did save us from our sins and eternal death.

If all the great men and women who were “saviors” were openly portrayed as such in the English versions, the grace and mercy God demonstrates in saving His people by “saviors” He has raised up would be openly displayed. Furthermore, we believe no reader would confuse the true God with the people He was working through. A good example that shows God raising up “saviors” to rescue Israel through history occurs in Nehemiah in a prayer of confession and thanksgiving to God. The Israelites prayed, “But when they [Israel] were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers [saviors], who rescued them from the hand of their enemies” (Neh. 9:27 NIV84). Some other examples of men designated as “savior” are in 2 Kings 13:5; Isaiah 19:20 Obadiah 21. It is incorrect to say that because Christ and God are both called “Savior,” they are one and the same, just as it would be incorrect to say that the “saviors” God raised up throughout history were also God in the flesh or even the same individual as Jesus Christ. For more information, see Andrews Norton, A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians, pp. 304, 305. Also, Don Snedeker, Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals, pp. 378-380.

1:48. “because he has looked upon the low estate of his servant.” God does look upon the lowly and humble (Ps. 138:6). In this sentence, “looked upon” is used in an idiomatic or “pregnant” sense, because it means much more than just “look at,” it means to see and do something about it.

The words for “look at” or “see” (a common Hebrew word for “see” is ra‘ah (#7200 רָאָה)) are sometimes used in an idiomatic or “pregnant” sense that means “to look with favor upon,” “to accept,” “to notice and do something about.” Example of this idiom occur in both the Old and New Testaments, and include: Genesis 29:32, Exodus 4:31; 1 Samuel 1:11; 9:16; 2 Samuel 16:12; Job 40:12; Psalm 9:14; 10:11; 31:7; Habakkuk 1:13; and Luke 1:48. In contrast, to “not see” something was to ignore it, to not pay attention to it, to not care about it or look at it with any favor. Thus when Joseph ran the prison in Egypt, the jailer did “not see” anything under Joseph’s authority; he paid no attention to it (Gen. 39:23).

Sometimes the idiom of “see” goes a step beyond just “look upon with favor” or “accept,” and means, “to choose for oneself” “to provide for oneself,” or “to choose” (cp. Gen. 22:8 (God will ‘see’ a lamb for Himself); 41:33; Deut. 33:21; 1 Sam. 16:1; 2 Kings 10:3; Esther 2:9 (the girls were “chosen” or “selected” to be with Esther).
The word “see” is also used the way we use it in English as “to visit” someone, to “go see them” (cp. 2 Sam. 13:5; 2 Kings 8:29; 9:16; Ps. 41:6; 2 Chron. 22:6).

It is also used as “to know” or “to understand,” and can be just a mental knowing or a knowing through experience, if the emphasis is on experience, it might even be translated “experience.” This is similar to the way we use it in English when we say, “I see what you mean,” or “I am going to see for myself,” which often mean experience it myself (cp. Ps. 16:10; 27:13; 34:13; 60:5; 71:20; 89:49 (Heb. 11:5); 90:15; Jer. 5:12; Jer. 20:12; Lam. 3:1). [For more information on the idiomatic uses of “see,” see commentary on John 1:18, and also the commentary on Romans 8:29, “foreknew”].

“Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

1:49. “because the Mighty One has done great things for me…” Almost 1000 years earlier, King David had noted the same thing, that God has done great things (Ps. 71:19).

“holy is his name.” The Psalmist says, “holy and awesome is his name” (Ps. 111:9).

1:50. “his mercy is on those who fear him.” God refers to his love and mercy extending for generations in Exodus 20:6 and Psalm 103:17.

1:52. “mighty.” The word for “mighty” is dunastes (#1413 δυνάστης). It denotes “rulers, officials, or potentates” (cp. Acts 8:27; 1 Tim. 6:15).


1:54. “He helped his servant Israel.” “The middle voice of antilambano means to take hold of something or somebody and in that way to help, and, like the verbs of touch, it is constructed in the genitive,” (Lenski).

“to remember mercy.” Figure of speech, Metonymy (cp. Bullinger; Figures of Speech). “Mercy” is put for the act of mercy, being merciful. God “took hold of Israel his servant to help them,” in order to remember to be merciful to Abraham and his seed. In other words, God helped Israel in order to fulfill the promise He made to Abraham and his seed, a promise that they did not deserve, which is the point of saying that God remembered “mercy.”

1:67. “filled with holy spirit.” There is no definite article. This holy spirit is the gift of God. (cp. Matt 3:10). [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

1:68. “Praise the Lord.” This phrase is often translated as “blessed be the Lord.” However, the sense is best captured by “praise the Lord.” It is a verbal adjective; as Lenski writes, “Thus ‘blessed’ means: ‘let all men bless God,’ i.e., speak well of him.” Translating it “praise the Lord” carries this sense of the command: “let all men bless God.” On the other hand, to say “blessed be the Lord,” just states the simple fact that the Lord is well spoken of.

“visited.” Episkeptomai (#1980 ἐπισκέπτομαι) has the sense of “looking favorably upon with an intent to help.” Cp. NET translation, “he has come to help.” The rest of the verse explains the help provided by the Lord, He has “brought about redemption for his people.”

1:70. “from ancient times.” For this translation compare NJB and HCSB. The literal reading is “from of ages.” Hence, “from of old” would be a good alternative translation.

1:72. “our fathers.” These are the “fathers” of Israel, namely, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—who worked so hard but did not see the promises fulfilled. It is not
speaking of the immediate biological fathers, as the next verse makes clear by referring to “Abraham.”


1:76. “prepare the way for him.” The Greek word that is translated “way” is hodos (#3598 ὁδὸς) in the plural, and the Greek is etoimazo hodous outou (ἐτοιμάζω ὁδοὺς αὐτοῦ), which would be more literally translated as, “prepare his roads.” Hodos refers to a road, a path, or a way something is done. In this context, the phrase “prepare his roads,” refers to a well-known biblical custom. Inside the city of Rome, or other large cities, and on some major thoroughfares such as the “Appian Way” (Appian Road), the road was paved and maintained by slaves, road crews, and the army. However, for most of the Roman Empire, and certainly for most of the ancient Middle East, roads were just dirt roads, and frankly, most often, not even what we would classify as a “dirt road” today—they were actually just dirt paths. These dirt roads and paths did not specifically belong to anyone unless they were main roads and government maintained or unless they belonged to a landowner if the path went through his specific piece of property. No one really was considered to “own” the roads through wilderness and woods except the kingdom in general, and thus no one kept them repaired or travelable. Over time they became filled with ruts and holes (that were often just mud holes), washed out, overgrown by brush and overhung by any nearby trees.

Furthermore, since no one really owned the path, nearby farmers would throw stones from their fields onto them, so a road with lots of stones was not uncommon. After a while, the “roads” of the Middle East became very difficult to travel. When royalty or a powerful dignitary was going to travel to a certain place, the call would go out to “prepare the roads.” The ruler would usually send someone out to make sure that work was being done. This is the custom that is referred to in this verse. John the Baptist was sent to “prepare the roads” that Jesus Christ would travel on spiritually. He preached the Good News, confronted sinners, offered baptism for repentance, and raised everyone’s expectation for the Messiah, the laces of whose sandals he was unworthy to unloose.

1:77. “by the forgiveness…” The versions differ, some having “by” (KJV, NASB, RSV, Rotherham, etc.) some “through,” some “in,” and Lenski has “in connection with.” The point is that, in having their sins forgiven, people really have a sense of their salvation, especially before the Church Age. Christ knew this, and often told people their sins were forgiven.

1:78. “Rising Sun.” This is a title of the Lord Jesus Christ. It comes from the word anatole (#395 ἀνατολή), which is used to describe the dawn, “a change in darkness to light” (BDAG). This leads naturally into verse 79, where Christ is said to “give light to those who sit in darkness.” The verb form of anatole occurs in the LXX translation of Malachi 4:2, describing the rise of the Sun of Righteousness. Here, the Rising Sun is said to visit us “from on high,” the same Greek phrase found in 1 Samuel 22:17, Psalm 18:16, 102:19, 144:7, and Luke 24:49. These passages in 1 Samuel and Psalms show that rescue from one’s enemies is said to come “from on high”—this theme comes up in Zechariah’s prophecy, especially verses 71 and 74.


1:79. “into.” Rather than solely expressing motion “into,” the preposition eis (#1519 εἰς) can also have the sense of “in” [See Appendix 11: “Greek Prepositions.”]. Here it
includes both the meanings of guiding us “into” the way of peace and also the notion of guiding along, “in,” the road while actually on the path. Christ leads us both ‘into’ and ‘in’ the road of peace.

Chapter 2


“inhabited world.” In the time of the first century the Roman Empire was the entire known “world.”

2:5. “had been betrothed.” Matthew 1:20, 24 make it clear that by this time Mary was already Joseph’s wife. Why then does the text emphasize the betrothal here and not the marriage? The answer is because the couple’s union had not yet been consummated; they had not as yet had sexual intercourse (Matt. 1:24-25) (Hendriksen).

This verse highlights a biblical custom that is hard to see in English. The Greek verb *mnesteuo* (μνηστεύω) is in the perfect (past) tense, passive voice. In the ancient Near East, betrothal, the promise of marriage, usually was a contract between the parents of the groom and the parents of the bride. Marriages were arranged, and often many years before the couple was of marriageable age. The perfect tense, passive voice verb shows that the betrothal, the engagement, was something that happened to Mary, not something she did. She did not “get engaged,” her engagement happened to her. This is a much different picture than modern western courtship. The problem with the English translation “had been betrothed” (or “had been engaged”) is that is what we say when someone “had been” betrothed, but is no longer; the engagement was broken off. Thus it is very hard to produce the truth that is in the Greek text into English without giving the wrong idea. On balance, we decided that communicating that Joseph and Mary were betrothed at the time was more important than trying to produce the custom that the engagement had happened to Mary in the past but risk people thinking they were not still engaged.

“was pregnant.” The Greek word is *egkuos* (#1471 ἐγκύος), a compound word from the preposition *en*, “in” and the word *kuo*, the womb. It literally means, “to have in the womb” (Louw-Nida). It simply refers to being pregnant. It does not refer to how far along the pregnancy was. The King James Version and a couple other English versions support the traditional Christmas story by translating *egkuos* as “great with child.” That is an unwarranted translation, because the Greek word simply means, “to have in the womb,” “to be pregnant.” It shows us Mary was pregnant, but does not tell us how far along she was. Joseph was a wise man, and wisdom would dictate that he would not travel with her when she was on the verge of giving birth. While it is true that at that time it was difficult to tell exactly when a woman would give birth, if she gave birth on the road that would be exceedingly difficult for the family, so if she had started early contractions, or Braxton-Hicks contractions, it is unlikely Joseph would have traveled with her. Actually, since both Joseph and Mary knew the Messiah had to be born in Bethlehem to fulfill the prophecy, and since they had relatives in Bethlehem and were both a “royal” couple who would have been gladly received by many homes, they almost certainly would have allowed plenty of time to be in Bethlehem.
2:6. “while they were there.” The Greek is more literally, “in their being there.” This is well translated as, “while they were there,” which is the translation in most English versions. Note that this verse makes it clear that they had not just arrived that day. The specific Greek phrase occurs in three other verses besides this one, and it does not refer to just arriving or just starting something—it refers to being “in” the middle of something. In Luke 5:12 Jesus was visiting a town when a man came to him to be healed. He had not just arrived at the town, he was “in” it. In Luke 9:8 the disciples came to him “while” he was praying. He had not just started, he was in the midst of prayer. Similarly, in Luke 11:1 Jesus was “in” prayer, and when he had finished a disciple asked a question. The point is that Joseph and Mary had not just arrived in Bethlehem, as the traditional Christmas story teaches. They had been in Bethlehem a while, but the Bible never says exactly how long.

2:7. “no space for them in the guestroom.” The Greek is: διότι οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος ἐν τῷ καταλύματι. [διότι (because) οὐκ (not) ἦν (there was) αὐτοῖς (for them) τόπος (a place) ἐν (in) τῷ (the) καταλύματι (guest room)]. Young’s Literal Translation, which is similar to our own, reads, “there was not for them a place in the guest-chamber.”

The traditional story of the birth of Christ has Joseph and Mary arriving in Bethlehem late in the day or perhaps even at night, desperately seeking lodging, only to find there are no vacancies in the inn. Upon receiving no help from the people of Bethlehem they retire to a stable (some tradition says a cave), where Mary gives birth and Jesus is placed in the manger from which the animals eat. However, this understanding of the nativity stems largely from extra biblical works and tradition imported into the gospels, rather than study of the biblical record itself. Much misinformation about the birth of Christ came from a document that was widely circulated in Christian circles in the early centuries of the Christian era. It is referred to by scholars as the Protevangelium of James, and it is likely from the third century AD, although it is possible, but not likely, that it dates as early as 150 AD (see Wilhelm Schneemelcher, editor, New Testament Apocrypha, The Protevangelium of James, pp. 370-388). This is the first document scholars are aware of that refers to Jesus being born close to Mary’s arrival in Bethlehem, although in the Protevangelium, Jesus is born in a cave before Joseph and Mary even reach Bethlehem.

The Bible, however, makes it clear that they were in Bethlehem for some number of days before Mary gave birth. Luke 2:6 (KJV) says: “And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.” R. C. H. Lenski writes: “This was not the day of Joseph’s and Mary’s arrival, several days had already passed (“while they were there”) (see R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel, p. 126). If that is the situation, why was it that “there was no room for them in the inn”? Surely Mary and Joseph could have found a suitable place to give birth to the Messiah in their days in Bethlehem—and they did.

Before we look at the mistranslations of “room” and “inn,” however, let us look at some reasons Joseph and Mary could have found a place to stay. (These reasons are enumerated in: Kenneth Bailey, Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes, p. 25, 26) First, Joseph was returning to his town of origin. Historical memories are long in the Middle East, and family support is very strong. For example, Paul knew he was a descendant of Benjamin, who was the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, but Benjamin
had lived more than 1500 years earlier. Once Joseph announced that both he and Mary were descendants of families from Bethlehem, many homes would be open to them.

Second, both Joseph and Mary were “royals,” from the royal line of David. David is so famous in Bethlehem that it is called, “the city of David” (Luke 2:4). Being from that famous family would have meant that most homes would open their doors to him. Third, in every culture women about to give birth are given special help. As Kenneth Bailey puts it: “Was there no sense of honor in Bethlehem: Surely the community would have sensed its responsibility to help Joseph find adequate shelter for Mary and provide the care she needed. To turn away a descendent of David in the city of David would be an unspeakable shame to the entire village.” (see Kenneth Bailey, Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes, p. 26.)

Joseph and Mary were not rejected by a local hotel that had its “no vacancy” sign turned on. The phrase “no room in the inn” is a mistranslation that continues to support a very serious misunderstanding about the birth of Christ. Two words we must understand to properly interpret the biblical account are topos (#5117 τόπος) and kataluma (#2646 κατάλυμα), usually translated as “room” and “inn,” respectively. The word topos occurs more than ninety times in the New Testament, and does not refer to “a room,” but simply a place, or space in a given area, and in this case there was no space available for Joseph and Mary in the kataluma. What is the kataluma? It does not refer to a commercial lodge, or inn, but simply means a “lodging place” or “guest room.” Bauer’s Greek-English Lexicon says of kataluma: “lodging place. The sense inn is possible in Luke 2:7, but in 10:34 Luke uses pandocheion, the more specific term for inn. Kataluma is therefore best understood here as lodging or guest-room.”

To properly understand the birth narrative of Jesus Christ, it is vital that we understand that the normal Greek word for “inn” is pandocheion (#3829 πανδοχεῖον), and it refers to a public house for the reception of strangers (caravansary, khan, inn). Pandocheion was not only used by the Greeks, but was used as a loan-word for “inn” or a commercial lodging place in Hebrew, Arabic, Armenian, Coptic, and Turkish. Pandocheion is the word Luke uses in the parable of the Good Samaritan when he wanted to refer to a public inn (Luke 10:34).

In contrast to the public inn, both Mark and Luke use kataluma in their Gospels as “guest room” (Mark 14:14; Luke 22:11). When finding a place to eat the Last Supper with his disciples, Jesus tells them to say to the owner of the house, “The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room [kataluma], where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?” (Luke 22:11). So in both Mark and Luke, the kataluma is a room in a man’s house. Luke also uses the verb form of kataluma, which is kataluo (#2647 κατάλυω), and means “to find rest or lodging.” In the record of Jesus and Zacchaeus, Jesus goes “to be the guest” at Zacchaeus’ house, not at a public inn (Luke 19:7). So Luke also uses the verb such that “to stay in the kataluma” indicates lodging at someone’s house.

There are a couple features of common houses in the Middle East that we must understand to understand the birth of Jesus. The first is that it was very common for houses in the Middle East to have a guest room where guests, and even strangers, could stay. Showing hospitality to strangers has always been a huge part of Eastern life, and shows up in the Bible as well as the modern Moslem culture, where one of the five pillars of the Moslem faith it to be quick to entertain strangers. Several Biblical records show strangers being given hospitality, such as Lot taking in two strangers (Gen. 19:1-4) or the
man in Gibeah taking in strangers (Judges 19:19-21). Giving hospitality is a command for Christian leaders (1 Tim. 3:2). The Shunammite woman so wanted to show hospitality to Elisha that she had a guest room built on her roof just for him (2 Kings 4:10).

The second thing we must understand is that it was common for people to bring their animals into their houses at night. They did this to keep them from being stolen, and to protect them from harm. Usually, the floor of the family dwelling was raised up somewhat, and the animals were in an area that was a little lower (see Fred Wight, Manners and Customs of Bible Lands, p. 34; Kenneth Bailey, Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes, p. 28-33). John Nolland writes: “…it is best to think of an overcrowded Palestinian peasant home: a single-roomed home with an animal stall under the same roof (frequently to be distinguished from the family living quarters by the raised platform floor of the latter).” (John Nolland, Word Biblical Commentary, p. 105.)

When Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem they were taken into one of the local homes, most likely of a relative. However, there was no space available for them in the kataluma, the guest chamber. Therefore, the family made room for Joseph and Mary in their own living quarters, and the baby Jesus was placed in a manger in the home, which would have been filled with clean hay or straw and would have been the perfect size for him.

The fact that the record says there was no room for them in the guestroom does not mean that Joseph and Mary had just arrived. Lots of people would be traveling to Jerusalem for the registration, and even more if this was around the time of Rosh Hashanah and the Feast of Tabernacles, which we think it was. Many scenarios are possible. One is that the guest room had been occupied for weeks, which at that time of year would not have been out of the ordinary. Another is that when other people arrived for the registration or the feast, that Joseph and Mary moved from the guestroom into the main house because they were closer relatives or to better care for Mary. The Bible is simply letting us know that Jesus was placed in the manger in the house because the family guestroom was occupied.

Understanding the birth narrative in this way highlights another important aspect of Eastern hospitality. In the East, guests were given special treatment of all kinds, including behavior that seems very extreme to us. For example, in the record of Lot and the two strangers, Lot would have handed over his own daughters to the mob before surrendering his guests (Gen. 19:8). The people whom Joseph and Mary stayed with would not displace their guests from the guest room, but instead inconvenienced themselves, because no male would be allowed in the house as Mary was giving birth. The husband and any sons would have left their own house to give Mary the privacy she needed during the birth of Jesus.

Thus, the birth narrative of Jesus is considerably different than what is commonly taught. It is not that Bethlehem was full of cold-hearted townspeople who would not take special care of a family about to give birth. Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem some days before she gave birth. The guest room of the people who gave them lodging was full, so the family opened their own home to them and took them into their living quarters. When Mary gave birth, in the late evening or the night some days later, the men left their own home to accommodate her and give her privacy, and no doubt baby Jesus was born in quite usual circumstances, most likely with the village midwife and no doubt helped by the women of the family. Shortly after, the new baby Jesus was wrapped in
swaddling clothes, dedicated to God, and placed in a perfect spot, the manger in the home. That same night the angels announced to shepherds in nearby fields that the Christ had been born, and they came and saw the baby, and announced his birth to the whole village.

2:9. “frightened with great fear.” Figure of speech polyptoton (Cp. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*).

2:10. “Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“the people.” Often the Greek word *laos* (#2992 λαός) is used to designate specifically the Jewish people. This is the case here; *laos* is to be understood to mean the people of Israel (Cp. Lenski). If God had wanted to refer to the Gentiles and everyone he could have used the plural, “the peoples” (e.g. Luke 2:31; Rom. 15:11), or “all nations” (*panta ta ethne*: Matt. 28:19). For scriptures where “the people” clearly refers to the Jews, see: Matthew 13:15; Mark 7:6; Luke 1:68; 2:10; John 11:50; 18:14; Acts 3:23; 7:17; 13:17; 13:24; 13:31; 21:28; 7:11; 7:27; 9:7; 9:19; 11:25.

Here in Luke 2:10, by extension this announcement is good news to all people everywhere (2:31-32), and the future “will be” is prophetic to this effect, but here the angel is speaking to the shepherds in a way they would understand, of Israel’s long awaited messiah (cp. Luke 1:68).

2:11. “this day.” The Jewish day began at sunset; hence the angel was telling them what had happened sometime after sunset that evening.

“the Savior.” We have translated this with “the,” although the Greek lacks the definite article. As Lenski says, “The relative clause [“who”] makes ‘Savior’ definite.”

“Christ and Lord.” These words function like adjectives in the Greek, describing the Savior (Cp. Lenski). These adjectives are descriptive of the baby, showing that he has both the properties of being Christ and Lord. To translate the phrase as, “who is Christ the Lord,” misses this point.

2:12. “the sign.” It was not “a” sign, as though there were many signs, but “the” particular sign given the shepherds by the angel. In verse 16, this finds its fulfillment when the shepherds find the baby in “the” manger. Cp. Lenski.


2:14. “highest.” The Greek is *hupsitos* (#5310 ὑψίστος), and it is an adjective describing the highest place, or the highest rank. Here the grammar would naturally refer to the highest place, heaven. Thus “glory to God in the highest heaven” would refer to the glory to God that is given by the exalted spiritual beings who dwell in the highest heaven, or rather in the highest part of heaven. The “highest heaven” in this phrase is contrasted with the earth, a lower place, in the next phrase. Thus, in heaven, glory, and on earth, peace….

The birth of the savior was a cause for the spiritual beings of the highest heavens to glorify God, because the savior is not only the redeemer of mankind, but of the very universe itself, which is under bondage and decaying (Rom. 8:20-23). This same phrase, “in the highest heaven,” is also used in Luke 19:38.

2:15. “thing.” From the Greek *rhema* (#4487 ῥῆμα), which can mean, “a word or message,” or “the event that the word describes, a thing or event” (BDAG). Here in verses 15, 17, and 19 it refers not to the words themselves but the whole event.
surrounding the message. The shepherds wanted to go see the event the angel’s message described, not go see the words. Likewise, in verse 17 the shepherds speak “about” (Greek: peri #4012 περί) the rhema, which shows that they were not just making known the message’s content, but “told the whole story” (Lenski), they made known “about” the message, i.e., all about the angels, the sign, and having found the child. Lastly, in verse 19 Mary does not just store up the angel’s words about the child in her heart, but pondered the entire event.

2:17. “it.” Literally, this verse reads “having seen, they made known.” Some versions supply “it” (ESV; KJV) or “this” (NRSV; NASB), while other versions supply “him” (NIV; NET) or “them” (HCSB). The difference in translation effects whether they saw the fulfillment of the sign of the child lying in the manger (“it” or “this”), or they simply saw the child and his parents (“him” or “them”). It is clear from the context that “it,” meaning the fulfillment of the sign, is what the shepherds saw and this made them go and make it known. For verse 16 employs the definite article “the,” indicating that they found “the” manger, namely, the one just foretold by the angel in verse 12, and having seen it they went and made the event known.

E. Martin, in The Star that Astonished the World, does an astronomical calculation of the time of day Jesus was born using the astronomical material in the Bible and especially in Revelation 12. If he is correct, the shepherds would be spreading the news of Jesus’ birth not too long after sundown, so most of the town would still be awake. There is nothing in the text to indicate that the shepherds had to wake the townspeople up in the middle of the night.

“about.” For the significance of peri, see entry on “thing” in Luke 2:15.

“message.” From the Greek rhema (#4487 ῥῆμα), see entry on “thing” in Luke 2:15.


2:21. “eight days.” The eight days required by Genesis 17:12. The child had to be circumcised on the eight day, which is precisely the day when the clotting factor prothrombin is the highest in a newborn baby. Until the eighth day Vitamin K levels, which produces prothrombin, are insufficient and any surgery before this could produce hemorrhaging. Out of love, our God ordered that the circumcision rite be done precisely on the eighth day, the only time in a baby’s life when prothrombin levels are above 100%.

“We should commend the many hundreds of workers who labored at great expense over a number of years to discover that the safest day to perform circumcision is the eighth. Yet, as we congratulate medical science for this recent finding, we can almost hear the leaves of the Bible rustling. They would like to remind us that four thousand years ago, when God initiated circumcision with Abraham..... Abraham did not pick the eighth day after many centuries of trial-and-error experiments. Neither he nor any of his company from the ancient city of Ur in the Chaldees ever had been circumcised. It was a day picked by the Creator of vitamin K.” (Dr. S.I. McMillen, None of These Diseases, p. 93.)

2:23. “will be called holy to the Lord.” This command to consecrate the firstborn male was from the Mosaic Law. Quoted from Exodus 13:2, 12.
2:24. “A pair of turtledoves.” Quoted from Leviticus 12:8. This verse contains important information concerning the timing of the events of the birth of Jesus. According to Leviticus 12:8, a woman was only allowed to bring a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons as a sacrifice after childbirth if she could not afford a lamb. Mary’s cleansing and the presentation of Jesus in the Temple would have been 40 days after the birth of Jesus (Lev. 12:2-4). Mary and Joseph would have made the 7 mile walk with Jesus from Bethlehem to the Temple in Jerusalem to present Jesus only because Bethlehem was so close to the Temple. Women were not expected to travel far after childbirth. After presenting Jesus and making the sacrifices, they went back to Bethlehem, where Joseph had no doubt found work. The Magi would arrive on the scene almost two years later. Had they already come and been with the shepherds at the manger, as tradition teaches, then the gold, frankincense, and myrrh, that they brought would have made Joseph and Mary far too wealthy for her sacrifice of the doves or pigeons to be accepted by God. The idea that Joseph and Mary would not have brought a lamb because Jesus was the lamb cannot be substantiated. They, of all people, would have kept the Levitical Law.

2:25. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“deeply religious.” The Greek is eulabes (#2126 εὐλαβής); see discussion on “godly man” in Acts 10:2.

“comforting.” Cp. Young’s literal translation. Paraklesis (#3874 παράκλησις) has a large semantic range including “encouragement, exhortation, appeal, and comfort.” Most translations go with “consolation.” In this situation, however, “comforting” seems to get more at the heart of it. In the harsh reality of Roman control, Simeon was waiting for all that the Messiah would bring: plenty of food, peace, protection from enemies, etc. This would come as great comfort to a hurting nation.

“holy spirit was upon him.” There is no definite article. This holy spirit is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.


“holy spirit.” The context shows that this refers to the gift of holy spirit rather than the Father who is the Giver. For in the verses before and after, “holy spirit” is clearly referring to the gift. Further, although the Greek has the articles “the’ spirit ‘the’ holy” there are instances where having both articles can refer to the gift (Mark 12:36; Luke 3:22; 10:21; John 14:26; Acts 2:33; 5:32; 10:44; 10:47; 11:15; 15:8; 19:6). [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

“Messiah.” The Greek word is christos, which is usually translated as “Christ” but also can mean “anointed one” or “messiah.” Here we translated it “messiah” because Simeon was a Jew looking forward to the comforting of Israel, which would mean, in part, that he was looking forward to the coming Jewish messiah and messianic age.

2:29. “Master.” The Greek is despotēs (#1203 διστόπτης) meaning master or lord, and it refers to someone who has legal control and authority over others, such as subjects or slaves (cp. 1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:9). Thayer points out that it was “strictly the correlative of “slave” doulos, and hence denoted absolute ownership and uncontrolled power” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon). It also refers to someone who controls a thing, hence, an “owner.” It is used both as a title for God (Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24), and a title for Jesus.
Christ (2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 1:4). Whereas despotēs denoted absolute power and control, kurios, “lord,” has a more general meaning applicable to the various relationships in life, which is why we see kurios used even as a term of address equivalent to our polite way of addressing strangers as “Sir” (cp. KJV Matt. 13:27; John 4:11; John 5:7; etc.).

“according to your word.” The word spoken of in v. 26, that he would not see death until he had seen the messiah.


2:34. “Take notice!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“appointed.” The Greek is keimai (#2749 κεῖµαι), which has a number of meanings, including, to be set in place, thus to lie, or be set; to be placed on something; to exist or have a place; to occur, appear, or be found; to be appointed or destined. Although some translations go with “destined,” we did not feel that was the correct meaning, and is very close to “predestined.” Jesus was human, and as a human could have failed in his mission. God “appointed” him as Messiah, but Jesus had to rise to the occasion, and walk out his appointment and calling. So does each Christian.

“to cause.” The eis (#1519 εἰς) in this verse has a causal meaning. Compare NIV and HCSB translations.

“falling and rising.” These are translated from the Greek words ptosis (#4431 πτῶσις) and anastasis (#386 ἀνάστασις). Louw-Nida translates ptosis—usually rendered “falling”—as “to suffer destruction or ruin, with the implication of having formerly held a position of eminence.” Anastasis is used everywhere else in the New Testament, 39 times, to indicate “resurrection.” We were sorely tempted to translate it thus here as well, but did not because the word can also mean “rising,” and is used that way in the LXX, and because the anastasis here seems to include a broader sense of “rising” than just resurrection; although we are quick to add that resurrection is clearly implied here by Simeon. Hence, a narrower translation would be “for the destruction and resurrection of many in Israel.”

The Greek is ambivalent to whether it is the rise of some and the fall of some, or whether everybody falls and then rises. The greater scope of scripture points to the former. However, due to the ambiguity of the Greek, there is the implication that many will fall before they rise, as is the case with the Apostle Paul who first stumbled because of the Lord, then rose up to seize eternal life.

“that will be continually opposed.” “Will be” is supplied because it is a prophecy regarding the future. “Continually” (cp. Williams) comes from the present tense of the verb, in this case a durative present indicating continual action (See commentary on 1 John 1:7 for more on this usage of the present). The Greek is antilegō (#483 ἀντιλέγω). It has two distinct meanings: to be spoken against, or to be opposed. Both fit here, and thus the Greek gives a fuller sense than can be given in English. Christ will be spoken against, but more than that, he will be opposed in general in every way. Jesus is, and always has been, opposed and spoken against by those who will not submit to God’s rule and rules. Robertson (Word Pictures in the New Testament) writes: “Spoken against (antilegomenon). Present passive participle, continuous action. It is going on today. Nietzsche [the German philosopher who was known for the phrase, “God is dead”] regarded Jesus Christ as the curse of the race because he spared the weak.”
There is certainly a sense in which the entire life of Christ was a sign. Jesus Christ himself is a sign that is continually opposed. The sign also can refer to the resurrection of Christ. As Christ told the Pharisees who were asking him for a sign:

Matthew 12:39-40

An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

The sign of Jonah was to be the sign for that generation, and this sign was opposed by the Jews (e.g., Matt. 16:21-22; 27:62-64); it makes sense then that the resurrection of Christ was partly what Simeon was referring to.

If the resurrection was the sign, then this verse indicates Christ was “appointed” beforehand for this, which is why God could not take “this cup” from him in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). Having been appointed for this, Christ was the “Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world” (Rev. 13:8 NIV).

2:35. “broadsword.” An unusual word for “sword,” occurring only here and in the book of Revelation (Rev. 1:16; 2:12, 16; 6:8; 19:15, 21). The Greek is rhomphaia (#4501 ῥομφαία). It has several meanings. It was a large sword, usually two edged, which was used by non-Greek-speaking peoples, especially the Thracians. We can rightly refer to it as a “broadsword.” Also, rhomphaia was used of a long Thracian javelin, and also a kind of long sword usually worn on the right shoulder. The word appears very often in the Septuagint, and was the word used for the sword of Goliath. This long, broad, two-edged sword would pass through Mary’s soul as the life of her son developed. The fact that it can refer to a Thracian spear also points to one of the final acts of violence towards her son when the Roman soldier pierced Christ’s side with a spear (cp. Thayer; BDAG).

“soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of Mary. With all that happened to Jesus in his life, she would feel as if she had been pierced by a sword. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

2:36. “Anna.” It is an amazing demonstration of the love God has for His people that He would reveal to both Simeon and Anna that the Christ was in the Temple. The Temple was very segregated, with courts for the men, and courts for the women. The only way to get the word effectively to both groups was for God to tell both a respected man and a respected woman that the Christ was there.

“from when she was a virgin.” Stating it this way emphasizes the purity of Anna’s life, and simultaneously shows that this was her first husband. She lived with this man seven years, until he died and she became a widow; she did not take another husband, but remained a widow until she was 84 here at the temple scene. See entry on 2:37 for controversy regarding Anna’s age.

2:37. “as a widow until the age of eighty-four.” There are differences among commentators and translators as to whether Anna was eighty-four years old, or was a widow for eighty-four years on top of her seven years of marriage and the time before she was married. The Greek can be understood either way. It reads literally, “and she a widow up to eighty-four years,” which could mean she was a widow for eighty-four years
or she lived as a widow up to her eighty-fourth year. On the former view, if she was married at age 14 then she would be 105 (14+7+84=105) (Hendriksen). KJV and HCSB go with the interpretation of an older Anna: e.g., “and was a widow for 84 years” (HCSB). However, we have sided with translations such as ESV and NIV, which suppose the younger age. Hendriksen provides a good summary of the arguments and sides with our translation. As he points out, verse 37 portrays Anna as being very active, daily in the temple performing the service of religious duties, praying, and fasting. This is much more likely to be the case if she were 84 rather than 105.

2:39 “And when they had completed everything required by the law of the Lord.”

This is one of the very many places where the word “and” does not indicate that the two events connected by the “and” happened in immediate succession; the “and” simply continues the narration. Another thing that had to be completed after the offering for sin was Jesus’ trip to Egypt. When we put the events of the other Gospels together with this verse, we can see that Joseph and Mary stayed in Bethlehem after Jesus was born until they went to Egypt, and they went from there to Nazareth.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:4, 11). Joseph and his family still would have been there forty days later when they had to travel the seven miles (11.2 km) north to Jerusalem to present Jesus in the Temple and offer a sacrifice (Luke 2:21-24; Lev. 12:1-8). They were still in Bethlehem when the magi arrived eighteen months to two years later (Matt. 2:8). There is simple no evidence that they left Bethlehem and went back to Nazareth then went back to Bethlehem again in that time, and no reason for them to have done so. After the magi left Bethlehem, Joseph took Mary and Jesus and went to Egypt (Matt. 2:14). He stayed there until Herod was dead and then went back to Nazareth (Matt. 2:15, 23).

A major key to the chronology of the birth of Christ is the phrase in this verse, “when they had completed everything required by the law of the Lord.” The word “law” is the general use of “law” meaning the whole Old Testament, and thus “everything required by the law” refers to all the things in the Old Testament spoken about the Christ, whether it was in the Torah (the five books of Moses), the prophets, or the writings. The Greek phrase kata ho nomos, often translated “according to the law,” in this context refers to the things in the law, or things required by the law (cp. BBE, CEB, CJB, NIV, NJB, NLT, NRSV, and see commentary on Galatians 3:29). Part of what was in the law that had to be fulfilled by the Messiah was that he had to be called out from Egypt (Matt. 2:15; Hos. 11:1). Remembering that, we can see that Luke 2:39 is a kind of summary verse that mentions the trip to Egypt simply by saying they fulfilled everything required by the law.

In summary, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and his parents stayed there for perhaps as long as two years after he was born, then they went to Egypt to escape Herod. They left Egypt when Herod was dead, and settled in Nazareth.

2:41. “the feast of the Passover.” Passover is one of three feasts—Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles—that required all adult Jewish males to go to Jerusalem (Exod. 23:14-17; 34:22, 23; Deut. 16:16). The imperfect tense of “went” shows they habitually went; compare Hendriksen’s translation: “His parents were in the habit of going to Jerusalem.” Since only males “of mature age” were required to go, that Mary also attended shows us Mary and Joseph were a devoted couple (See Hendriksen).
Luke 2:42. “according to the custom.” For explanation of customary trips to Jerusalem, see entry on 2:41.

Luke 2:43. “of the feast.” There is a question as to whether this phrase belongs in verse 42, “according to the custom of the feast,” or in verse 43, “completed the days of the feast.” The Greek could be read either way; NRSV, NASB, HCSB, KJV, and ASV go with “custom of the feast,” while NIV, ESV, and NET take it to go with verse 43. We believe it should be taken with verse 43 because if left as “custom of the feast” then there is no genitive subject to complete the genitive absolute started in verse 43. Further, it strikes us less likely that they would be said to go to Jerusalem according the “custom of the feast” when in reality it was the Mosaic Law that dictated customary visits to Jerusalem, not “festival custom” (NAB translation).

Luke 2:44. “diligently searching.” The Greek word is anazeteo (ἀναζητέω), comprised of the word for seeking, zeteo (ζητέω), with the intensifier ana. Louw-Nida translates anazeteo as, “to try to learn the location of something by searching for it (presumably somewhat more emphatic or goal-directed than in the case of ζητέω).” We have brought out the intensified meaning of the Greek by the translation “diligently searching.” This seems especially justified here given the situation of a missing child, and Mary’s admission to being “greatly distressed” in verse 48.


Luke 2:48. “Look here!” The Greek word is idou (ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

Luke 2:49. “Why….” These are the first recorded words of Jesus.

Luke “must be.” Jesus, as the Messiah, “must be” in his Father’s house, where he would learn about his Father.

Luke “in my Father’s house.” This is a common Greek idiom, and does not mean “about my Father’s business” which has been popularized by the KJV. The Greek is en tois tou patros mou (ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρός μου), which literally translates as “in the of Father of me,” The phrase is an idiom; it does not make sense literally, and idiomatically it means “in my Father’s house.” At 12 years old, Jesus knows he is the promised Messiah and the Son of God, and he told his parents that he “must be” in his Father’s house, the Temple. He was surprised that they would think he would be anywhere else. This verse shows a little of the workings of the mind of a 12 year old who is the sinless Son of God. As a 12 year old, he is appropriately disconnected from the pain his absence would cause his parents, but as the Son of God he already felt the mission of God working inside him and knew he must be in the Temple, and he was sitting at the feet of the great teachers there listening to them, asking them questions, and learning from them (cp. A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament).

Chapter 3
3:1. “Pontius Pilate.” Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea from 26 to 36 AD. [For more on Pilate, see commentary on Matt. 27:2].


3:4. “Make ready the way of the Lord! Make his paths straight!” This quotation in Luke, which comes from Isaiah 40:3-5 (and the quotation in Matthew 3:3 and Mark 1:3) is from the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament. The vast majority of scholars believe that the New Testament was written in Greek, and there are many reasons for that. A primary one is textual.

There are simply no extant manuscripts of the NT in Hebrew, and the manuscripts in Aramaic (Syriac) do not seem to be the autographs from which the Greek texts came. Similarly, however, the Greek of the New Testament is so markedly stylistically different from book to book that it does not seem possible that there is an underlying Aramaic text. Although there are some stylistic differences in Aramaic writings, the Aramaic texts we have today would not have led to the stylistic differences that we see in the different books of the Greek New Testament.

There is research that indicates that Hebrew was spoken in the first century more than was believed in the past, and this has led a few scholars to conclude that the original texts of the New Testament were written in Hebrew or Aramaic. The argument is that the texts were written by Jews for Jews, and thus would have not been written in Greek but in a native Jewish tongue. However, that misses the point. The focus of the New Testament documents was the Christian Church. They were not written in Israel and they were not written exclusively to the Jews.

There were many Jews, especially in the diaspora, who spoke Greek. When Stephen addressed the Jews in Jerusalem in Acts 7 (likely less than ten years after the death of Christ), he was speaking Greek and quoting from the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. Stephen’s dispute had begun with, among others, Jews from Alexandria Egypt, which is where the Septuagint was written (Acts 6:9). When he was brought before the Sanhedrin, he quoted from the Septuagint, not the Hebrew Bible. One way we know that is while the Hebrew Bible says Jacob’s family who went to Egypt was 70 people, the Septuagint text says 75, and Stephen said 75 (Acts 7:14).

By the time much of the NT was written, God had already moved away from the Jews and was ministering to the Gentiles. It was not so much that God wanted to abandon the Jews and minister to the Gentiles, but when He began to include the Gentiles, and wanted His People to do the same, they resisted. Many Jews resisted God’s Messiah (Rom. 10:1-4), but it seems even the majority of the Jews who believed in the Messiah wanted to bring them under the Law, rather than accept that God had a new program of grace for all people and had moved away from “the yoke of bondage.” We know from the New Testament that Paul was continuously persecuted by Christian Jews.

So the claim that the NT was written by Jews for Jews is not correct. In fact, it seems that the only book of the New Testament that was written in Israel was James. Even Peter wrote from Babylon (or Rome). By the time Paul visited Jerusalem the year he was arrested, none of the original apostles were listed as being there (Acts 21:17ff). Although we do not know the reason the original Apostles likely left Jerusalem, they may have left with the persecution of Acts 12, and not come back, perhaps in part because the Christian Jews in Jerusalem were rejecting the revelation of the New Testament.
James, who was leading the church at Jerusalem at that time, was not the Apostle James, but James the brother of Jesus. It is worth noting that James did not believe that his half-brother Jesus was the Messiah until sometime after the resurrection. He did not believe by the Feast of Tabernacles, less than a year before Jesus’ death (John 7:5), and the evidence is that he still did not believe when Jesus was dying on the cross, which is why Jesus told John to take care of Jesus’ mother Mary (John 19:27). It seems that after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his family and convinced them he was alive, because “his brothers” were with the disciples in Acts 1:14. However, there is no mention of James until Acts 12:10, during the persecution of Herod Agrippa, when the Apostles apparently were forced to leave Jerusalem. Apparently in their absence, James took over as an elder in the church and by Acts 15 seems to be the leader of the congregation in Jerusalem.

As we can see from Acts (and Galatians), the Christian Jews in Jerusalem completely ignored the revelation that Paul got that was codified in the books of Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians (see commentary on Galatians 2:2). The fact that Paul was ministering to Jews and Gentiles living outside of Israel, is good evidence that he would have written in Greek. Similarly, by the time the Four Gospels were written the majority of the Church was centered outside of Israel, and that goes for the writing of Hebrews, Peter, Jude, and the writings of John as well. Thus it makes sense that the original texts were in Greek, and that is also perhaps why many of the New Testament quotations of the Old Testament are from the Septuagint, as we see here in Luke 3:4.

3:7. “wrath.” This is the wrath associated with the Day of the Lord (see commentary on Matthew 3:7 and Revelation 6:17).

3:8. “Come now.” For this translation compare Anchor Bible Commentary (Joseph Fitzmyer). NASB, HCSB, and KJV translate the oun (#3767 οὖν) as “therefore.” But “therefore” normally indicates the practical application of that which came before, which makes no sense in this context; rather, this is a continuation of narrative, a logical connection, not properly the practical application. “Come now” captures this sense well.

3:9. “is cut down.” The Greek is the present perfect form of the verb ekkopo (#1581 ἐκκόπω), and “is cut down” is a good translation in this context, which involves “trees.” This verse can be confusing because the present tense of the verb “is cut down,” makes it seem like the cutting is being done now, when in fact the cutting is actually future, at God’s Judgment. This is clear even from the first part of the verse which notes that the cutting has not begun, but the axe has been placed down near the root of the trees in preparation for the cutting.

Translators recognize the confusion that the “is” can cause, and thus some versions actually transpose the present tense to a future tense in their translations, using “will be cut down” (HCSB; NIV; NJB; Moffatt). Although the present tense verb is used, the cutting will be done in the future. This is the idiom some scholars refer to as the “prophetic present,” and it takes an event that is future but certain to happen and coming soon, and treats it as if it is present. The present tense verb being used for an event that is future is also referred to as the futuristic present (Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, p. 535-36). Writing in the prophetic present typically emphasizes either the certainty and inevitability of something happening in the future, or the fact that the event will occur very soon. Other examples of the prophetic present include Matthew 3:10; 17:11; Mark 9:31; 1 Corinthians 15:26; 16:5; 2 Corinthians 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 2:9,
11. The prophetic present idiom is closely related to the prophetic perfect idiom (see commentary the prophetic perfect on Eph. 2:6).

“trees” is the figure of speech hypocatastasis for people (Bullinger, Figures), and is often used for the powerful people in the society (Judges 9:8-15; Song of Solomon 2:3; 7:8; Isa. 56:3; Ezek. 17:22-24; Dan. 4:10, 22; Zech. 4:3-14; Rom. 11:16-24). There are times when a tree is used for a nation (Ezek. 31:2-9), but that is not the case in this context, because nations are judged by God by what happens in and to them, but only people are judged in the future Judgment. For an explanation of hypocatastasis, see commentary on Revelation 20:2.

3:14. “extort money from anyone by threats.” The Greek is διασείω (#1286 διασείω). Robertson (Word Pictures in the New Testament) writes: “Here only in the N.T., but [it is] in the LXX [the Septuagint] and is common in ancient Greek. It means to shake (seismic disturbance, earthquake) thoroughly (dia) and so thoroughly to terrify, to extort money or property by intimidating... It was a process of blackmail to which Socrates refers (Xenophon, Memorabilia, ii. 9, 1).” This was a constant temptation to soldiers. Might does not make right with Jesus.

3:16. “in holy spirit.” There is no definite article. This holy spirit is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

3:18. “exhorting.” The Greek is parakaleō (#3870 παρακαλέω), and can mean exhort, encourage, etc. It is a verb (participle present active nominative masculine singular) and as such should not be translated as “exhortations” in the sense of a noun. John preached the good news, and one of the ways he did so was by speaking up about many (polus) and various (heteros) subjects, just as he had done in verses 10-14. To say “many others” rather than “many” and “varied” takes some of the emphasis away from the number and variety of subjects that John must have covered in his teaching. Bible teachers should make note of John’s teaching. The Good News is not always proclaimed by teaching about the death of Jesus. We also have to tell people how to live righteously before God. For a similar translated structure to the REV, cp. Lenski.

3:22. “the holy spirit.” There is no definite article. This holy spirit is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

3:23. “about thirty.” According to the Law of Moses, no one could enter Priestly Service as a Levite until 30 years old, and then they served from 30 to 50 years old (Num. 4:3, 23, 30, etc.). King David changed the age a Levite or priest could serve from thirty years to twenty years old (1 Chron. 23:24-27). However, it is important to note that the Word of God does not say that David spoke by revelation when he made the change. In fact, it is noteworthy that the Bible says that the Levites were counted from 20 years old and older “by the last words of David,” as if this were a decree David made, and thus “his words,” not “God’s word.” Jesus started his ministry when he was “about 30” (Luke 3:23), but would have turned 30 before he carried out his duties as both priest and sacrifice, dying for our sins and interceding for us before God. Jesus began his ministry when he received holy spirit when he was baptized by John (Matt. 3:13-17; John 1:32-34). In the spring of his 29th year he went to Passover at Jerusalem (John 2:23). That fall, we believe Tishri 1, he would have turned 30 [For a Tishri 1 birth, see: Wierwille, Jesus Christ Our Promised Seed; Earnest Martin, The Star that Astonished the World]. The next Passover he would have been crucified, when he was 30 years old.
“thirty.” Thirty?! What happened to the years of his childhood and adolescence, and his life as a young adult? Where are the records that fill in the gap in his life from age 12 (Luke 2:42) to adulthood? The Gospels give us little information about Jesus before he started his ministry. Edersheim writes: “We feel that the scantiness of particulars here supplied by the Gospels was intended to prevent the human interest from overshadowing the grand central Fact, to which alone attention was to be directed. For the design of the Gospels was manifestly not to furnish a biography of Jesus the Messiah, but, in organic connection with the Old Testament, to tell the history of the long-promised establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth” (Edersheim, Life and Times, book II, p. 145). What we do know is that Jesus was the son of a carpenter, and as the custom of the time was, was trained as a carpenter and became one himself (cp. Mark 6:3).

All the stories about Jesus going to India and studying to become a yogi, or going to some other place to study ancient mystic ways, are erroneous assumptions. In fact, the people of his own hometown Nazareth had witnessed him growing up and quietly doing his work, learning as he went. The prophecy was that Jesus would be quiet and orderly: “He will not cry out or shout or make his voice heard in the streets” (Isa. 42:2 HCSB). He lived the way the New Testament tells us to live: “Now we…command and exhort such people to be busy working in a quiet fashion, and to eat their own bread” (2 Thess. 3:12). Jesus never flaunted his knowledge and led a quiet and obedient lifestyle, growing up in the builders’ trade of his father, which is why he is called both “the carpenter’s son” (Matt. 13:55) and “the carpenter” (Mark 6:3). Jesus’ quiet and unassuming early years is why the people of his hometown were so surprised when he suddenly showed up with great knowledge and power. According to Matthew 13:54 they exclaimed: “Where did this man get this wisdom, and these mighty works?” Had Jesus been gone for some 20 years, and studied mystic ways in some far off place, they would have not been surprised at his knowledge. In fact, Jesus had been studying all along, learning the Word, being obedient to it, and preparing his heart for his ministry.

“the son (as it was assumed) of Joseph.” Luke contains the genealogy of Joseph, tracing his ancestry through David via David’s son Nathan. In contrast, Matthew contains the genealogy of Mary and traces her ancestry through David via David’s son Solomon. Nathan and Solomon were full brothers, both being the sons of David and Bathsheba (1 Chron. 3:5; cp. 2 Sam. 5:14; 1 Chron. 14:4). The Gospel of Luke never mentions Mary for the simple reason that it is not her genealogy. Similarly, Matthew never mentions Joseph, the husband of Mary, because it is not his genealogy (the Joseph in Matthew 1:16 is the father of Mary, see commentary on Matthew 1:16).

Once we realize that Matthew has Mary’s genealogy and does not mention Joseph at all, and Luke has Joseph’s genealogy and does not mention Mary at all, two things happen: the genealogies makes sense (one genealogy for Mary and one for Joseph), and also many fanciful explanations for the two genealogies is eliminated. For example, some commentators have concluded that both genealogies belong to Joseph, saying that by custom Joseph had two different fathers, a real father, Jacob, and a levirate father, Heli. But that is clearly an assumption to solve a problem that does not actually exist, and it creates another and larger problem: it would mean that Joseph has two genealogies while Mary has none.

Most of the commentators who say that Matthew is Joseph’s genealogy and Luke is Mary’s genealogy realize that each parent should have a genealogy. However, they
anchor their argument in their belief that Matthew 1:16 is referring to Joseph the husband of Mary (but it is not!), and based on that they say Matthew’s genealogy has to be about Joseph and Luke’s about Mary, even though Luke does not mention Mary. They answer the objection that Luke’s genealogy does not mention Mary by saying it does not have to since Luke chapter 1 made it clear that Mary was the mother of Jesus. Our rebuttal is that both Matthew and Luke make it clear that Mary is the mother of Jesus, but in the actual genealogical list, Matthew mentions only Mary while Luke mentions only Joseph.

Defenders of the position that Luke has Mary’s genealogy point out that the Talmud says Heli was the father of Mary, not Joseph, and therefore Luke must contain Mary’s genealogy. Our rebuttal to that line of reasoning is that the Talmud was written centuries after Christ, and the animosity between the Jews and Christians had been going on for years. It is well known that in the centuries after Christ the Jews did many things to try to prove that Jesus was not the Christ. As late as when the Gospel of Matthew was written (likely 50-65 AD; more than 20 years after Jesus was crucified) the Jews were still aggressively promoting that Jesus was not the Christ, which is why Matthew says that it was “assumed” he was the son of Joseph. The Jews did not believe he was the Son of God. The Jews also promoted that Jesus’ body was stolen from the grave by his disciples (Matt. 28:15-17). They also discounted many of the Messianic prophecies so that Jesus could not be said to have fulfilled those prophecies. For the Jews, whether accidentally or on purpose, misunderstanding the genealogy in Luke would be just one more way to show the New Testament was confusing and erroneous. It should be recognized that believers such as Sextus Julius Africanus (c. 230), who predates the Talmud, wrote that Luke gave Joseph’s genealogy, and so did a number of the Church Fathers.

Despite all the rhetoric (some of it quite ungodly, even involving name-calling) about the genealogies in Matthew and Luke, the solution is quite simple. God gave us a mathematical key in Matthew that, along with the Aramaic text, makes it clear that Matthew has Mary’s genealogy, which is why Matthew mentions Mary and not Joseph. Luke, on the other hand, mentions Joseph and not Mary because it is Joseph’s genealogy.

3:36. “the son of Cainan.” The name Cainan does not appear in any Hebrew manuscript, but appears in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew. The Septuagint added to the Old Testament in other places, and this is very likely an addition, for no one earlier than Augustine mentions Cainan. Also, some early Greek manuscripts omit the name in Luke, while others have a different form of it. It is almost certainly an addition to the Septuagint, which then was brought into some early manuscripts of Luke.

Chapter 4

4:1. “full of holy spirit.” There is no definite article. This holy spirit is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

“in the desert.” Matthew 4:1 and Mark 1:12 clearly tell us that the spirit led, or drove, Jesus into the desert: Greek, eis (#1519 εἰς). Luke, however, emphasizes that Jesus was being led (imperfect tense) by the spirit while in the desert, using the Greek word en (#1722 ἐν) rather than eis. Some later texts changed the reading to eis to harmonize with the other gospels, and this explains the KJV’s translation “into the wilderness.”
4:2. “the Slanderer.” “Slanderer” is the literal meaning of the Greek diabolo [6183, διάβολος]. The Bible never gives a proper name for the Devil, although it seems clear that at one time he had one. It is fitting that God does not glorify the Devil by telling us what his original name meant. It likely contained inherent honor and blessing that he now no longer has or deserves. [For more information on the characteristics inferred by the names and appellations of God’s archenemy, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

4:3. “the Slanderer.” Slanderer” is the literal meaning of the Greek diabolo [6183, διάβολος]. The Bible never gives a proper name for the Devil, although it seems clear that at one time he had one. [See Appendix 14, “Names of the Slanderer”.

4:4. Quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3.

4:5. Showed him all the kingdoms. Matthew and Luke both record the 3 temptations that the Adversary tempted Jesus with, but worded slightly differently and in a different order. Commentators differ as to whether Matthew or Luke has the order of events as they actually happened. We believe Luke has the order correct because Luke says he recorded things “in order” (Luke 1:3). Furthermore, another reason we believe Luke has the correct order is that to the Devil, the most desirable outcome would be to have Jesus worship him, but if he could not accomplish that, to kill Jesus and be done with him. The order of temptations in Luke accomplishes that goal. The second temptation would result in Jesus worshipping the Devil, and if that failed the third temptation would have resulted in Jesus’ death.

4:6. “inhabited world.” There are different words translated “world” or “earth,” and the differences in the meanings are important. Unfortunately, most versions translated both oikoumene and kosmos as “world,” leaving the English reader with no way to see the differences. The Greek word in Luke 4:5 is oikoumene (#3625 οἰκουµένη), and it means 1. The earth as inhabited area, exclusive of the heavens above and nether regions, the inhabited earth, the world. 2. The world as administrative unit, the Roman Empire (in the hyperbolic diction commonly used in reference to emperors, the Roman Empire equaled the whole world). 3. All the inhabitants of the earth, then, figuratively humankind (cp. Acts 17:31; Luke 2:1, 4). When it means the whole world so far as living beings inhabiting it, it seems to include the realm of transcendent beings as well. The inhabited world is different from kosmos, the world as a creation.

The Greek world kosmos (#2889 κόσμος) has several different definitions (from BDAG). The basic idea is one of order or orderliness. 1. That which serves to beautify through decoration, adornment, adorning (1 Peter 3:3). 2. Condition of orderliness, orderly arrangement, order. 3. The sum total of everything here and now, the world, the (orderly) universe (John 17:5). 4. The sum total of all beings above the level of the animals, the world (1 Cor. 4:9). 5. The planet earth as a place of inhabitation, the world, the world in contrast to heaven. 6. By metonymy: humanity in general, the world. 7. The world, and everything that belongs to it, appears as that which is hostile to God. 8. Collective aspect of an entity, totality, sum total the tongue becomes (or proves to be) the sum total of iniquity (James 3:6).

In Matthew 4: 8 the Slanderer showed Jesus the kingdoms of the kosmos, in Luke, the Slanderer shows Jesus the kingdoms of the oikoumene. Putting the two together shows that the Devil was offering Jesus everything in his dominion, the physical earth and the inhabitants of it.
   “glory.” The word also has the meaning of “praise,” “honor” (Cp. Acts 12:23; 2 Cor. 6:8; 8:19, 23). The world praised the Adversary. We Christians praise God. If Jesus was looking for the praise of men, he could have had it then and there.
4:10-11. Quoted from Psalm 91:11-12.
4:12. Quoted from Deuteronomy 6:16.
4:18-19. Quoted from Isaiah 61:1, 2.
4:23. Capernaum. Jesus made his home in Galilee in Capernaum. [For more information on Capernaum, see commentary on Mark 2:1].
4:33: “spirit (that is to say an unclean demon).” This construction in Greek is the genitive of apposition (Cp. Lenski). The literal Greek, “a spirit of an unclean demon,” means, “a spirit, that is to say an unclean demon,” or “a spirit; an unclean demon,” or even, “a spirit; an unclean demon.”
4:34. “Ha!” An exclamation that combines many elements, and is therefore hard to translate. It can include the emotions of surprise, indignation, fear, and dismay.
   “What do we have in common with you?” See commentary, Matthew 8:29.
4:35. “And Jesus subdued him, saying, “Be bound!” and “Come out of him!” The first half of verse 35 is worded exactly like Mark 1:25. The sentence uses vocabulary that has a technical sense. For example, in this case “subdue” is the Greek word epitimaō (#2008 ἐπιτιµάω) and it is used in this verse as it was used in Greek religion of gaining control over a spirit, a demon. See commentary on Mark 1:25.
   “Be bound.” The Greek word was used in magic to denote binding a person with a spell. Jesus “bound” the demon with his word. See commentary on Mark 1:25.
4:39. “subdued.” The Greek word translated “subdued” is epitimaō (#2008 ἐπιτιµάω), and this is the technical sense of the word as it was used in Greek religion for taking control over a spirit. Robert Guelich (Word Biblical Commentary: Mark) notes that epitimaō is “a commanding word uttered by God or by his spokesman, by which evil powers are brought into submission.” Jesus subdued the fever by the power of God, which was expressed in words. See commentary on Mark 1:25.
4:41. “subduing.” See commentary on verses 35 and 39, and also Mark 1:25.

Chapter 5

5:12. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).
5:18. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).
5:21. “defaming words.” The Greek noun is blasphēmia (#988 βλασφημία; pronounced blas-fay-me'-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. See commentary on Mark 2:7. [For more on blasphēmia, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].
5:23. “Which is easier?” Which is easier to say and accomplish, declaring someone’s sins are forgiven, or divine healing? They are equally easy. They both require authority from God and the faith to walk out on the revelation God gives. The Pharisees did not see this simple truth. They believed in divine healing but did not believe a person could have the authority to forgive sins. But God gives authority to do both.

5:27. “Levi.” This is the Apostle Matthew.

5:29. “And Levi made him a great feast in his house.” This verse makes it clear that the dinner associated with the calling of the Apostle Matthew was held at Matthew’s house. The Gospel of Matthew and Mark are not clear, and only say, “his” house (Matt. 9:10; Mark 2:15). See commentary on Matthew 9:10.


5:35. “But the days will come.” To be properly understood, this sentence fragment needs to be completed, finishing the thought of the previous sentence (v. 34). Thus the full thought is, “But the days will come, when the bridegroom is not with them.” This is not the figure of speech ellipsis, which is most usually the omission of a word in the middle of a sentence. Nevertheless, it is elliptical, in the sense that the reader must fill in what is missing.


Chapter 6


6:23. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

6:27. “love your enemies.” The word “love” is the verb agapaō (#25 ἀγαπάω; the more familiar noun is agapē). In this context, to love one’s enemy does not mean to “feel good” about them, but rather to act toward them in a loving manner. To better understand what God is telling us when He says, “love your enemies,” see the commentary on John 21:15, “I am your friend.” The second phrase of the verse, “do good to those who hate you,” explains agapaō in this context.

“Do good to those who hate you.” This teaching is profoundly wonderful and the highest sense of morality was taught by our Lord. This can especially be seen when comparing this with the teachings of the Greeks at the time, who proclaimed that one ought to harm their enemies in order to be just. In the Republic, Plato’s interlocutors have the following exchange:

“Should one also give one’s enemies whatever is owed to them?"
“By all means, one should give them what is owed to them. And in my view what enemies owe to each other is appropriately and precisely—something bad."
“...To treat friends well and enemies badly is justice?"
“I believe so” (Republic, 332b, d).

6:28. “bless those who curse you.” The word “curse” is kataraomai (#2672 καταράω), and it means to curse, to call down evil upon. A genuine curse is not just “hate language,” it has spiritual power. People can curse using the power of the Devil or
the power of God. When we curse using the power of God, it is always by revelation, as God directs us to, and it is very rare. Jesus cursed the fig tree in Mark 11:14 (Peter correctly called what Jesus did a curse in 11:21). When wicked people curse, they are using the Devil and his demons to accomplish the curse. Someone saying something bad about someone else is not a curse, but conscripting the power of the Devil to accomplish something spoken is a curse. Witches’ “spells” are curses.

This commandment requires much from the Christian, because personal attacks always hurt us emotionally. We have to understand that if we are blameless in God’s eyes, the curses of the enemy cannot hurt us. Proverbs 26:2 (NET): “Like a fluttering bird or like a flying swallow, so a curse without cause does not come to rest.” In other words, an undeserved curse will have no effect.

Christians have to be so secure in who we are in Christ and that we will be blessed by God that we can bless those people who curse us. The reason that it can be so difficult to ignore curses is that they are often very personal in nature. They often come from people whom we care about, and/or can be very personal in nature. The ancient Romans and the people of the biblical culture often called on the gods to curse and harm people, and curses can have spiritual power and cause genuine damage if one is not protected by God and godliness. One curse tablet that now is in the City Archaeological Museum of Bologna reads: “Destroy, crush, kill, strangle Porcello and his wife Maurilla. Their soul [life], heart, buttocks, liver…. A curse directed at a Roman senator reads: “Crush, kill, Fistus the senator... May Fistus dilute, languish, sink, and may all his limbs be dissolved” (Archaeology Magazine, Sept/Oct 2012; “Curses,” p. 16).

Especially in the biblical world where almost everyone believed in the power of curses to harm them, knowing about God’s protection and desiring to help the misguided person who cursed others by blessing him back, was an act of great love and faith.

Luke 6:29. “To whoever strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also.” This verse is not talking about the death penalty or any other type of civil crime or punishment for crimes, although many Christians think it does. Interestingly, people who quote this verse as if it were saying there should not be a death penalty do not seem to grasp that the verse is saying there should not be any kind of retribution at all. If this verse were applied universally to the criminal justice system, it would mean no fines, no jails and not even any community service. If applied in a criminal context, it would read something like, “If someone steals one of your cars, give him the keys to your other car. Surely even the most liberal of people do not believe that we can have a safe society if we do not enforce any laws or have any kind of penalties for breaking laws.

Why would Christ say something like “turn the other cheek?” What did he mean? In the culture of the Bible, touching or striking someone on the cheek was an insult. It was the equivalent of calling someone a dirty name today. Jesus knew that his disciples would be insulted, and that it is a waste of time and energy to try to get “satisfaction” for an insult. So he instructed people to “turn the other cheek,” i.e., ignore insults, and by showing the other cheek, show that you are firm in your beliefs and actions even if it means you will be insulted again.

There are other Bible verses that show that slapping someone on the cheek was an insult: Lamentations 3:30: “Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him and let him be filled with disgrace.” Job 16:10: “Men open their mouths to jeer at me, they strike
my cheek in scorn.” Isaiah 50:6: “I offered my cheeks, I did not hide from mocking and spitting.”

A good example of slapping on the face as an insult occurs in 1 Kings. The Israelite king, Ahab, was trying to convince the Judean king, Jehoshaphat, to join forces with him and fight the Arameans. Ahab brought out an impressive number of prophets who all foretold success in the mission. However, there was no prophet of the true God represented in the group. Jehoshaphat insisted on hearing from one, and at last Ahab found a prophet of Yahweh, a man named Micaiah, who insulted the other prophets by first mocking what they had said, and then giving a contradictory prophecy—one that came true, by the way. One of the false prophets, a man named Zedekiah was incensed: “Then Zedekiah, son of Kenaanah, went up and slapped Micaiah in the face” (1 Kings 22:24). This was not an attack on Micaiah’s life or body. Zedekiah was insulted by Micaiah’s words, and he insulted Micaiah back in a way that was perfectly understood in the culture. Micaiah, as if following the words of Jesus spoken some 800 years later, ignored Zedekiah’s insult and simply kept on speaking the words God gave him to speak.

Christians need to follow the advice of the Lord and learn to ignore insults without burning in anger. We also need to know the culture and customs of the Bible so that we can correctly interpret such verses. The command to “turn the other cheek” has no bearing on the criminal justice system and the justice exercised by the government in the defense of society, and neither does it have anything to do with self-defense or war.


Chapter 7

7:12. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).
7:14. “bier.” The Jews carried the bodies of their dead to the grave on something that resembled a stretcher. It was flat and open. “Coffin” gives the wrong impression, because the bier had no sides, but was simply a platform on which the body was laid. In the biblical culture, people were buried the same day they died, before the body started to decay (See Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia).
7:16. “God has visited his people.” This verse can be confusing to some people who do not realize that God usually “visits” us, or works around us, through other people. Occasionally, Trinitarians will cite this verse as proof that Jesus is God, because it says that God visited His people. However, that phrase in no way proves the Trinity. Any word or phrase in Scripture must be interpreted in light of both its immediate and remote contexts. In this case, the immediate context alerts us to the truth being presented. The people called Jesus “a great prophet,” which tells us right away that they did not think he was God.

God “visits” His people by sending them some blessing. This is clear from verses like Ruth 1:6, “Then she [Naomi] arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread.” In the Book of Ruth, Yahweh “visited” His people by sending them bread, but even that did not mean that God gave them the bread.
directly, like He had done with the manna at the time of Moses. God “visited” the people by ending the famine and allowing the ground to produce grain again, but the people were the ones who plowed, sowed, weeded, and harvested. God simply provided the fertility, but without His blessing nothing would grow. So God “visiting” His people, in that case, was simply Him putting His blessing on the soil. In a similar fashion, in the Gospels, God visited His people by sending them “a great prophet” who raised a widow’s son from the dead.

A lesson we should learn from this verse and others like it is that God works through His people. When He does, He often gets the credit even when people do the actual work. When God works through people, the Word records things like, “God visited His people” (Luke 7:16) and “God has done great things” (Luke 8:39). Americans today use the same language. If an acquaintance gives you some money when you need it and says, “The Lord put it on my heart to give this to you,” you might well say to someone else, “The Lord really blessed me today.” Neither you nor any other person would believe that you were saying that the person who gave you money was “the Lord.” Everyone understands that the Lord works through people, and so our language, like biblical language, reflects that knowledge. For more information on this, see Charles Morgridge, True Believer’s Defense Against Charges Preferred by Trinitarians, p. 118.

7:19. “Are you the Coming One.” See the commentary on Matthew 11:3.

“another one.” The Greek word “another” is allos (#243 ἀλλος), here meaning another of the same kind; a second one. In other words, “Are you THE one, or is there a second one?” (Or perhaps, “Is there someone else?”) This record has a different emphasis than the record in Matthew 11:3, which uses the Greek word heteros (#2087 ἴτερος), referring to someone of a different quality. See commentary on Matthew 11:3.

7:25. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

7:27. Quoted from Malachi 3:1.

“Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“road.” See commentary on Mark 1:3.


7:29. “declared God righteous.” This seemingly difficult phrase is very powerful. The idea being portrayed is that God is on trial. Is He a righteous God? Has he provided a way for mankind to repent, have forgiveness of sins, and thus have salvation? Yes, He has. The jury of the people has spoken. God is righteous, and has provided for mankind. However, the religious leaders rejected God’s provision (verse 30), to their own doom. It is important to realize that the tax collectors and sinners did not “declare” God to be righteous with their mouth, although they may have done that too, but by their actions.

7:34. “See!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

7:37. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδοû), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).
8:4. The Parable of the Sower. It is perhaps more accurately named, “The Parable of the Soil.” It is also in Mark 4:3ff. See commentary on Matthew 13:3.

8:8. “Anyone who has ears to hear had better listen!” This is the same Greek phrase as occurs in Mark 4:9 (see commentary there), and almost the same Greek phrase as occurs in Matthew 11:15. For an explanation of the exclamation, see the commentary on Matthew 11:15. This verse is longer, reading, “Anyone who has ears to hear had better listen,” while the occurrences in Matthew read, “Anyone who has ears had better listen!”


“sacred secrets.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

“so that…” For this quotation from Isaiah and the purpose of parables, see commentary on Matthew 13:13. The “so that” is a hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood purpose-result clause: see entry on Matthew 2:15, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.” To fully understand this passage, we must see how Matthew’s record portrays the human side of the events, John’s the spiritual side, and Mark and Luke’s records combine the two into one.

8:12. “the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

“cannot believe.” The verb “believe” is in the subjunctive mood, thus many versions have “may” not believe, but the Greek conjunction hina (#2443 ἧνα) earlier in the sentence is the reason the verb is subjunctive, and therefore in these cases we must get the sense of the verb from the context. In this case, the Devil does not take the word from people so they “may” not believe, his intention is that with no word in their heart, they “cannot” believe (see J. B. Phillips, The New Testament in Modern English. The translations by N. T. Wright and A. Nyland, say “won’t” believe).

8:19. “his mother.” Jesus’ family had come to take control of him, because they thought he had gone insane (There is no mention of Joseph; he had apparently died. See commentary on John 19:27).

8:24. “subdued.” The Greek word translated “subdued” is epitimaō (#2008 ἐπιτιμάω), and this is the technical sense of the word as it was used in Greek religion for taking control over a spirit. Robert Guelich (Word Biblical Commentary: Mark) notes that epitimaō is “a commanding word uttered by God or by his spokesman, by which evil powers are brought into submission.” Jesus subdued the storm, which was no doubt caused by a demon, by the power of God that he wielded, which was expressed in words. The power came from God and was used by Jesus. Jesus did not gain control over the storm by some “magic words” or formula that he used. “It is not a magical incantation...it is powerful Word of the Son” (Gerhard Kittel, Theological Dictionary, ἐπιτιμάω Vol. 2, p. 626). For more on epitimaō, see commentary on Mark 1:25.

8:27. “in the tombs.” Inside them, not “among” them. See commentary on Mark 5:3.

“torment me.” See commentary on Matthew 8:29.

8:40. “returned.” The Greek word is hupostrepho (♯5290 ὑποστρέφω) and it means, to return, to turn back. In this case, the parallel record in Mark 5:21ff makes it clear Jesus “returned” to a city back across the Sea of Galilee, most likely to Capernaum. The main reason there can be confusion about this word “return” and whether it refers to returning back to Capernaum or returning again to where the demon-possessed men were, is that Luke 8:37 says that Jesus, “got into a boat and returned (to Capernaum).” However, a careful reading of the context reveals that is a summary statement, not strictly in chronological order, because verse 38 shows the man who had been delivered still talking with Jesus, so Jesus had not in fact left yet. He actually left in verse 40. The reason this is important is that verse 40 says the people welcomed Christ, and were expecting him. That was certainly true of Capernaum. Capernaum was Jesus’ home (see commentary on Mark 2:1), and where he lived, so the people expected him to come home periodically. In contrast, there is no indication Jesus said he would return to the area where the demon-affected man lived.

8:41. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (♯2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

8:47. “she came trembling, and falling down before him.” The record of the woman who had the issue of blood for twelve years occurs in Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-35; and Luke 8:43-48. Each record has some of the same information, but each record includes different details as well. In this case, there are too many matching details for the records not to be of the same event, and there are no contradictory details—they all fit together to make a singular picture of the event. Mark and Luke include many details that are left out of Matthew. Matthew does not record the power that came from Jesus, or how Jesus then searched for the person who touched him. The focus in Matthew is on the woman’s need, her King meeting that need, and Jesus focusing on her faith. Like a benevolent King, he tells the woman to “Be of good cheer,” because her faith had healed her. Mark and Luke include many more details, and it seems almost like some kind of professional courtesy that it is Mark, not Luke (Luke was a doctor!) who says she suffered many things from many doctors and instead of getting better got worse (Mark 5:26). Mark and Luke record Jesus having to be persistent to find the person who touched him, including having to ignore his close disciples who thought it was incredulous that he would even ask who touched him in that large crowd. Because the Gospel of Mark focuses on Jesus as a servant, and Luke on Jesus as a man, a human being (see commentary on Mark 1:1), it seems to make sense that Jesus would have to fight with more circumstances to find out what happened to him, whereas it makes sense that as the King, Jesus would simply see the woman and address her.

8:52. “sleeping.” The Greek verb is katheudō (♯2518 καθεύδω). Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.


Chapter 9
9:3. “staff.” The Gospel of Mark says to take a staff. For information on the apparent contradiction, see commentary on Matthew 10:10.

9:7. “out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from amongst those who were dead.”

9:18. “alone.” In this case, “alone” means apart from the huge crowd mentioned in the previous verses.

9:19. “Elijah.” For information on why the people thought that Elijah would come, and why John the Baptist was called “Elijah,” see commentary on Matthew 17:10.

9:20. “life” (2x). The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. [For a more complete explanation of psuchē, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’.”]

9:25. “life.” The Greek word is psuchē, as in verse 24. It is used twice in verse 24 of the life of the body, and it is expanded in this verse to be life in general, both here and the hereafter, which is why many versions translate it “life” in verse 24 but “soul” in verse 25. We felt it was better to translate the word the same way in both verses and point out that “life” can be just our physical life or our physical and everlasting life [For a more complete explanation of psuchē, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’.”].

9:26. “ashamed.” Most Christians do not understand the Day of Judgment or the Kingdom of Christ on earth, so these words do not make sense to them. Although unbelievers may well be ashamed of the words of Christ, many believers are too, and they show it by not boldly standing on what Jesus said, often never mentioning Jesus or his teachings, but instead trying to “blend in” to the people around them. [For more on the Kingdom being on earth, see Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”; for more on rewards and punishments on the Day of Judgment, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or worthless.”]

“of the holy angels.” This is a simple and well stated truth: when Jesus comes back, it will be in his glory, and the Father’s, and the holy angels. There is no mention of the “Person,” the Holy Spirit, because there is no such “third person of the Trinity.” See, Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to Be Like Christ.

9:28. “went up onto the mountain.” For an explanation of this event, which is referred to as “The Transfiguration,” see commentary on Matthew 17:2.

9:29. “the appearance of his face became different.” For more on this event, which is referred to as “the Transfiguration,” see the commentary on Matthew 17:2 and 3.

9:30. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

9:38. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

9:39. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).


“made him have convulsions.” It is possible that the demon threw the boy to the ground, as some translations say. But there are other translations that say the demon tore the boy, and that seems to be in accord with the Greek which seems to be much stronger
than simply throw on the ground. The word we translate as “tore” is regnumi, and means “To cause to come apart or be in pieces by means of internal or external force, tear in pieces, break, burst (burst the wine-skins: Mk 2:22; cp. Mt 9:17; Luke 5:37). Passive = be torn, burst. Of ferocious animals tear in pieces w. their teeth” (from BDAG). If a demon has to leave someone, because of its evil and hateful nature, it will do everything it can to hurt the person by tearing flesh, nerves, or anything else it can as it leaves. In this case, the demon saw Jesus coming, and was going to hurt the boy as much as possible before he left, tearing the boy and convulsing him. (Cp. the record in Mark 9:20).

9:45. “so they did not perceive it.” This is a result clause in Greek. It was not hidden from them in order that, for the purpose of, the disciples not perceiving Christ’s meaning. Rather, the disciples’ own preconceived notion of the Messiah and his role concealed this meaning from their understanding, “so they did not perceive it.” It does not make sense to say Jesus concealed it because he precedes the saying with, “let this sink into your hearing.” Nor does it make sense that God would be at odds against Christ, causing them to be blinded to it, when the Lord desired the disciples to understand.

9:48. “Indeed.” This is the “confirmatory” use of the Greek gar, not the causal use in which it is usually translated “for.” Some grammarians refer to it as the “confirmatory gar.”

Chapter 10

10:3. “Pay attention.” The Greek word is idou (#2400 Ἰδοὺ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!). Evangelism is a serious work, difficult in itself due to the fallen nature of man and mankind’s general resistance to godliness. Adding to that difficulty, however, is the spiritual battle that always rages around any outreach work. Thus it is understandable that the Lord would start instructing us about it with, “Pay attention.”

10:4. “greet no one.” This does not mean to be unfriendly. The oriental greetings were long and involved, and Jesus wanted his disciples to go with haste.

10:18. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. [For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

This verse is a vivid testimony to the problems that believers can cause in the Adversary’s kingdom when they teach the truth, heal the sick, and cast out demons. The Devil spends much of his time in heaven, where he constantly makes accusations against God’s people (Job 1:6, 7, 12; 2:1, 2, 7; Rev. 12:10). However, he comes to the earth when he needs to, as he did when he appeared to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3), or when he personally tempted Jesus Christ in the desert (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). The book of Revelation shows us that in the future the Devil will be cast out of heaven and no longer allowed access to God (Rev. 12:10).

In Luke 10 Jesus sent out the 72 (or 70; the Greek texts are divided) with the authority to heal and cast out demons. They were very effective in helping God’s people, because they came back to Jesus amazed at the deliverance they were able to accomplish.
through the power of God. They said, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name.” This was great news for God’s people, but terrible news for the Devil and his kingdom. Before Christ’s time, no one had effectively delivered people from demonic power. Now Jesus, the Twelve, and the 72, were casting demons out of people and destroying the oppressive system the Devil had carefully built.

The Devil could not just stand by and watch this happen. He came to earth to personally intercede, and try to minimize the damage that the disciples were doing, as well as try to cause them problems in any way he could. Thus, just as he left heaven to tempt Adam and Eve (Gen. 3), and to tempt Jesus (Matt. 4; Luke 4), he quickly left heaven to support his demonic army on earth. God showed Jesus the Devil’s rapid descent from heaven in a revelation vision. Thus, when the disciples joyfully exclaimed that even demons were subject to them in Christ’s name, Jesus supported their faith by telling them that they had such a powerful and damaging effect on Satan’s kingdom that Satan had quickly, like lightning, come down from heaven.

The Greek word translated “fall” in Luke 10:18 is πίπτω (#4098) and is a general term for all types of falling or downward motion, including falling off of things, throwing oneself down before dignitaries, falling down dead, lightning falling from the sky, being ruined personally (“falling” from grace), and even the heat of the sun “falling” upon people. Thus, the exact meaning of πίπτω has to be taken from the context, and the context of Luke 10:18 is the disciples causing a disturbance in the Devil’s kingdom, so he “fell” (traveled quickly downward) from heaven to correct it.

Some Christians teach that when Jesus said he saw Satan fall from heaven, he was saying that he existed in the beginning and saw when Satan and his demons rebelled against God and were cast out of heaven. That interpretation does not fit the context of the verse. What difference would it make in the context of Luke 10 that Jesus had seen Satan’s rebellion and fall? Such a statement would not have supported the 72, and in fact would have confused them. Furthermore, it is not the kind of statement that Jesus would make, because it would be pointing to something he had done ages before that was completely removed from the situation he was in. It would almost seem like bragging. The Trinitarian explanation of this verse is incorrect, and takes away the powerful meaning of the verse, which is the damage we disciples can do to Satan’s kingdom if we walk in the power that God has given us.

“falling.” The Greek is πίπτω (#4098), and it means to fall, or “to move with relative rapidity in a downward direction” (BDAG). It is not that Satan “fell,” as if he tripped and fell, or that he was thrown down, so he fell. He moved with great rapidity, like lightning, traveling in a downward direction from heaven to earth.

10:19. “Look!” The Greek word is ιδού (#2400), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

10:21. “in the holy spirit.” There is no definite article. This holy spirit is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

10:22. This verse is very similar to Matthew 11:27, see commentary there.

10:25. “Look!” The Greek word is ιδού (#2400), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.


10:28. “live.” This is one of the many places where “live” is used idiomatically for “live forever,” and sometimes “life” is used in the same way: idiomatically for everlasting life.

The idiom is very ancient, and is why Ezekiel 33:12-20 is very clear that if a “righteous” person becomes unrighteous he will “die” (i.e., “die” forever, sometime after he is judged on the Day of Judgment), while if a wicked person repents and becomes righteous he will “live,” (i.e., live forever). It is why Habakkuk says that righteous will “live” (i.e., live forever) by their faithfulness (Hab. 2:4). There are many other uses of the idiom, and there are cases where, although the primary meaning of “live” is “live forever,” there are undertones of also “live to the fullest.” For “live” meaning “live forever,” see, John 5:25; 6:57; 11:25; 14:19; Rom. 6:8; 2 Tim. 2:11; Heb. 12:9. For “life,” meaning “everlasting life,” see, Matt. 7:14; 18:8, 9; 19:17; Mark 9:43, 45; John 3:36; 5:40; 20:31; Acts 11:18; Rom. 5:18; Gal. 3:21; 2 Tim. 1:1; 1 John 3:14; 5:12.

Just as “live” or “life” can refer to everlasting life, “die” and “death” could refer to everlasting death (see commentary on John 8:51).

10:31. “he passed by on the other side.” The man who was mugged was an Israelite. So why would the priest and Levite not help him? It is not that they were “bad people.” They had their priorities wrong. The man was half dead, and could have died at any time. If the priest or Levite was helping the man, and he died, then they would have been unclean for 7 days (Num. 19:11-16) and would not have been able to “spiritually minister” to others. Thus, these men put their “spiritual duties” above helping their fellow-man. They should have known from the law that God desires mercy, not sacrifice (Matt. 12:7; Hos. 6:6; Micah 6:6-8). This happens far too often in Christianity. Our families get ignored while we do “spiritual things” for the Body of Christ. Or we ignore the cries of other humans while we take care of spiritual responsibilities. The lesson that the Lord is teaching us from the parable of the Good Samaritan is that we are to love our neighbor, and when we do, it is spiritual service.

10:42. “but one thing is necessary.” This is one of the many places where the verse should have been started in a different place for clarity. The sentence reads, “you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary….” When the sentence is broken in the middle by the “42,” it can be difficult to see what it means.

Chapter 11

11:6. “just come.” The verb is in the aorist tense. The guest had just arrived and caught the host off guard, with nothing to feed him.

11:9. “keep asking.” This verb is in the continuous present tense. See commentary on John 16:24, “keep asking.”

11:11. This verse has several textual variants. The one in the REV reflects the Nestle-Aland 27 Greek text (cp. Metzger, Textual Commentary).

11:13. “give holy spirit.” There is no definite article. This holy spirit is the gift of God, which was poured out on the day of Pentecost. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]
11:14. “mute demon.” Since the textual evidence favors the omission of “and it was,” and since the word “mute” is an adjective, it makes sense to say “mute demon,” i.e., a demon that causes muteness.

11:15. “Beelzebul.” The Greek is Beelzeboul (#954 Βεελζεβούλ), which gets put into English as “Beelzebul.” He is called the “prince of demons” in Luke 12:10. “Beelzeboul” is “lord of the dunghill.” This comes from the Hebrew zebul (dung, a dunghill). [For more on this name and the other names of the Slanderer (the Devil), see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

11:18. “And also.” Similar structure to the New Jerusalem Bible. 

“the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

“Beelzebul.” See commentary on 11:15.


“sons.” Not the literal sons, but the disciples of the religious leaders. [For more information on “sons” being disciples, see commentary on Matthew 12:27.]

11:21. “in peace.” Other versions read “safe.” Christ, who spoke Hebrew (or Aramaic), would have used the word for peace, shalom, which indicates a state of wellbeing. But shalom would have been translated into the Greek eirene, which is the Greek word for peace, although it lacks the full sense of the Hebrew shalom. This is an excellent example of how meaning can be lost in translation going from the Semitic languages of Hebrew or Aramaic to Greek and then to English.

11:24. “the unclean spirit.” Jesus had been talking about demons and had cast out a demon (cp. v. 14), and the subject never changed, so it is “the” unclean spirit, that is, like the ones he had been referring to.

“a resting place.” The Greek is anapausis (#372 ἀνάπαυσις), and it can either mean “rest” or “a resting place” (see BDAG Greek-English lexicon; cp. The New English Bible; The Kingdom New Testament by N. T. Wright; The Kingdom of God Version by R. Faircloth). Here, the better translation is “a resting place,” that is a place to settle in and use as a base for causing trouble and harm. The demon does not “rest” in the person or animal it occupies, it goes about its demonic activity.

11:31. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

11:32. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

11:34. “lamp.” The eye is the “lamp” of the body. The eye is not the light, but the lamp that allows the light to shine. A poorly cared for lamp (the lamps of the time were oil lamps, usually made of clay) would not allow the light to shine well. Similarly, if one's “eye” was impure, the light of God would not shine well, or shine at all, in the body.

“single.” The Greek word translated “single” is haplous (#573 ἕπλοῦς), and means “single,” therefore “unmixed.” The key to this saying about the “single” eye and the “evil eye,” in this context of wealth, is to realize they are Semitic idioms. In this context the “single eye” is the generous eye, it is unmixed with worldly desires for wealth and
possessions, and it therefore generous towards others. In contrast, the “evil eye,” is used idiomatically in the Semitic languages for a person who is greedy, covetous, and envious.

In Western cultures, the “evil eye” was a look or glance that meant harm and brought harm. Although this use of the “evil eye” may have existed in ancient Judaism, there is no reason to think it is used in Matthew or Luke. The Semitic idiom of the “good” or “single” eye being generous, and the “evil eye” being greedy, covetous, and stingy, holds true throughout the Bible. The “good eye” of Proverbs 22:9 is generous, and the “evil eye” of Deuteronomy 15:9; 28:54, Proverbs 23:6 and 28:22 refers to someone who is greedy and stingy. See commentary on Matthew 6:22.

11:41. “see!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

11:42. “necessary.” The Greek word is dei (#1163 δεῖ; pronounced “day”), and it refers to what is necessary, what one must do, or has to do. In today’s English it seems to be watering down the meaning to translate it as “should” or “ought,” because there are many things we “should” do that are not actually a necessity. But love and justice are not just things we “should” do, if we are going to obey God, they are necessities. R.C. H. Lenski, in his translation, says, “But these it was necessary to do, and those not to dismiss.” John Nolland (Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 9:21-18:24), also uses “necessary” and has, “[if you were to do the will of God] it would be necessary to…..” The verb tenses in the phrase are somewhat idiomatic, the infinitives acting more like aorists (Lenski), and being “difficult to catch precisely in translation” (Nolland), which explains why the versions word the last phrase in the verse somewhat differently from one another.

11:50. “that.” The Greek preposition hina (#2443 ἴνα) here is used as introducing a result clause. God did not send prophets with the purpose of them being slain so He could punish a generation; He sent them to turn people from sin and call them back to Him. The fact that the prophets were killed “resulted” in a generation that will experience the wrath of God. Of course, God also realized that His prophets would be mistreated and killed, but He still sent them to help people, and their sacrificial death became part of the necessary redemptive process, God fully knowing that the final outpouring of His wrath would be the precursor to the Messianic Kingdom on earth. God gives people every chance to change, but also acts in a way that His judgment is just. The two processes are inextricably linked.

Chapter 12

12:5. “Gehenna.” See commentary on Matthew 5:22. [For more information on annihilation in the lake of fire, see Appendix 5: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”].

12:6. “assaria.” 1/16th of a denarius, which was a day’s wage for a laborer. If we were to use the time value of money based on today’s work day, one assarion would be worth one-half hour of work and so two worth about one hour’s work, but in biblical times a laborer’s work day was often longer than 8 hours, and lasted from shortly after sunup to sundown. See commentary on Matthew 10:29.


“the Holy Spirit.” “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]

12:12. “the Holy Spirit.” “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]

12:19. “soul” (2x). The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; and attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here psuchē is used of the person himself. Thus, the NIV says, “And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty….,” [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].


“is being demanded.” The Greek word is apaiteō (#523 ἀπαίτεω), which means to demand or ask for something back or to demand something that is due; to ask or demand with some urgency. Here it is in the present tense, active voice, so it has the essence of, “is being demanded from you.” The present tense is sometimes used in a general way to express something that will happen in the future, and so some versions have a future tense (“this night your soul will be demanded from you”). However, it is likely that the present tense subtly portrays the spiritual battle that is always going on behind the scenes. Satan stands before God day and night accusing people (Rev. 12:10), and he certainly demanded to have Peter, who, like all of us, had sinned (Luke 22:31).

12:22. “life.” The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is broadly used as the person and his life. It could be translated, “Do not be anxious about your life,” or “Do not be anxious about yourself.” [For a more complete explanation of psuchē, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].


12:35. “Your.” In talking to his disciples, the Lord’s words become emphatic to them (partly from the imperative mood of the associated verb). No matter what others do, the disciples of Christ must be focused on obeying him.

“must be.” The verb is imperative. Sometimes the imperative mood can mean an encouragement, as in, “Let your,” but that is not the case here. The Lord will come, and his servants must be ready for him. We dare not treat the commands of the Lord as if they are just suggestions. God created us to do good works (Eph. 2:10), and there are rewards for those who do, and punishment for those who do not.

12:54. “in the west.” That would be over the Mediterranean Sea. Wind from the sea brought rain, while wind from the south, from the Sinai, or from the east, Arabia, brought dry uncomfortable heat.
12:58. “For example.” Jesus was very aware of the times and the importance of being able to serve God rather than be sidelined by tricks and traps of the Adversary (cp. 12:45), so he gave this example.

Chapter 13

13:6. “And he spoke this parable.” If we are going to understand the parable, we have to understand its context, and the context is that people must repent of their sin and live godly lifestyles before God. Life can end shortly, and waiting for one reason or another before turning to God is foolish. Like the unfruitful tree in the parable, they may have a few more years (or maybe not), but that time will come to an end, because everyone dies eventually.

13:7. “See.” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”). Usually translated “Look,” that seemed too strong in this direct address. The vinedresser was not being condescending to the owner in any way. We might have used “Lo.”

“use up.” The Greek word katargeō (#2673 καταργέω) means to use up, to waste, so it is unclear whether the landowner in the parable thought the unfruitful tree was actually depleting the soil or just taking up space that could have been used more productively. The phrase “use up” covers both possibilities, and points to the fact that the landowner would have realized that the tree required precious moisture from the ground that could have helped other plants to be fruitful. The parable makes a very powerful point: “unfruitful” people are just not unfruitful themselves, but they use up resources that keep others from being fruitful. Nevertheless, the vinedresser had a heart for this unfruitful tree and wanted to save it. This too, is like life. Often people take an interest in helping others who are unfruitful. But, like this compassionate vinedresser, even they must realize that if the people they try to help remain unfruitful month after month, there comes a time when they have to be let go.

13:9. “soon after.” The Greek phrase, eis to mellon is idiomatic, but mellon most often refers to something that is about to happen, not something that is far off. The point the gardener was making was that once the tree was fertilized he and the owner should start to see positive changes very quickly, and realize there would be a good chance the tree would bear fruit next season. Although some versions use “next year” as a translation of the phrase eis to mellon, there is no reason to think the gardener was thinking about a time that far off. The point of the parable, and something we should keep in mind when working with people, is that if we give them the attention they need, we should start to see some results fairly quickly. While it is true that there are people who do not change for years and then suddenly change, we are not to spend an inordinate amount of time trying to help those people. When we say “Yes” to helping one person, we are saying “No” to other opportunities and serving the Lord in other ways. We are not called just to use our time for the Lord, but rather to make the best use of our time for him (Eph. 5:16).

13:11. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

13:16. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατάνافق), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of
the word, which is important, to be lost. In this case, the Adversary has used his power to cripple this believing woman. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

“Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“eighteen years!” We pick up the exclamation from *idou*, (“Look!”). Jesus was talking with great force and passion, and “woke up” the minds of his audience, which is why those who suggested that this woman not be healed after eighteen years of torment were put to shame.

13:19. For more information on this parable, see commentary on Matthew 13:32.
13:22. “through.” The Greek is *kata*, used in the distributive sense (cp. Lenski; Hendrickson). Lenski translates this as: “city by city and village by village.”
13:30. “Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).
13:32. “fox.” This is the figure of speech, *hypocatastasis*. A study of the word “fox” in the biblical culture reveals that Jesus was calling Herod a destructive nuisance. The meaning of the word “fox” when used in figures of comparison has changed over time. In the United States today it usually refers to a beautiful woman, whereas fifty years ago it usually referred to someone who was sly and/or sneaky. In biblical times “fox” referred to a destructive nuisance, something that could be dangerous, but not as dangerous as a wolf, bear, or lion. For an explanation of *hypocatastasis*, see commentary on Revelation 20:2.

“Take notice!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).
“Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

Chapter 14

14:2. “Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).
14:5. “son.” The oldest texts read “son.” It seems that reading was unsettling to copyists, who at some point changed *ous* (son) to *onos* (donkey). There would be no reason to change “donkey” to “son.” Some manuscripts have all three: donkey, son, and ox, the copyists not being able to decide how to correctly copy the text.
14:14. “resurrection of the righteous.” In the future the dead will be raised at different times. Dead Christians will be raised at the Rapture, which is immediately before the Great Tribulation. Those people who are righteous will be raised at the resurrection of the righteous (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15), also called the first resurrection (Rev. 20:5, 6), and “the resurrection of life” (John 5:29), and people in that resurrection are part of the Messianic Kingdom on earth. [For more on the Rapture and the resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15].
14:15. “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the Kingdom of God!” There is a lot in this statement. The exclamation point comes from the tone of the sentence, not from an imperative verb. The man, hearing Jesus speak about the Resurrection of the Righteous, correctly understood that anyone who was part of that resurrection would be a part of the Messianic Kingdom on earth.

It was “a prevailing Jewish idea, a great and long-continued feast will be held when the Messianic kingdom is established on earth after the resurrection [of the Righteous]” (N. Geldenhuys, The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Luke). It is clear that the man who spoke up, likely a Pharisee or expert in the Law, did not think that the Kingdom of Heaven was currently going on, but was future (the verb “will eat” is in the future tense). [For more on the kingdom on earth, see Appendix 3: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”]. The man’s statement is clearly true: anyone who is in the Resurrection of the Righteous (or in the Rapture) and gets to take part in the Messianic Kingdom on earth is indeed blessed.

The belief in a Messianic Kingdom on earth was prevalent among the Jews, but so was the belief that “good” Jews like the Pharisees would certainly be a part of it—a belief that Jesus took some pains to dismantle at various times in his teachings (cp. Matt. 5:20; 21:31). So it was that after the man made his statement, that Jesus took time to correct him, albeit in a manner that set forth the truth in a way that was not directly confrontational and one that invited the dialogue, “What did that parable mean?” Those who were self-absorbed or arrogant would never see the point Jesus was making, while the humble would either see it or ask about it.

14:23. “will be filled.” The verb is subjunctive, hence many translation say “may” be filled, but the Greek preposition hina that starts the phrase requires the verb to be subjunctive. Thus the verb has to be translated from context. Here the Lord wanted the servants to bring people in so his house “will” be filled.

14:26. “life.” The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is broadly used as the life of the person.” [For a more complete explanation of psuchē, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

14:35. “Anyone who has ears to hear had better listen!” This is the same Greek phrase as occurs in Mark 4:9 (see commentary there), and almost the same Greek phrase as occurs in Matthew 11:15. For an explanation of the exclamation, see the commentary on that Matthew 11:15. This verse is longer, reading, “Anyone who has ears to hear had better listen,” while the occurrences in Matthew read, “Anyone who has ears had better listen!” Jesus has just taught about the cost of being a disciple, and he gives this stern warning and exhortation to people so they will not take it lightly.

Chapter 15

15:1. “kept drawing near.” The Greek is eggizō (#1448 ἔγγιζον), to come near or close, but the real meaning here is expressed by the fact that it is a present participle, active voice. The action was going on and on. The sinners did not just “come,” they “kept
coming.” This makes a sharp contrast with the religious leaders in verse two who do not just grumble, they keep grumbling.

15:2. “kept grumbling to each other.” The Greek is diagogguzō (#1234 διαγογγύζω), and it means to murmur among a crowd or to each other (gogguzō without the dia prefix is used of just murmuring). It is “always used of many indignantly complaining” (Strong’s). Here it occurs in the indicative imperfect active, meaning that the action was ongoing. The sinners kept coming, and the religious leaders kept grumbling among themselves.

“This man.” The Greek is just “This” or “This one,” used derisively. They scorned Jesus with their words.

15:4. “does not leave.” No shepherd would leave a flock of sheep unattended in the wilderness. This is one of those places where we have to understand the ancient customs as well as Jesus’ audience did to have the parable make sense. Rarely if ever would a flock of one hundred sheep be watched by one person. There would be an owner, or a main shepherd, and then some helpers. But the owner cares deeply for his flock, and would leave the 99 with the hired help while he searched for the lost sheep. This is part of the parable, that the owner cares so much for the sheep that he would search for one that is lost, not just hope it came home somehow. God is constantly searching for the lost, and we should be too.

15:5. “lays it on his shoulders.” Shepherds have reported that sometimes sheep that have been lost are so scared and disoriented that they will not walk, and even if they would they would probably walk too slowly to suit the shepherd. So the shepherd does the hard work of carrying the sheep. This is a wonderful illustration of how just “finding” the lost person is not enough. We then have to carry that person until they are “with the flock” and can stand strongly on their own.

15:8. “drachma.” The drachma was a Roman coin made of silver. Although it varied in value over the course of the Roman empire, during the time of Christ it was apparently equivalent to a Greek denarius, which was worth a day’s wage for a laborer (cp. Matt. 20:2).

15:15. “hired himself out to.” The Greek phrase is literally, “joined himself to,” which is an idiom for beginning to work for someone, to hire oneself out to someone else (cp. NET First Edition text note).

15:18. “before you.” The Greek is enōpion (#1799 ἐνώπιον). The word has several meanings, and thus the meaning must be determined from context. Its primary meaning is literal, “before” and it pertains to a position in front of an entity, before someone or something. Thus it also pertains to being present or in view, in the sight of, in the presence of, among, and it also pertains to value judgment, thus, “in the opinion of; in the judgment of.” It also has special uses, such as in this verse when it is combined with “sin.” In this case it means more than just in your sight or judgment, but “against you” (cp. BDAG; Friberg).

The word is a good one for the son to use; it reveals his humility at this point in his life. He says he has sinned against God (“heaven” is used as a euphemism for “God,” God being sometimes considered too holy to say politely) and “against you,” which includes the fact of the sin being against his father, but also recognizing that it was “in your opinion,” thus recognizing that the father was aware of the sin and personally hurt by it.
15:29. “Lo.” The Greek word is *idou* ( defaultProps), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

Chapter 16

16:9. “*make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth.*” The answer to this difficult verse lies in understanding that only God and Christ can receive anyone into “the tents in the Age,” i.e., the dwellings in the Millennial Kingdom and beyond. How does the believer “make friends” with wealth? By using it to help and bless others. Matthew 25:40 notes that what we do for the least of the believers we do for Christ himself. When we use our wealth properly, we make friends of God and Christ, who then help us, just as the unrighteous house-manager made friends who later helped him when he was in need. For “mammon” see commentary on Matthew 6:24.

“*in the Age to come.*” This is the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.]

16:11. “*And if you have not been faithful...*” This verse contains the figure of speech Hyperbaton (Bullinger; Figures of Speech) and more literally reads, “If, then, you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, the true riches—who will entrust them to you?”

16:13. “*No servant is able to serve two masters.*” See commentary on Matthew 6:24.

16:19–31. “*a certain rich man.*” This record of the rich man and Lazarus is a parable, not a literal portrayal of events that were actually occurring. Jesus spoke the parable to the Pharisees who believed that every person had a soul that lived on after the person died, and the souls of evil people were tormented, while the souls of good people were not. By wording the parable the way he did, Christ was “becoming a Pharisee to win the Pharisees,” (cp. 1 Cor. 9:19–22). The parable makes a couple of very profound points. Perhaps the most important one is the way he ended the parable, that if hardhearted and rebellious people would not believe Moses and the prophets, they would not change their mind and believe, even if someone rose from the dead (Luke 16:31). This was shown to be absolutely correct when both Lazarus and Christ rose from the dead and yet the religious leaders did not believe.

Another point of the parable was that the ways a person deals with his wealth and earthly possessions will directly affect what happens to him on Judgment Day. Luke chapter 15 has three parables that show how valuable people are and how they should be loved and cared for. Those three parables are then followed in Luke chapter 16 by two parables about how important it is for people to properly steward their material possessions. Luke 16:14 points out that the Pharisees, who were listening to Jesus, “loved money.” The parables in Luke 16 were stern warnings to these greedy Pharisees that their selfishness would have severe consequences.

In spite of the fact that the record is a parable, just as in every parable, there is some truth in it. Scholars debate exactly how much truth is in the parable. For example, some scholars believe in disembodied souls, while others do not. Of those that do, some believe those souls have fingers that can be dipped in water, while others do not. Some scholars point out that it is very unlikely that Abraham would have the authority to allow someone from Paradise to return to earth to warn the unsaved, so the rich man asking that
of Abraham would not be literal. Other scholars doubt that unsaved people in torment can speak to the saved people in Paradise.

When it comes to determining what is true about things such as life after death, our only reliable source is the Bible, and conclusions must be drawn from the entire scope of Scripture, not just individual sections. It is not good exegesis to use a parable as a primary source of doctrine about what happens to people when they die, especially when that parable contradicts other clear verses of Scripture. We know from many other verses of Scripture that when a person dies their soul does not live on, but the person is dead in every way until the Rapture or one of the resurrections, which is a point we will expand upon later.

One thing that is true in the parable is that some people will not die immediately in the lake of fire, but will be in torment for a period of time as a retribution for their sins. This conclusion can be drawn from many verses of Scripture, and thus the clear message of the Bible is that unless people get forgiveness for their sins they will be punished for the evil they have done (cp. Ps. 62:12; Ecc. 11:9; Jer. 17:10; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 2:23). Romans 2:5 says of stubborn people, “you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath.” Just as godly people by their good works store up treasure for the life to come, wicked people store up wrath for themselves.

It is important to realize that although many Bible teachers use this parable to teach that there is everlasting torment for the unsaved, the parable itself never says that. Nowhere in the parable is it stated or implied that the rich man’s torment will go on forever. The parable simply portrays him being in torment, and a period of torment for the unsaved is expected, based upon the Scripture. However, from the scope of Scripture we learn that the unsaved in the lake of fire eventually die and are consumed, a point we will make again later.

People who assert that the record about Lazarus is factual and not a parable argue that Jesus did not say it was a parable and furthermore, no other parable contains a proper name. While it is true that Jesus did not say he was speaking a parable, it is also true that many parables start without Jesus saying he is speaking a parable. A few examples from Matthew include the parable of the Workers in the Field (20:1–16), the Two Sons (21:28–31), the Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1–13), and the Talents (25:14–30; this is a different parable from the parable of the Minas in Luke 19:11–27 which is specifically said to be a parable).

We have just seen that many parables in Luke open with “a certain man.” What is just as important is that none of Jesus’ other teachings, only his parables, open that way. Going through all the different teachings of Jesus in Luke shows us that when he started speaking, using the phrase, “a certain man” or “a certain one,” he was speaking a parable.

In answer to the assertion that no parable contains a proper name, we must realize that there is no rule that says a parable cannot have a proper name. Furthermore, actually, it is not true that parables do not contain proper names. For example, the parable of the Good Samaritan mentions both Jerusalem and Jericho. While these are not names of people, they are proper names. Also, it is generally acknowledged that Ezekiel 23 is an allegory or parable about Israel and it contains the proper names “Oholah” (“my tent”) and “Oholibah” (“my tent is in her”). While it is true that these are names assigned by God to Samaria (Israel) and Judah to make the point that He had been personally involved with them, it is also true that “Lazarus” (“whom God has helped”) is a name Jesus could assign to show that no one gets to Paradise without God’s help. So it is not actually true that no parable in the Bible contains proper names, and many of them contain very specific other details, such as amounts of money or goods, or times of the day.

There are many things besides the way the parable opens and its context that shows this record about the rich man and Lazarus is a parable. As we have already pointed out the most major one is that the scope of Scripture reveals that once a person dies, he is dead in every way—body and soul—until he is raised at one of the Judgments. No one is alive in heaven (or Paradise) or hell immediately after they die. Of course, someone reading this parable and thinking it is literal would take the position that this parable proves that theology false, but every text of Scripture must fit into the scope of the rest of Scripture. Scripture teaches via many clear verses that dead people are dead and in the grave, not alive in heaven or hell (see *Is There Death After Life?* by Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit). For example, Ecclesiastes 9:10 says, “…for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.” Yet the rich man and Lazarus had knowledge and wisdom despite the fact that they were “dead.” Luke 16 and Ecclesiastes 9 cannot contradict one another, because they are both God’s Word, and, as we have said, there are many other clear verses in the Bible that, like Ecclesiastes, teach that when a person dies he is dead in every way until he is raised.

What happens to dead people is that they will be raised in one of the resurrections (while dead Christians will be raised in the Rapture). Dead people who are resurrected in the “first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5, 6), also called the “Resurrection of the Righteous” (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15), and “the resurrection of life” (John 5:29), will live forever with Jesus. Dead people who are resurrected in the second resurrection, the Resurrection of the unrighteous (Acts 24:15) and who are judged unworthy of everlasting life will be thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death (Rev. 20:14) and people thrown into it will die and their bodies will be totally consumed [For more on people not “burning in Hell” forever, see Appendix 5: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire,” and Matthew 5:22, “Gehenna”. For more on the Rapture and the resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15].

Another reason to view this record as a parable is that it is set with four other parables, and it flows well with them. Still another reason is that the information in this parable was not the kind of factual information that Jesus could have known. How could
Jesus have known about a conversation that was going on between two dead people? The traditional answer is that Jesus was God so he knew everything, or he could have known it by revelation. However, Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees, and if they thought he was recounting to them an actual incident of a man who had brothers living among them, and that somehow Jesus knew who had gone to Paradise and who had gone to Gehenna, and furthermore he knew what these dead people were saying to each other, they would have thought he was insane or had demons, and he would have had no credibility with them whatsoever. In contrast, by presenting his teaching as a parable with a valid point, he had the opportunity to make a big impact on the Pharisees, who already believed the basic premises in the parable.

Another reason to believe that the record is a parable is that it seems inconceivable that saved people could enjoy everlasting life if they were hearing the cries and pleas of people in torment. Could it really be that right now, today, people in everlasting torment are begging people in Paradise for water but are being ignored? And could it be that saved people who were merciful and loving throughout their earthly life and took care of the poor, wretched, and needy, are in their perfected state more hardhearted than they were in their sinful earthly state? While it is true that God is a God of justice, it seems hardly possible that the everlasting joy that is promised to those who are saved could include purposely ignoring tormented people crying out for help and relief, especially since according to orthodox teaching, those cries of pain go on for eternity. It fits the scope of Scripture, and makes much more sense, that this is a parable and Jesus was speaking it to the Pharisees who loved their money and believed in a destiny similar to that which Jesus portrayed in the parable.

A large number of conservative and orthodox biblical scholars believe that the record of Lazarus and the rich man is a parable. An exhaustive list is not possible, but the commentators represent many different theological backgrounds and denominations. Bibles and Study Bibles include: The Catholic Study Bible edited by D. Senior and J. Collins; The Companion Bible by E. W. Bullinger; The ESV Study Bible by Crossway Bibles in Wheaton Illinois; The MacArthur Study Bible edited by John MacArthur; The NIV Study Bible edited by K. Barker.


Some of the other specialty books that recognize the record as a parable include: The Greek Testament by Henry Alford; The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church edited by Cross and Livingstone; The Fire that Consumes by Edward Fudge; All the
Parables of the Bible by Herbert Lockyer; The Expositor’s Greek New Testament by W. R. Nicoll; Notes on the Parables of Our Lord by R. C. Trench; and The Parables of Jesus in the Light of the Old Testament by Claus Westermann.

Many of the authors listed above believe in the everlasting torment of the unsaved, so the fact that they consider Luke 16:19-31 to be a parable is important support for its being a parable. Many unsaved people will spend time in torment in the lake of fire as a retribution for their sins. That point is well made in the parable. This wonderful parable makes many good points, not the least of which is that we need to take our lives seriously. Our life is a gift to us, and God holds us responsible for living in a way that brings glory to Him. If we are disobedient or rebellious, and squander the life He has given us, there will be serious consequences.


Chapter 17

17:2. “hung around his neck.” For information on millstones, see 17:35.
17:3. “Watch yourselves.” The need for people to forgive others cannot be overstated. Unforgiveness is a sin against God (Eph. 4:32), and it also is very harmful to one’s health, both mentally and physically, as even modern medical research shows. Furthermore, Jesus taught that if we do not forgive those who sinned against us, neither would God forgive us (Matt. 6:15). Thus, this verse, speaking about forgiving others, is set in the context of taking heed to ourselves.

17:6. “trust as a grain of mustard seed.” A mustard seed looks small to the world, but it has total trust that it can do what God designed it to do, and we, too, should have total trust that we can do what God has called us to do. Some versions such as the HCSB, NIV, and NRSV, add to the Greek text a reference to size (for example, the NIV says “as small as a grain…”), and this reverses the meaning of the parable and makes it nonsense. Small faith will not get us much, but total faith can move mountains. [For more information on the mustard seed and having faith like a mustard seed, see commentary on Matthew 13:32 and Matthew 17:20].
17:11. “on his way to Jerusalem.” This makes it seem like Jesus is traveling south to Jerusalem, but actually he is traveling north. Between verse 10 and this verse (11), Jesus went to Bethany and healed Lazarus (John 11). While he was there, the religious leaders made plans to kill him (John 11:53), so he left and traveled north. He went to the city of Ephraim (John 11:54), which is about 13 miles (21 km) NNE of Jerusalem. The Bible does not say how long he stayed in Ephraim, but it was from there he went on this final itinerary. The fact that this verse places him at the border between Samaria and Galilee means that he had already traveled north from Ephraim through Samaria. That he was already through Samaria and in Galilee is clear in the following verses, because one of the ten lepers that were healed was a Samaritan (v. 16). If Jesus was still in Samaria, we would expect all, or most, of the lepers to be Samaritans, but the fact that only one of them was shows us that Jesus was now in Galilee. From Galilee he traveled across the Jordan River to the territory known as Perea. Both Matthew 19:1 and Mark 10:1 say that Jesus was in the area of Judea beyond the Jordan. Although Perea was not technically
part of Judea, the territory ruled by Herod the Great had included both regions, and so Perea became commonly called a part of Judea. Thus for Jesus to come to Jericho (Matt. 20:29; Mark 10:46; Luke 18:35), he had to cross the Jordan River again. He arrived in Bethany six days before Passover (John 12:1, 2).

“the border.” The Greek text can be confusing here if the reader does not have a knowledge of the geography of Palestine at the time of Jesus. The Greek text reads that Jesus passed through the “midst” of Galilee and Samaria. That makes it sound like Jesus walked south through both areas. However, Galilee was the area to the north, and Samaria the area to the south, and the midst of them was the border between them, sort of like in a figure 8, the place in the midst of the upper and lower circle is also the border between the two circles.

17:20. “The Kingdom of God does not come accompanied with observation.” The Kingdom of God does not come as a spectacle that people will sit by and watch. It is not at all a kingdom that will come in that way.

17:21. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“take notice.” The Greek word is idou (ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

17:22. “The days will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of man, and you will not see it.” Jesus was teaching his disciples about the terrible times ahead. During those difficult times, disciples would long for even a temporary rest, even just one day from the “days of the Son of man” (i.e., one of the days in the Millennial Kingdom, not just one of the happier days when Jesus walked the earth with them), but there would not be any rest. Thus this teaching is similar to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 24:4-25. The tribulation will be a terrible time for people on earth.

17:26. “days of Noah.” For an explanation of why Jesus used the illustration of Noah, see commentary on Matthew 24:40. Noah’s ark and the Flood are described in Genesis 6 and 7.

17:28. “days of Lot.” For an explanation of why Jesus used the illustration of Lot and Sodom, see commentary on Matthew 24:40. The record of the destruction of Sodom is in Genesis 18:20-33; 19:1-29.


17:35. “There will be two women together grinding grain.” A biblical custom. One of the ways to grind grain was with a grinding mill of a lower millstone and an upper millstone. These stone wheels were mostly 18-24 inches in diameter and 2-4 inches thick. A hole in the center of each stone allowed a stick to pass through them so the top one would stay on the bottom one while they turned. Then another hole was put into the top one, and a stick inserted as a handle. The women would sit on opposite sides of the stone, each taking a grip on the handle. In this manner, the two women could put grain between the stones, and then turn them to grind it, each pulling and pushing opposite the other to help each other. The big hole in the middle made carrying the stone from place to place easier, and also, a rope could be run through it and tied around things, such as a person’s neck in order to drown him (cp. 17:2).

17:36. This verse, as it appears in some manuscripts of the Western Text, and thus got into the KJV, does not appear in the oldest and best Greek manuscripts, but was almost certainly added here to harmonize with Matthew 24:40.
Chapter 18

18:3. “kept coming to him.” In the Ancient Near East, the officials were appointed by the King or ruler and were answerable to him, not to the public. In fact, often they were related in some way to the ruler. One of the reasons people would give their daughters to a man like Solomon, who had 1,000 wives and concubines, was so they could gain political appointments. The judges and magistrates, then, were not voted in and could not be voted out, so many of them felt no compulsion to be helpful. The usual way to get their assistance was that they could be threatened by someone with equally powerful contacts, or they could be bribed or offered some benefit for giving their assistance. Alas, the only resort of the poor was to become such a bother that eventually the judge might actually be helpful.

In 1853 the oriental scholar, Richard Burton, made a secret pilgrimage to Mecca (at that time, any Western Christian discovered there would shortly be killed). One thing he needed to start his journey was a certain passport. Burton went to the gate of the building of the Governor of Alexandria, where he sat without being helped for over three hours until someone finally bothered to tell him he was in the wrong place. The next day he went to the Palace. He writes:

The first person I addressed was a Kawwas, or police officer, who, coiled up comfortably in a bit of shade fitting his person like a robe, was in full enjoyment of the Asiatic “Kayf” [a state of relaxation]. Having presented the consular certificate and briefly stated the nature of my business, I ventured to inquire what was the right course to pursue for a visa.

…”Don’t know,” growled the man of authority, without moving anything but the quantity of tongue absolutely necessary for articulation. Now there are three ways of treating Asiatic officials,—by bribe, by bullying, or by bothering them with a dogged perseverance into attending to you and your concerns. The latter is the peculiar province of the poor. Moreover, this time I resolved, for other reasons, to be patient. I repeated my question in almost the same words. Ruh!, “Be off,” was what I obtained for a reply. But this time the questioned went so far as to open his eyes. Still I stood twirling the paper in my hands, and looking very humble and very persevering, till a loud, “Ruh ya kalb,” “Go, O dog.” At that point Burton left, fearing that the next thing would be a lash from the hippopotamus hide whip the policeman had. Burton goes on to say, “I tried a dozen other promiscuous sources of information,—policemen, grooms, scribes, donkey-boys, and idlers in general,” but he got no help (Richard Burton, Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah & Meccah, Vol. 1, pp., 20, 21). Finally, his patience wore out and he bribed a soldier with some tobacco and money, and met with success.

Thus the parable that Jesus told about the poor woman whose only recourse to get help was to pester the judge was something his audience was all too familiar with. Without explaining all the reasons why we on earth have to pray and pray to get success, which is not due to God’s not caring but due to the intensity of the spiritual battle raging
in the universe, Jesus effectively made the point that if we want to get things from God, we have to persevere and pray until we get them.


18:11. “took a stand.” Robertson (Word Pictures in the New Testament) writes: “Stood (statheis). First aorist passive participle of histemi. Struck an attitude ostentatiously where he could be seen. Standing was the common Jewish posture in prayer (Matt 6:5; Mark 11:25).” Lenski writes, “He took a stand right up front, next to the stone balustrade which divided the priest’s court from that of the men.”

“went on praying these things.” The imperfect tense tells us that he, like many other Pharisees, made long prayers.

“for himself.” The Greek is pros eautou (πρὸς εαυτοῦ). Lenski writes: “The phrase is to be construed with the verb (not with the participle) and means that he prayed these things “for himself,” “in favor of himself,” using the pros of direction, which may be either hostile (‘against’) or friendly or neutral; here it is the second.” The Pharisee prayed on his own behalf, which is not wrong if that is only a part of one’s prayer life and it is done with the right heart. However, the picture here is an ostentatious Pharisee who stands right up front where everyone will see him, keeps on praying on his own behalf, and even thanks God that he is not like other men, whom, instead of helping or blessing, he looks down upon.

18:17. “like a little child.” With the same attitude a child would have: humility, openness, innocence, excitement, and joy. Expecting to receive and live in harmony, not to control or be someone important.

18:18. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.

18:20. Quoted from Exodus 20:12-16.

18:25. “Indeed.” The Greek conjunction gar (#1063 γάρ) usually expresses a reason and is translated “for.” But occasionally it expresses a continuation of the thought and is sometimes then referred to as a “confirmatory gar,” and can be translated, “indeed,” “yes,” etc. Here the camel reference is elucidating the point Jesus just made about the difficulty of getting into the Kingdom of God.

“camel.” There has been much discussion about this verse. The Greek and Aramaic texts read “camel,” and that does not seem too extreme given the fact that Jesus, and Orientals from that era in general, were fond of hyperbole (cp. Luke 6:41, a person having a “beam” in his eye). Origen referred to a reading that said “rope,” but it has little support. In the fifteenth century AD, it was postulated that the “needle’s eye” was a small gate that the camel had to crawl through, but that view has now mostly lost scholarly support. For one thing, historically the explanation was developed centuries after the biblical era, and also there is no epigraphical or archaeological support that there was any such practice in biblical times of trying to get a camel thorough a small door. As the “gnat” in Matthew 23:24 is a real hyperbole, so also is the camel.

18:28. “See.” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδοù), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

18:30. “life in the Age to come.” This is new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See Appendix 2: Life in the Age to Come”.

Luke
18:31. "Take notice!" The Greek word is idou (♯2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 ("Look!").

18:34. "they did not comprehend the things that he said." Once the disciples realized that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (Matt. 16:13-17; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21), he began to tell them that he must suffer, die, and be raised from the dead. In spite of his clear teaching about it, however, they did not understand what he meant.

Jesus taught about his suffering, death, and resurrection many times. He taught about it right after the disciples recognized him as the Christ (Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31, 32; Luke 9:22). Then he taught about it again immediately after the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:9-12; Mark 9:9-13); then again when he was in Galilee shortly after the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:22, 23; Mark 9:31, 32; Luke 9:43-45), then again at the Feast of Tabernacles (John 8:21, 28); then again while he was going up to Jerusalem for the Passover, at which time he would be killed (Matt. 20:17-19; Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31-34); and then again when he was in Jerusalem for the Passover (Matt. 26:2; cp. John 12:7).

The fact that the disciples never understood what Jesus meant, even though he clearly taught that he would suffer, die, and be raised from the dead, gives us some very important insights. For one thing, it shows us how the Jews at the time of Jesus viewed their Messiah, and for another it shows us that once someone has a firmly embedded preconceived idea about what the Bible says, he can look at very straightforward verses and misunderstand them.

As to what the Messiah would do when he came, just as the Jews never expected a virgin birth (note Mary’s reaction to the angel’s message, and see commentary on Luke 1:34), they never expected their Messiah to suffer and die. The common teaching at the time of Christ was that there were two great ages, the present, evil age, and the wonderful Messianic Age to come, and that the Evil Age would end, and the Messianic Age start, during the time of the Messiah. This teaching was so imbedded in the minds of the Apostles that they could not understand Jesus’ teaching that he would suffer and die.

The death of the Messiah was so contrary to their understanding that even though Jesus said it plainly over and over, they did not really get it until they saw him personally after his resurrection (this should also give us some insight into why it was so difficult to make converts—trying to get the Jews to believe in a crucified-then-resurrected Messiah required the signs, miracles, and wonders prevalent in the early years of the Church!).

Even after his death and resurrection, upon seeing the empty tomb, the disciples did not understand what had happened (John 20:9). It took Jesus personally appearing to a number of people for the disciples to believe he had been raised from the dead. Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20:16), then to the women who came to the tomb (Matt. 28:9), then to Peter (this appearing is not recorded in Scripture; we are only told that it happened; Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5); then to the two men on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:31), then to the disciples as a group (Luke 24:36ff). Even with all this evidence, Thomas, who was not with the disciples when Jesus appeared, still did not believe until he had personally seen the resurrected Lord (John 20:26-28). Ultimately, it took both understanding the Scriptures and seeing the resurrected Christ to fully confirm their belief in the resurrected Christ (Luke 24:45).

And just as they were not able to understand the death and resurrection of Jesus before it happened, they did not understand what he was saying to them when he spoke of
his ascension into heaven (John 14:5; 16:17-19). Even after his death and resurrection, the disciples did not understand the ascension. Very close to his ascension the disciples asked him if he was going to restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). They understood the prophecies of the restored earth ruled by the Messiah, and thought that he would use his spiritual power to conquer Jerusalem and the world. They did not realize Jesus had to ascend into heaven. Jesus’ ministry from heaven became clear to them over time. When the ascension happened, the Apostles kept looking into heaven, as if he would come right back down, and had to be told by two angels that suddenly appeared that he would come back down in the future, something that became much more clear as year after year as the books of the New Testament were written and Jesus did not come back and establish his kingdom.

18:39. “but he cried out all the more.” There are many lessons that we learn from Scripture about things that help us get what we want in life. One of them is being doggedly determined, and this is an example of it. You would think that the crowd would want to help a blind man see, but, alas, often people do not have the best interest of others at heart. In this case the crowd likely has some “religious reason” for supposedly protecting the sanctity of Jesus, and not let him be disturbed from his goal of reaching Jerusalem. Not deterred by the false religious scruples of the crowd, the blind man knew what he wanted and knew what it took to get his petition to Jesus—by yelling loud enough Jesus could hear him—and he yelled until he was heard, at which point he could bring his petition directly to Jesus, who in typical loving and compassionate form, saw the man’s trust and determination and healed him.

Chapter 19

19:2. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

Luke 19:5. “I must stay at your house.” Jesus spent the night at Zacchaeus’ house. The trip from Jericho to Jerusalem was over 15 miles (24 km), all uphill, and so he would have started out on the next day, probably in the late morning, and arrived before supper. When he arrived in Bethany, the people there made him a supper. The trip to Jerusalem took place six days before Passover (John 12:1, 2).

19:8. “See.” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

19:9. “he also is a son of Abraham.” Instead of speaking directly to Zacchaeus, Jesus spoke about him and his salvation to those who were present.

19:13. “minas.” The Greek is mna (#3414 μνᾶ), which we translate as “mina.” The mina was a Greek monetary unit worth 100 denarii (also 100 drachmae), and a denarius was worth one days wage for a fieldworker or soldier, or what we today would roughly call “minimum wage.” If a worker makes $8 an hour or $64 per day, in 100 days he makes $6,400 dollars. One hundred days work is roughly 1/3 of a years working days, so a mina was worth about 1/3 year’s wage for a worker.

19:20. “see.” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).
19:24. This verse demonstrates clearly that the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God (1 Cor. 3:19), and the world does not understand the wisdom of God. The world takes from the rich (often by excessive taxes) and gives to the poor. But the poor have demonstrated their inability to manage what they have, and despite hundreds of years of various welfare programs in different countries and different cultures (from the “grain dole” in the Roman Empire to the welfare system in the United States), the poor almost always stay poor. Furthermore, by taking away from the rich both the building power of their money and their incentive to work hard, the rich are made poorer and the poor are reduced to the point of being almost destitute. Christ demonstrates the wisdom of God and the way economies should work. The poor lose what they have but can work if they wish to survive, and the rich have plenty to use to build an economy that supplies jobs because they have full control of their own money and plenty of incentive for making more.

19:25. “Lord, he has ten minas.” The people in the parable, not the crowd listening to the parable, speak this. The crowds were used to listening to parables and would not have expressed such surprise by something said in a parable, even if it seemed unusual. On the other hand, Jesus knew the parable reflected the reality of what will happen on the Day of Judgment, and that some people will be very surprised at God’s justice, and thus he builds that surprise into the parable. It is both wise and just to give more things to manage to people who have demonstrated the ability to well manage what they have. There are some commentators who see this statement as part of the crowd listening to Jesus rather than the crowd in the parable, which is why some versions such as the KJV have the verse in a parenthesis.

Luke 19:28. “And when he had said these things, he went on ahead.” Jesus had spent the night at Zacchaeus’ house in Jericho (19:5). It was over 15 miles (24 km) from Jericho to Jerusalem, all uphill, so he would have gotten up and gotten a start by the laste morning, and sometime after he arrived in Bethany at the house of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha (John 12:1, 2), they made him supper.

19:30. “colt.” This “colt” is not a young horse, but a young donkey (Matt. 21:2-5).

19:37. “as he was drawing near.” This verse is in contrast with verse 41, which states “when he drew near.” As Jesus left Bethany for Jerusalem, he would be going up the east slope of the Mount of Olives, from which Jerusalem could not be seen. However, “as he was drawing near Jerusalem,” at the start of the downward slope of the west side of the Mount of Olives, the first glimpses of Jerusalem would be visible. The full panorama of Jerusalem, including of the City of David (south of the Temple Complex), the Temple Complex, and the city of Jerusalem, were not yet be visible (cp. v. 41), because it would have been obscured by houses and perhaps even by part of the Mount of Olives itself. Nevertheless, parts of Jerusalem did start to come into view. Upon seeing Jerusalem, the huge crowd became filled with emotion and began to shout and praise God because of all the miracles they had seen, and because their expectation was that someone who could heal the blind and raise the dead would be able to deliver them from the Romans and issue in the Messianic Kingdom.

Jerusalem.” Jerusalem, and what he would accomplish there, had been the object of his travels for months now. Even before the Feast of Tabernacles the year previous, he “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). We must note that this phrase is eschatological, not geographical; it points to the end of his life and what he will
accomplish. From a purely historical/geographical point of view, Jesus would go to Jerusalem one more time before he went there at Passover (when he was crucified), and that time was for the Feast of Dedication in the winter (John 10:22). As the months drew closer to his crucifixion, the Word tells us more and more he was going to Jerusalem. Luke 13:22 says Jesus traveled through the cities and villages, heading for Jerusalem. Later, as he headed for Jerusalem, he took the apostles aside and told them he would suffer and die there (Matt. 20:17-19; Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31-33). After leaving Jericho, he made the steep climb up the out of the Great Rift Valley and up the east slope of the Mount of Olives, heading for Jerusalem (Luke 19:28). Now at last he drew near the city. The verse is not simply stating that what he drew near to was the west slope of the Mount of Olives, although the Greek can be translated that way. No, he drew near Jerusalem. How near? He was already at the west slope of the Mount of Olives, on the verge of entering the city. We believe the Expositor’s Greek New Testament correctly notes that, “Luke is thinking of Jerusalem = when he was nearing the city. The next clause, πρὸς τῇ καταβάσει, is added to define more precisely the point reached = at the descent of the mount.”

“the whole multitude.” This multitude consisted of the crowds who had followed Jesus from Jericho, where Jesus had performed miracles such as healing blind Bartimaeus and his blind companion (Matt. 10:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43), and was greatly swelled by the people in Jerusalem who heard he was approaching and went out to see and welcome him (John 12:12-18; note that John 12:17 and 18 mentions two crowds).


19:41. “drew near and saw the city.” Jesus had come up from Jericho and stayed in Bethany (John 12:1-12). Bethany is on the east slope of the Mount of Olives, but houses continue up the slope and cover the top of the mountain. Thus in verse 37, as the procession reached the top of the Mount of Olives, the whole city of Jerusalem was still not in view. However, the Mount of Olives is steep, and as Jesus and the crowd descended the Mount of Olives and came closer to Jerusalem, the whole city became visible before them. Upon seeing it, Jesus became overcome with emotion and burst into tears.

“burst into sobs.” The Greek is klaio (κλαῖω; pronounced klī'-ō), and it means to weep, cry, mourn, lament. It is used of crying from pain and grief. In this verse the verb is an ingressive aorist which means the crying happened suddenly: “burst into tears” (A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament; Hendrickson, New Testament Commentary: Luke; Charles Williams, The New Testament). Lenski writes, “burst into sobs.” Robertson notes that Jesus probably cried audibly, while Vincent (Word Studies) asserts Jesus did weep out loud. H. A. W. Meyer writes, “Observe, further, the audible weeping of Jesus at the view of Jerusalem, not the silent δακρύω, as at the grave of Lazarus (John 11:35)” (Meyer’s Commentary). It is a normal human emotion that when we are faced with difficult circumstances such as a death or separation that we can control our emotions much of the time, but are sometimes overcome with a wave of grief or sadness that causes us to burst into tears. That is what happened to Jesus. He knew the Jews in Jerusalem rejected him, and he knew that most of the people in the crowd that surrounded him, although they were saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord,” in their hearts they did not really want the Messiah that he was. They
wanted political deliverance; they wanted the peace of the Messianic Kingdom; they wanted an easy life; they did not want to repent and change themselves. That is why, when Jesus was arrested and did not give the people what they wanted, they quickly changed what they were shouting, and shouted, “Crucify him!” (Mark 15:11-14). Jesus knew all this already, and had been dealing with it emotionally. However, upon getting a clear view of Jerusalem he was overcome by a wave of emotion and burst into audible crying, sobbing over the wasted lives, the pride and selfishness, the unbelief, and the untapped potential of the people, as well as over the destruction he foresaw of the people and city that he loved. (for his more silent crying, see commentary on John 11:35).

19:42. “would bring.” The Greek preposition pros means “to” or “toward,” and the idea is that the things that would lead to or would bring peace. The hardness of Jerusalem and its leaders no doubt fueled Jesus’ emotion, but that was exacerbated by the people around him shouting, “Blessed is the King....” He knew that they wanted a Messiah, yes, but the kind they wanted, not the kind he was. They wanted political deliverance, wealth and health, and would not settle for less. Thus, it was only a few days later when they realized Jesus would not bring them what they wanted, they shouted, “Crucify him” (23:21).

“peace...” This is the figure of speech, aposiopesis, or “sudden silence” (Bullinger, Figures; Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament). Jesus, overcome with emotion or seeing no point to it, did not finish his sentence. Some versions end the phrase with an exclamation point, as if Jesus was showing great emotion, perhaps anger or frustration. There is no imperative in the Greek text and Jesus is crying over the lost potential: “If only you had known...” and he let his voice drop off. Then he restarted with the actual situation, “But now they have been hidden from your eyes.”

“have been hidden.” The Greek is krupto (#2928 κρύπτω), to conceal or to hide, and it is in the passive voice. This verse is not saying that God hid what the people of Jerusalem needed to see, but rather just makes the statement that they have been hidden. When a person stubbornly refuses to acknowledge the truth, over time one’s understanding becomes darker and darker. This was the situation with Jerusalem. The leaders and the people had refused to believe Jesus over and over, and eventually their eyes could not see.

19:46. Quoted from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11.

19:48. “hanging upon what he said.” A very graphic idiomatic saying. A more literal, but also more confusing, translation is that all the people “were hanging on him, listening” (cp. YLT). But the people were not literally “hanging on him,” they were hanging on every word he spoke. The Jewish leaders hated Jesus, but the crowds loved him.

Chapter 20

20:7. “they did not know where it was from.” The religious leaders lied to Jesus. They were convinced, wrongly, that John’s baptism was from men, but they lied about it to protect themselves. They would not tell where they thought it was from, so Jesus said he would not tell them where he got his authority.

20:8. “Neither will I tell you.” Jesus was not fooled by the Jews saying they did not know. They knew exactly what they believed, but those hypocrites and cowards were
Luke

afraid to say it. Jesus had said if they would tell him about John’s baptism, he would tell them about the source of his authority. Since they would not tell him, he kept his word and would not tell them.

20:9. “And he began to speak to the people this parable.” This parable is a clear reference to the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7, except in Isaiah the vineyard is itself Israel, and is wicked, while in Jesus’ parable the vineyard is God’s and it is the people who are hired to tend it who are evil. Jesus was using thinly veiled language to speak of the leaders of the Jews, who had been entrusted by God to take care of His vineyard, i.e., His people, but were evil. The Jews got his point (v. 19), and wanted to arrest him but were afraid of the people. This parable appears in Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12, and Luke 20:9-19.

20:14. “will be.” The Greek verb is subjunctive, but that is due to the hina (#2443 ἓνα) that starts the phrase and demands a subjunctive verb, and in these cases the tense of the verb must be translated from context. The renters thought if they killed the heir, the vineyard would be theirs.

20:16. “May it not be!” Literally in the Greek, “May it not be.” This is an idiom that reflects revulsion at the thought. Perhaps, “Perish the thought” would be good. “God forbid,” which is employed in many versions, is not bad, and carries the sense, but it is so different from the Greek text that it is better in this case to translate the idiom more literally.

20:17. Quoted from Psalm 118:22.


20:34. “people of this age.” The Greek literally reads, “the sons of this age,” but that is the standard Semitic idiom where a “son” of something refers to someone who is somehow associated with it, for example, a “son of disobedience” is a disobedient person. Thus a “son of the resurrection” (Luke 20:36) is a person who is resurrected.

20:35. “out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among those who are dead.” This verse in Luke is referring to the first resurrection, the resurrection of the righteous, which is at the start of the Millennial Kingdom, Christ’s 1000 year reign (Rev. 20:4). The second resurrection is the resurrection of the unrighteous (Acts 24:15; Rev. 20:5, 11-14). [For more on the resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15].


“But that the dead are raised.” The Greek verb, egeirō (#1453 ἐγείρω), is in the present tense, not to say that they are being raised as they die (the dead bodies were obviously in the ground), but rather as a contrast to the Sadducees’ claim that the dead do not rise.

20:38. “for all live for him.” This verse makes the point that God created people to live for him (cp. Eph. 2:10), and it will not do to have His beloved be dead in the ground. His purposes, as accepted by those who believe in Him, will be fulfilled, they will live for him. The key to understanding the phrase, “for all live for him,” lies in knowing that the Sadducees said there was no resurrection, while Jesus said there was a resurrection (cp. Luke 14:14; 20:35, 36). Neither the Sadducees nor Jesus was espousing that the dead were actually alive. Rather, the issue was, did people die and then stay dead, or did they die and then later, at the resurrection, get raised back to life? Since the Sadducees only
accepted the Torah (the Five Books of Moses) as the Word of God, and considered the rest of Scripture to not have divine authority, Jesus, to help them understand, quoted from the Torah. Other Scriptures perhaps more clearly prove the resurrection, such as Peter used (Acts 2:25-36), or Paul (Acts 13:33-35), and there are other verses such as some in Isaiah 53 that are not quoted in Scripture, but clearly refer to the resurrection of Christ. Translating the Greek as “for to him everyone is alive,” as the NIV does, misses the point and clouds the issue. Not everyone is alive, and God knows this, which is why He fights for His people to stay alive. All through the Bible He rescued His people from death. Dead people cannot praise God (Isa. 38:18).

20:39. “you have well spoken.” The experts in the law who made that statement would have been Pharisees, and they believed in the resurrection (cp. Acts 23:6-9), but had never managed to silence the Sadducees like Jesus had just done.

20:40. “For they did not dare to question him any more.” After Jesus silenced the Sadducees, they did not question him any more.


20:46. “experts in the law who desire.” The English versions are divided as to whether the meaning is, “Beware of the experts in the law. They desire to walk in long robes…” or “Beware of the experts in the law who desire to walk in long robes.” The Greek text can be punctuated either way. If there is a period (or even a comma) after “law,” then Jesus is warning the people about all the experts in the law. If, on the other hand, there is no punctuation between “law” and “who,” then Jesus is only warning people about those experts who are self-seeking. It is a difficult choice. On the one hand, the Bible testifies that there were some experts in the law who were godly, and Jesus surely knew that, and so could have made a simple literal statement. On the other hand, it is common to exaggerate that kind of statement; they did it in biblical times and we do it today. We might say, for example, “Lawyers are greedy,” and our audience would know that not every lawyer is greedy, but many of them are.

So was Jesus making a literal statement, or was he exaggerating to make a point? We may never know, but for translation purposes, given the fact that only a few verses earlier there were some apparently godly experts in the law (Luke 20:39), in our opinion, it is clearer to translate the statement in a way that expresses literal truth. We feel that makes it much easier for the English reader to believe what Jesus said—that only some experts in the law were to be avoided. Also, it avoids the possibility that someone would think that Jesus said every expert in the law was an ungodly person, something clearly not true.


Chapter 21

21:6. “one stone on another.” The Greek is literally, “a stone upon a stone that will not be thrown down.”


21:15. “a mouth.” Figure of speech metonymy, the mouth being put for the words that will come from it.
21:19. “souls.” The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why some versions translate it “life.” However, since in this context Jesus is not referring to temporal life, but everlasting life, “soul” seemed a better choice than “life.” By staying faithful to the end, believers gain everlasting life. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

21:23. “distress…wrath.” This is the wrath of God associated with the Day of the Lord (see commentary on Revelation 6:17).


Chapter 22

22:3. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. [For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer.”]

22:4. “Temple commanders.” The Greek word is strategos (#4755 στρατηγός), and it is only used in the New Testament in the books written by Luke: the Gospel of Luke and Acts. The “commander” was the highest official in a Greco-Roman city (thus we have translated it “magistrate” in Acts 16:20, 22, 35, 36, 38). The Greek word strategos is also used of the commander of the Temple police in Jerusalem. The “commander” was the top man in charge of the police force that governed the Temple. Then there were officers of various ranks under the commander. In the Jewish writings the commander of the Temple is called, “the man of the Temple Mount.” The Temple police were a large number of hand-picked Levites who kept order at the Temple, which was a huge complex, covering more than 37 acres, and was sometimes filled with tens of thousands of people. The Temple police were empowered by the Romans and the Sanhedrin (the Jewish ruling council of 70) to maintain order, and insure that the laws of Israel were being kept. They had the power to arrest people, which is what they were sent to do to Jesus but were unable to do (John 7:30, 32, 45). There were many specific rules and regulations concerning the Temple that needed to be enforced. These included insuring that the boundaries of the various courts (court of the Gentiles, court of the women, court of the men, etc.) were respected, the purity laws kept such that no unclean people approached the holy places, and that the many other rules were kept as well.

At night the Temple police were placed in twenty-four stations around the Temple and its compound. Twenty-one of the stations were occupied by Levites, while three were occupied by both Levites and priests. There were ten men at each station except for the three innermost to the Sanctuary, which had ten Levites and ten priests. Thus, there were 240 Levites and thirty priests on guard in the Temple every night.

This verse mentions the “commanders” of this police force, as does verse 52, while Acts 4:1; 5:24, 26 mention the top commander (using the word in the singular).

22:10. “Listen!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ιδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).
“a man carrying a pitcher of water.” This would be very unusual. The customary practice for millennia was that women carried the water.

22:15. “eagerly desired.” The Greek is the figure of speech polyptoton, and reads, “with desire I have desired,” meaning with great desire, or eagerly desired.

22:19. “This is my body.” This is the figure of speech metaphor. In the Bible, there are many uses of the three common figures of speech of comparison, which are simile, metaphor, and hypocatastasis. These three figures are commonly used in English speech as well, but only simile and metaphor are generally known by name.

A simile is a comparison by resemblance, usually using “like” or “as.” If a person is a sloppy and noisy eater, someone might say, “You eat like a pig.” Psalm 1:3 uses a simile when it says a righteous person is like a tree planted by the water. Proverbs 11:22 (HCSB) says, “A beautiful woman who rejects good sense is like a gold ring in a pig’s snout.” Jesus effectively used the figure simile when he said, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs” (Matt. 23:27).

More intense than a simile is the figure metaphor, a comparison by representation. In a metaphor, one noun represents another. In the pig example above, a metaphor would be, “You are a pig.” Jesus used a metaphor when he said to his disciples, “I am the vine; you are the branches…” (John 15:5 NIV).

Even more intense than metaphor is the figure hypocatastasis, which is a comparison by implication. This figure is very common, but not well known by name. In the pig example, instead of comparing the messy eater with a pig by saying he is “like” a pig, or even that he “is” a pig, in hypocatastasis the comparison is just implied. One person says to the other, “Pig!” and the meaning, although just implied, is effectively communicated. [For more on hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2].

There are many metaphors in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Genesis 49:14 says, “Issachar is a strong donkey.” Deuteronomy 33:22 says “Dan is a lion’s cub.” Job 25:6 says, “man...who is a maggot.” Psalm 18:2 says, “The Lord is my rock,” and Psalm 84:11 says, “For the LORD God is a sun and shield.” God is not literally a “sun” but He does provide warmth and what is needed for life and growth. Neither is He literally a “shield,” but He does protect us from much harm. Psalm 60:7 (ESV) says, “Ephraim is my helmet; Judah is my scepter.” Jeremiah 50:17 says, “Israel is a scattered flock....” Hosea 10:1 says, “Israel was a spreading vine; he brought forth fruit for himself.”

New Testament metaphors include: “You are the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13), “I am the bread of life” (John 6:48), “I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7), and says, “you are a letter from Christ” (2 Cor. 3:3).

The danger with the figures metaphor and hypocatastasis is that the reader may not realize that a figure is being used and mistake the figure for a literal statement. That is what has happened with Jesus’ statement, “This is my body.” The early Christians understood the metaphor that Jesus used when he said, “This is my body. “There is no evidence that the apostles or anyone in the early Church misunderstood what Jesus was saying was a metaphor or ever even considered the idea of what is now called “transubstantiation.”

The doctrine of transubstantiation, in which the bread (“host”) is said to become the actual body of Christ developed very late, more than 1000 years after Christ. The Internet encyclopedia Wikipedia says, “The earliest known use of the term
‘transubstantiation’ to describe the change from bread and wine to body and blood of Christ was by Hildebert de Lavardin, Archbishop of Tours (died 1133), in the eleventh century and by the end of the twelfth century the term was in widespread use. In 1215, the Fourth Council of the Lateran spoke of the bread and wine as ‘transubstantiated’ into the body and blood of Christ.” (This information from the Internet can be confirmed in books such as Walter Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, under “Transubstantiation”).

22:20, “which is being poured out for you.” The last phrase in this verse has been translated in two different ways.

(REV) “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is being poured out for you.”

(ESV) “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”

The question is: is the verse saying that it is the literal cup of wine that is being poured out, or is it saying that Jesus’ blood is being poured out? This has to be a reference to Jesus’ blood being poured out. His sacrifice had begun. He was at the Last Supper and Judas had already left to betray him (22:4). Lenski writes: “Jesus means that this pouring out of his sacrificial blood has now begun. And he has, indeed, truly entered upon his sacrifice.” Jesus was beginning the sacrifice of his life for the salvation of mankind, hence the present participle, “being poured out.” To make the verse say that the cup of wine was being poured out is only to state the obvious, and misses the point that the pouring out of Jesus’ life had started in a very real and powerful way.

22:21. “look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

22:31. “take notice!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. [For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer.”]

22:34. “the rooster will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me.” This was revelation, and convicted Peter when the rooster crowed. There is a teaching in some Christian circles that Jesus was not referring to a rooster, but rather to the priest who opened the Temple doors first thing in the morning. According to the Jewish writings, at first light the priest who opened the Temple doors would cry three times, “All the priests prepare to sacrifice. All the Levites to their stations. All the Israelites come to worship.” Because of his crying out at dawn, this priest was referred to as the “rooster.” The idea that Jesus is referring to the “rooster” priest, and not a real rooster, is supposedly bolstered by the fact that because of their habit of getting into places where they are not wanted, and because the priests did not want them getting into the Temple, roosters were not allowed inside the walled city of Jerusalem. However, a careful study of the Bible and roosters will show that the “rooster” mentioned by Jesus was a real rooster. The rooster that crowed after Peter had denied Jesus did not crow first thing in the morning. It crowed after Jesus had only been at the High Priest’s house for no more than a couple hours (Luke 22:57-60). This alone rules out the possibility that the rooster was the priest who opened the Temple gates. Anyone who owns roosters will tell
you that the common belief that roosters crow only at dawn is simply not true. Roosters crow throughout the day and even the night. Furthermore, in the cold night air of the Passover season, their crows can be clearly heard for more than a mile across the hills of Judea. The city of Jerusalem in Christ’s time was only about a square mile, so it would not be impossible that a rooster on the Mount of Olives could be heard by most of Jerusalem, for example. And from what we know of the layout of the Jerusalem in Jesus’ time, the High Priest’s house was next to, or at least close to, the wall of the city. Therefore, a rooster outside the city could be heard very clearly in his courtyard.

22:37. Quoted from Isaiah 53:12.

“is being fulfilled.” “Is being” is the translation of echō (#2192 ἔχω), “to have” or “hold,” in the present tense. Literally it reads, “has fulfillment.” But in English we would say “is being fulfilled,” not “it has its fulfillment,” which could give the false impression of past tense. The present tense shows that the fulfillment is going on; the prophecy is presently being fulfilled.

22:38. “see.” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

22:43, 44. There are a number of reasons for believing that these verses are an addition to the text and are not original. They are absent from the earliest Greek manuscripts, but also from manuscripts of diverse text types. Also, some of the manuscripts that do contain them have scribal marks indicating that although the scribe copied them into the text, they were not original. Also, they are not in the same place in every ancient manuscript. In some manuscripts they occur in Matthew, after Matthew 26:39. This fact is very telling, because if a text is original and gets accidentally removed, it is always in the same place in the manuscripts that have it. However, if a verse is added, sometimes scribes add it in different places, which is what happened with these verses. Also, the verses contain vocabulary that occurs nowhere else in Luke, which, on its own does not carry much weight, but when combined with the other evidence is noteworthy. While it is still possible that the verses are original (some early manuscripts contain them while others do not, and some Church Fathers quote them while others omit them), the weight of the evidence leads us to believe they were added to the text.

One thing to keep in mind is that, although it sometimes happens that a section of scripture this long is added or deleted by accident, it is far more likely that this section, as complete as it is, was added or omitted on purpose. That being the case, and since we can construct from the manuscripts that this addition or deletion occurred sometime in the second century after Christ, why would the change occur? The most likely reason for the change would have been as an effort to combat one of the “heresies” of the early church: Docetism. The label “Docetism” came from the Greek word dokein, “to seem,” and it was the belief of the docetics that Jesus was not human, but only seemed human. The debate over whether Jesus was human or merely some sort of phantom raged hot and heavy in the second century and was firmly condemned at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. Thus, given the time period and the evidence of the text itself, it seems likely that in order to have a text that “proved” Jesus was human, these verses were added to the text of Scripture.

Even if the verses were added to the text, that does not mean the event did not happen. It is possible that Jesus really did pray so hard he sweat drops of sweat, and this was part of the oral tradition that was passed down about Jesus by the members of the
early Church. Then, especially considering the controversy about the humanity of Jesus, it was added to the text by scribes anxious to defend Jesus’ humanity. For more information, see Metzger, Textual Commentary, and Ehrman, Orthodox Corruption of Scripture.

22:47. “look!” The Greek word is idou (♯2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).


22:58. “someone else.” In verses 56 through 60, Peter is accused of being associated with Jesus three times by three different people, and three times here he denies the Lord. We know the first accuser is female, because it specifically says she was a “servant girl” in verse 56, and Peter replies with the appellation, “woman” in verse 57. The second two accusers were males, which we can tell from the Greek words heteros and allos, and the fact Peter changes his address to “man,” in verses 58 and 60.

After the servant girl accuses Peter, the Greek says “another” saw him and addressed him, using the word heteros (♯2087 ἕτερος). This word means, “another of a different kind.” In this case, the first “kind” was a female, then by using heteros in the masculine, Luke is telling us the second questioner was a male. Hence Peter changes his appellative to “man” here in verse 58. Then in verse 59 we are told still “another” addressed Peter, but this time the Greek is allos (♯243 ἄλλος), meaning “another of the same kind”—since the last questioner was male, another of the same kind would also be a male, hence Peter also uses the appellative “man” in verse 60. This record is an excellent example of how the words heteros (“another of a different kind”) and allos (“another of the same kind”) can help to understand a passage.

Reading this record in the KJV can be confusing, because heteros and allos are both simply translated “another.” It says a “maid” first talks to Peter, then “another,” then “another,” leaving the impression it is another maid—but Peter switches his replies from “woman” to “man.” To avoid this confusion and bring out the full meaning of the Greek, we translated heteros as “someone else” in verse 58.

22:65. “insulting him.” The Greek verb blasphēmeō (♯987 βλασφημέω) is transliterated (not translated) from the Greek into English as “blasphemy.” In English, “blasphemy” is only used in reference to God. However, in Greek, blasphēmeō and blasphēmia (the noun) did not have to refer to God or a god, although they could, but were common words that were used of someone speaking against another. The primary meanings were showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. In this case, the people at the trial of Jesus were insulting and defaming him. [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

22:70. “You say correctly that I am.” See Matthew 27:11 note on “It is as you say.”

Chapter 23

23:3. “It is as you say.” See Matthew 27:11 note on “It is as you say.”

23:9. “questioned him at some length.” The Greek reads, “was questioning him with many words,” but the phrase means “questioned him at some length,” just as many translations have. Herod questioned Jesus at some length, but there is no evidence of a
trial. Herod wanted to have his curiosity satisfied, and did not really care whether or not Jesus got justice in his court.

“but he did not answer him.” It is certainly understandable that Jesus did not answer Herod Antipas. First and foremost, there was no profit in it. For him to die in Jerusalem he would have to be tried before Pilate, who had the authority there. He had no desire to be taken under arrest back to Galilee. Further, he would provide no satisfaction to Herod, who had killed his friend and cousin John the Baptist. Neither was he interested in giving any satisfaction to Herod’s court, which included his murderous wife Herodias, or his dancing step-daughter Salome. He could have told them that soon he would be their judge and condemn them to a second death, but that would have only made him the butt of their jokes.


“mocked.” The Greek word translated “mocked” is *empaizo* (#1702 ἐμπαίζω), and means “mock,” “make fun of,” “ridicule.” See commentary on Matthew 27:29.

“sent him back to Pilate.” Herod Antipas was no doubt embarrassed by his failure to get Jesus to talk to him, so he mocked Jesus, treated him badly, and sent him to Pilate. He could have taken Jesus back to Galilee and tried him there, but since he was already feeling a lack of support from his subjects for killing John the Baptist, he would not take Jesus back to his area of strongest support and execute him when he could simply send him back to Pilate, who would then have to deal with him.

23:12. “friends.” Pilate and Herod Antipas had been hostile to each other, deeply disliking one another. Herod had even sent a letter about Pilate to the Roman Emperor Tiberias about his not respecting Jewish customs (see commentary on Pilate on Matthew 27:2.) Pilate’s sending Jesus to Herod, even though Pilate could have tried the case himself, was viewed by Herod as a personal and professional courtesy, both in recognizing his rank as Tetrarch of Galilee, but also in allowing him to see Jesus, something that Pilate likely knew Herod wanted.

23:13. “Pilate called the chief priests and the rulers and the people together.” This was now close to noon on Tuesday (John 19:14), and the start of Jesus’ second trial before Pilate. In Luke 23:1, the Jews brought Jesus to Pilate; he did not have to call them together (cp. Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1; John 18:28).

23:14. “Take notice!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

23:15. “see” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

23:17. This verse is an addition to some Greek texts, from whence it was translated into some versions. It was apparently added, based on Matthew 27.15 and Mark 15.6. See Metzger, Textual Commentary.

23:21. “Crucify! Crucify him!” The majority of this crowd was probably Jewish leaders, followers of the Jewish leaders, Temple police, etc. There is a lot of traditional teaching about the fickle crowd who shouted “Hosanna” as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, but shouted “crucify him” only a few days later, but the real situation was different than that. To be sure, there would have been people who, seeing Jesus humbled and beaten by the Jewish rulers and the Romans would have thought he was a deceiver who misled and tricked them, and they would have changed their mind perhaps to the point they wanted
Jesus crucified. However, the Gospel records make it plain that there were always people who doubted Jesus. This second trial before Pilate had not been advertised (Pilate had to gather the Jewish leaders back together after Herod returned Jesus to Pilate; Luke 23:13), but when the Jewish leaders were summoned before Pilate, no doubt they quickly spread the word to gather their supporters, who would have made up this crowd before Pilate. The followers of Jesus made up the crowd that followed him and were mourning (see commentary on Luke 23:27).

**23:27. “a great multitude.”** This shows that there was a huge crowd of people who did follow Jesus Christ, and did not agree with his crucifixion. It shows that the people in Jerusalem were divided into two camps: the group of people who shouted “Hosanna” and “Son of David” when Jesus entered Jerusalem some days earlier (Matt. 21:9; Mark 11:9; John 12:13), and the group of people who had shouted “Crucify him” (Matt. 27:23; Mark 15:14; Luke 23:21; John 19:15). The great multitude who was following Jesus seemed to genuinely sympathize with him, but it was to the women who were so emotional that he addressed himself.

“the People.” In this context “the People” refers to the people who were Jews (see commentary on Matt. 2:4).

“were beating themselves on the chest.” The Greek is koptō (#2875 κόπτω), and it means, to cut, strike, smite, or to beat one’s breast for grief.

**23:29. “take notice!”** The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

**23:34. “And he said.”** This verse is omitted in some early manuscripts, and therefore scholars have debated long and loud about whether it was or was not original. We believe it was original (Cp. Ehrman, Misquoting Jesus; Alford; The Greek Testament). If it was original, it would have been removed by those who were so biased against the Jews that any thought of them being forgiven by Jesus was repugnant (and had they believed it, they would have had to markedly change their attitudes towards the Jews). On the other hand, that Jesus would utter a prayer of forgiveness from the cross after some 40 hours of inhuman and merciless torture is so astounding and such an amazing act of grace that we dare say no human would have thought to add it. We believe any addition of that kind would have been immediately rejected by peers as absurd, and the saying would have never made it into the textual tradition.

**23:39. “hanged.”** The Greek is kremannumi (#2910 κρεμάννυμι), and it means, to hang, to hang up, to suspend, and it was also used of hanging or suspending someone on a cross, just as we used the word “hang” in reference to the cross, and say, “Jesus hung on the cross.”

“kept insulting.” The Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more information on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

**23:42. “remember me.”** This is the “pregnant sense” of remember, when the word remember is used idiomatically to mean more than just remember, it means to pay special attention to. For a more complete explanation, see commentary on Romans 8:29.

**23:43. “I say to you today, you will be with me...”** This verse is one of the demonstrations of Jesus’ great love for people. The malefactor on the cross had no assurance of salvation, and in fact may have been fairly certain of his own doom. Yet in a
last act he reached out to the Messiah, and Jesus promised him life in Paradise. Jesus never turns away those who come to him for salvation.

What Jesus said in Luke 23:43 to the criminal on the cross has been quoted to prove that when a person dies, he goes immediately to Heaven or Hell, but it does not have to read that way. Admittedly, the way that this verse is punctuated in almost every English Bible, it does say the criminal was going to go to Paradise that day. However, there was no punctuation in the original text (in fact, there were not even spaces between the words). All punctuation was added by translators, and they added it in a way that fit their theology and made sense to them. Thankfully, most of the time the translators have done a good job with the punctuation, and it is correct and helpful. However, in this verse almost every English Bible puts the comma in the wrong place, creating a false and misleading reading.

We believe that the comma should be after the word “today,” not in front of it. That way, the verse reads: “And he [Jesus] said to him [the criminal], ‘Truly, I say to you today, you will be with me in Paradise.’” Thus Jesus did not say the criminal would be in Paradise that day, but rather made the point that today he was saying the criminal would be in Paradise in the future.

Placing the comma after “today” makes the verse fit with both the scope of Scripture and the immediate context. From the scope of Scripture we learn that when a person dies he is dead; not alive in any form (see commentary on 1 Cor. 15:26). The comma being after “today” also fits with the immediate context. To see this, we must remember what the criminal said to Jesus in the previous verse, Luke 23:42: “Remember me when you come into your kingdom.” The criminal was speaking about the “kingdom.” The “kingdom” is not “heaven,” and it is future, it is not available now, which is why the criminal said, ‘when you come into your kingdom.’ The kingdom is the Messianic Kingdom that Jesus will set up on earth after he fights the Battle of Armageddon and conquers the earth. The Bible has a lot to say about the Messianic Kingdom: there will be peace, justice, and safety on earth. Jesus will rule from Jerusalem, everyone will worship in the Temple (Ezek. 40-44), and the lion will eat straw like the ox (Isa. 11:7). Also, everyone will be healthy and have plenty to eat. [For more information about the Millennial Kingdom see commentary on Matt. 5:6, “the meek will inherit the earth,” and John Schoenheit, The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul].

The criminal did not doubt that the Messianic Kingdom was coming, but he likely doubted whether he would be allowed into it. So in an unassuming, pleading way, he requested, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom.” In other words, the criminal said to the Lord that he would like to be in the first resurrection, the Resurrection of the Righteous, and get to enter the Kingdom and be saved. It was a wonderful act of love for Jesus to say, “you will be with me in Paradise.”

Why did Jesus use the word “today?” In many languages, including Greek, Hebrew, and English, words that we normally think of as being “time words” are often used for emphasis. This happens with the English word “now” all the time. A teacher might say, “Now class, make sure you sign your test.” The purpose of “Now” in that sentence is not time, but emphasis, and that can be the case in both Hebrew and Greek as well (cp. Luke 11:39, Acts 13:11; 15:10; 22:16; 1 Cor. 14:26; James 4:13).

In Hebrew, the word “today,” or “this day” was also used for emphasis, and it is used that way many times in the Old Testament. “I call heaven and earth to witness
against you today,...” (Deut. 4:26); “know therefore today,...” (Deut. 4:39); “And these words, which I command thee this day,...” (Deut. 6:6). “I testify against you this day, that you shall perish” (Deut. 8:19). A use that is very similar to Luke 23:43 is Deuteronomy 30:18, “I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish.” There is very little difference between, “I say to you today” (Luke 23:43) and “I declare to you today” (Deut. 30:18). Deuteronomy 9:1 says, “Hear O Israel today you are going to cross over this Jordan (P. Craigie; The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, without punctuation). It is vital that we understand that Israel did not cross Jordan “that day,” and in fact did not do so for another couple months. So “today” did not mean that very day, but was used for emphasis. Bullinger, Companion Bible, notes the punctuation of Deuteronomy 9:1 should be: “Hear O Israel today, you are...,” which is very similar to Luke 23:43. Other uses, just in Deuteronomy, that include the word “today” more for emphasis than for time, include 4:40; 5:1; 7:11; 8:1, 11, 19; 9:1, 3, 10:13; 11:2, 8, 13, 26, 27, 28, 32, 13:18; 15:5, 15; 19:9; 26:3, 16, 17, 18; 27:1, 4, 10, 28:1, 13, 14, 15; 30:2, 8, 11, 15, 16, 18, 19; 32:46.

Joshua 23:14 is another verse that uses “today” for emphasis, not time. As it is punctuated in the NASB, it reads, “Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth.” But Joshua did not die that day, which we can see by just reading the last two chapters of the Book of Joshua. Thus Joshua 23:14, Luke 23:43 and other verses we have seen should have the comma put after the word “today,” not before it.

Neither Jesus nor the criminal went to “Paradise” that day (see commentary on “Paradise” in Luke 23:43).

“Paradise.” The Greek text actually reads, “the Paradise” (tō paradeisō), that is, the well-known one that the prophets had been speaking about for centuries. Jesus was not speaking about “a” paradise,” but “the Paradise” that will be on earth when he conquers the earth and sets up his kingdom.

The English word “paradise” comes from the Greek word paradeisos (#3857 παράδεισος; pronounced pā-rā-day-sos). “Paradise” was, and will again be, a place on earth. God’s plan was that mankind would live on earth, and so He put Adam and Eve on earth in the Garden of Eden. God’s plan for mankind to live on a wonderful earth was temporarily spoiled by sin, but God will bring His plan to fulfillment. When Jesus Christ conquers the earth at the Battle of Armageddon and sets up his Messianic Kingdom, mankind will again live in “Eden,” in Paradise (Rev. 2:7).

The Hebrew word eden (#5731 עֵדֶן) means “delight, or pleasure.” When God created Adam and Eve, He loved them and so He put them in the “Garden of eden;” the “Garden of Delight” (Gen. 2:15). It is unfortunate that the translators decided to transliterate the word eden into “Eden” instead of translate it into “Delight.” The phrase “Garden of Eden” does not mean anything to most English readers except that it was a physical place on earth. In contrast, had the translators decided to say, “Garden of Delight” instead of “Garden of Eden,” we would still know it was a place on earth, but God’s love and purpose in putting people in a wonderful place would have been revealed.

When the Greeks living in Egypt translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek around 250 BC and made the Septuagint version, they translated the phrase “garden of eden” as “paradeisos” (pronounced par-a-day’-sos). Actually, paradeisos was not a Greek word, but was a loan-word from the Persian language and meant “pleasure garden.” It referred to the lush, protected pleasure gardens that oriental rulers and powerful men kept for their enjoyment. The English word “paradise” comes from the
Greek word “paradeisos.” That the Greek speaking Jews translated the “garden of eden” as “paradeisos” was a good choice, because the Garden of eden was indeed a garden of delight, a paradise. By the time of Christ, paradeisos (Paradise) was one of the terms used for the Millennial Kingdom of Christ on earth, as we can see from 2 Corinthians 12:4 and Revelation 2:7.

We do not know for sure what language Jesus spoke when he spoke to the criminal on the cross because we do not know the nationality of the criminal, but Jesus did know because he heard the criminal speak. If Jesus spoke Hebrew, what he said would be in essence, “You will be with me in Eden.” If he spoke Greek, he would have used the word paradeisos.

The criminal on the cross asked to be remembered when Jesus came into his Kingdom, which will be on earth, and Jesus responded and comforted the man by saying he would indeed be in Eden, or Paradise, which will be on earth. When Jesus said, “You will be with me in Paradise,” Jesus was promising the man he would be in the resurrection of the righteous (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15), also called the first resurrection (Rev. 20:5, 6); and “the resurrection of life” (John 5:29), and people in that resurrection then get to be part of the Messianic Kingdom on earth. [For more information on the resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15].

Neither Jesus nor the criminal went to “Paradise” that day. When Jesus Christ died, Scripture universally testifies that he was in the grave and not in Paradise. In fact, Paradise (the Messianic Kingdom on earth) has still not come—we are still awaiting the resurrection of the dead and the Messianic Kingdom on earth. But the fact that Jesus said, “You will be with me in Paradise” is a beautiful expression of Christ’s heart for mankind. He could have looked at the criminal and said, “Okay, I will remember you.” But by saying “You will be with me in Paradise,” Jesus gave the man strength and hope to be able to endure his last few hours of tremendous suffering on the cross. The man was in excruciating pain, but he had a hope that burned with a fire that must have kept his heart warm until his dying breath. [For more information on the Kingdom of Christ being on earth, see commentary on Matthew 5:5; the meek will inherit the earth].

It is sometimes taught that “Paradise” is an intermediary state that existed for righteous people before they could go to heaven. There is no direct scriptural support for such a place, but it is assumed to exist due to some false assumptions.

The first false assumption is that the soul is immortal, and therefore has to live somewhere. However, there is no Scriptural support for the soul being immortal. In fact, just the opposite. The soul can and does die (cp. Matt. 10:28). The reason that people need to be “raised from the dead” is because the “person” is dead, not just the body. If the person’s soul was alive somehow, it could be judged without the body being present, but Scripture never teaches that. Furthermore, when it speaks of resurrection, it speaks of the “person” being raised. There is no verse about a living soul rejoining a dead body. [For more information on this topic, see Appendix 4: The Dead are Dead].

Having made the false assumption that the dead person is actually alive and has to live somewhere, theologians then drew another false conclusion based on the first one. First, they correctly realized that if the person died before the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the person’s soul could not go to “heaven.” If a dead person could go to heaven before Jesus died for his sin, then anyone could go to heaven before Jesus, and thus Jesus would not really have needed to come at all. So theologians invented a place
where the souls of good people could go while they waited for the savior to save them and open the way to heaven. This “place” does not exist in the Bible, so it needed a name, and therefore some theologians call it “Paradise.”

The simple, biblical truth is that when a person dies, he is dead until God raises him from the dead, and the three major times that happens in Scripture are the Rapture of the Church, the First Resurrection (or Resurrection of the Righteous), and the Second Resurrection (or Resurrection of the Unrighteous). Jesus and the malefactor both died on the cross that day. God raised Jesus from the dead three days later and Jesus is now in heaven ruling as Lord and Christ. The malefactor is still in the grave, dead and completely unaware of the passage of time. But Jesus will be good for his promise, and on Resurrection Day that man will hear the shout of the Son of Man and come out of the tomb (John 5:25-29; Ezek. 37:12-14).

23:44. “sixth hour…ninth hour.” This is about our noon to 3 PM. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].

23:46. Quoted from Psalm 31:5.

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” Jesus, speaking to his Father, God, committed the ultimate act of trust by giving up his life. The word “spirit” is translated from the Greek word pneuma (#4151 πνεῦμα), which has many meanings, and refers to things that are invisible and immaterial, yet often exert a force or influence that can be seen. Pneuma is also translated “spirit,” and we need to be aware that “spirit” itself has many meanings, including God (John 4:24); Jesus (2 Cor. 3:17; Rev. 2:7); angels (Heb. 1:14); demons (Matt. 10:1), “attitude” (Matt. 5:3; 26:41; Mark 14:38; Acts 18:25), and the natural life of the body, which is immaterial and thus in the realm of “spirit” (Luke 8:55; Acts 7:59; James 2:26). The natural life of the body (sometimes referred to as “soul”) is by nature “spirit,” and therefore is sometimes referred to as “spirit.” Examples include Luke 23:46, Matthew 27:50, Luke 8:55; and James 2:26. Here in Luke 23:46, Jesus committed his “life” to his Father, God, trusting that God would give him life again by raising him from the dead. [For more on the uses of pneuma (spirit) in the Bible, see, Graeser, Lynn, Schoenhut, The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be like Christ, Appendix B, “Usages of ‘spirit’ in the New Testament”. For more on spirit, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

23:50. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“there was a good and righteous man named Joseph.” Joseph is mentioned in all four Gospels. For the relationship between Joseph and Nicodemus, see commentary on John 19:39.

The death and resurrection of Christ is the pivotal point in the history of mankind. Each of the Four Gospels describes the event, but describes different aspects of it. It takes some effort to make all the pieces on the subject fit together. To be sure, the central message is crystal clear and stands on its own in every Gospel—God raised Jesus from the dead and the tomb is empty. However, when just read side by side, the Gospels have apparent contradictions. But the fact that we must piece the records together to get the actual history of the account is the same thing we have to do in many other places in the Bible in order to understand the more intricate information God has for us in His Word.
Just because the Four Gospels do not read the same way about an event does not mean they contradict each other. In order for each Gospel to portray its own unique picture of the Messiah, it has to have information that the other Gospels do not have, or omit information that they do have [For the four unique Gospel portraits of Jesus Christ, see the commentary on Mark 1:1].

We must keep in mind that even when a record in one Gospel seems to flow smoothly from one event to another, words such as “and,” “now,” or “but,” can represent a break in time and do not necessarily occur immediately after the phrase before it. For example, there are a large number of verses that start with “and,” which read as if they followed immediately after the previous verse, when actually we can see from the scope of Scripture that there was both time and other events that occurred between the verses.

The only way to properly construct the chronology of the Four Gospels is to be willing to split the seeming flow of events in a Gospel when there is good evidence from the other Gospels that there are intervening events. By reading each Gospel quickly, and simply noticing what is included or excluded, the unique emphasis of each Gospel is more easily seen. In contrast, by reading the record of Jesus’ life event by event in all four Gospels, we get the composite historical account of what happened.

In fitting the records together we can see that sometimes large periods of time occur right in the middle of a verse, and only by splitting a verse into two parts can we reconstruct a proper chronology. It would have been helpful if the men who invented the verse divisions had started a new verse each time there was a break in the chronology of Christ’s life. However, because the verse divisions are man-made (in fact, the modern verse divisions we use today were not put into the New Testament until the mid-1500’s), they are not always put in the best places. They are good for reference, but unfortunately sometimes they conceal the true chronology of the biblical text rather than help us understand it.

The study below lists the verses in chronological order. Commentary on the individual verses can be looked up under that specific verse reference. As we do our study, it is helpful to overview the chronology:

- **Wednesday, Nisan 14.** Jesus was crucified, died, and buried.
- **Thursday, Nisan 15.** The first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was a Special Sabbath. The people rest. The religious leaders ask Pilate for a guard to watch the tomb for three days, which would be Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.
- **Friday, Nisan 16.** The women get spices to properly bury Jesus but they do not go to the tomb because they knew a guard had been placed there for three days.
- **Saturday, Nisan 17.** The weekly Sabbath. The people rest. Jesus gets up from the tomb just before sunset, “three days and three nights” after he was placed in the tomb, fulfilling his prophecy of Matthew 12:40 that he would be “in the heart of the earth” for three days and three nights.
- **Sunday, Nisan 18.** Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene, then the other women, then the men on the road to Emmaus, then Peter, then the disciples behind locked doors.
- **Sunday, Nisan 25.** Jesus appears to the disciples and Thomas behind locked doors.

**Wednesday, 14th of Nisan: close to sunset**
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<td>Date: Wednesday, 14th of Nisan: Summary statement</td>
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<td>John 19:39, 40</td>
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<td>Date: Thursday, 15th of Nisan (the Special Sabbath): morning</td>
<td>Matthew 27:62-66</td>
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<td>Date: Friday, 16th of Nisan:</td>
<td>Mark 16:1</td>
<td>Luke 23:56a</td>
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<td>Luke 23:56b.</td>
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<td>Date: Saturday, 17th of Nisan: evening. The Resurrection. The event itself is not described in Scripture.</td>
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<td>Matthew 28:1</td>
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<td>Date: Sunday, 18th of Nisan: very early Sunday morning</td>
<td>Matthew 28:2-4</td>
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<td>Date: Sunday, 18th of Nisan: very early Sunday morning while it was still quite dark</td>
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<td>John 20:1-10</td>
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<td>Date: Sunday, 18th of Nisan: around sunrise</td>
<td>[(Mark 16:9 )]</td>
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<td>John 20:11-17</td>
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<td>Date: Sunday, 18th of Nisan: just after sunrise</td>
<td>Mark 16:2-4</td>
<td>Luke 24:1, 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date: Sunday, 18th of Nisan: just after sunrise</td>
<td>Matthew 28:5-7, 8</td>
<td>Mark 16:5, 6, 8</td>
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**Sunday, 18th of Nisan: early to mid-morning (summary statement)**

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**Sunday, 18th of Nisan: early to mid-morning**

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<th>Luke 24:12</th>
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**Sunday, 18th of Nisan:***

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**Sunday 18th of Nisan: evening, before sunset**

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**Sunday, 18th of Nisan (or soon afterward):***

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**Sunday, 25th of Nisan:***

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**Sunday, 25th of Nisan (or soon afterward):***

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**Between Tuesday, 27th of Nisan, and the Ascension:**

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**The Ascension:**

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**The Day of Ascension to the Day of Pentecost:**

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**Summary Statement:**

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**[After the Day of Pentecost:]**

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<th>[Mark 16:20]</th>
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Luke 298
[For information on the events of the last week of Jesus’ life, see commentary on John 18:13. For a more detailed explanation of the Wednesday crucifixion and Jesus’ three days and three nights in the grave, see commentary on Matthew 12:40].

23:52. “This man went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus.” Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus. See commentary on Matthew 27:58.

23:54. “and the Sabbath was beginning.” The Greek word translated “was beginning,” is epiphōskō (#2020 ἐπιφώσκω), and it literally means, to grow light. Thus it was used of “dawn,” or also idiomatically as “beginning.” Thus literally, “the Sabbath was dawning.”

This phraseology can be confusing to us Westerners because the Jewish Sabbath began at sunset, not dawn. The Jews, however, used the phrase idiomatically for the beginning of something. We could translate the verse as, “the Sabbath was dawning,” and understand it idiomatically, just as they did, but a less confusing way to translate the phrase is “the Sabbath was beginning.” We must remember that they did not have the kind of accurate clocks we do today, so they had to pay attention to the sun in the sky to know exactly when the Sabbath started. However, if there were clouds on the horizon, or if they were in a valley or alleyway, the exact time the sun went down and the Sabbath began might not be exactly clear. They could only tell when the time for the Sabbath was drawing close. [For more information on *epiphōskō* see commentary on Matt. 28:1.]

We must also keep in mind that according to Jewish reckoning of time, the sunset started the new day. So here in Luke 23:54, Wednesday the 14th of Nisan, the day Jesus Christ was crucified, was ending, and Thursday, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, was starting. Often the Passover sacrifice so dominated the events that the whole time period was just referred to as “Passover.” The Sunset after the Passover lamb was sacrificed started the 15th of Nisan and the new day, which was always a Sabbath, no matter on which day of the week it occurred (Lev. 15:7). Since the Law of Moses decreed that the 15th of Nisan was a special Sabbath, Luke 23:54 says the “Sabbath” was beginning. We need to be clear on the fact that the “Sabbath” in Luke 23:54 is not the weekly Sabbath, Saturday, but Thursday, the 15th of Nisan. This point is made again in John 19:31, which tells us specifically that this Sabbath was a “high day,” meaning a special Sabbath, not the regular weekly Sabbath. Most Christians do not realize that when the Bible says Jesus was crucified the day before the “Sabbath,” it does not mean the regular weekly Sabbath, but the Sabbath that starts right after the Passover sacrifice and starts the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the 15th of Nisan.

Because it was so close to the Sabbath and the start of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the women did not have time to buy and prepare the spices, so they went home (Luke 23:56). Friday, the 16th of Nisan, they bought and prepared the spices, but likely did not go to the grave because they knew it was guarded for three days. Saturday, the weekly Sabbath, they rested (Luke 23:56). Then, early Sunday morning, they went to the tomb with the spices. Sunday was the fourth day, and they had good reason to believe the guards would be gone by then.

23:55. “And the women who had come with him out of Galilee, followed after.” The women saw that Joseph had not prepared Jesus’ body, so they thought they had to prepare him themselves. See commentary on Matthew 27:58 and commentary on Matthew 27:59.

23:56. “prepared spices and ointments.” The women did this on Friday, the 16th of Nisan. (See commentary on Matt. 27:58 and see commentary on Mark 16:1).
“rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.” The women rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment, and although they would have rested on both the Special Sabbath and the regular weekly Sabbath, because of the chronology we can tell that this verse in Luke refers to the regular weekly Sabbath. Mark 16:1 makes it clear that the women bought the spices after the Sabbath, but in this verse they had already bought the spices when they rested on the Sabbath, so this Sabbath is the regular weekly Sabbath, Saturday the 17th of Nisan (see commentary on Mark 16:1).

The commandment in the Law of Moses about resting on the weekly Sabbath is Exodus 20:8-10, and about resting on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is Leviticus 23:4-8. According to the Law of Moses, walking was not considered work so the women could have walked to the tomb on the Sabbath without breaking the Sabbath. However, by the time of Jesus, Jewish traditional law had imposed limits on how far a person could walk on the Sabbath without it being work. The limit was called “a Sabbath day’s journey” and was 2000 cubits, or just over one half mile (see commentary on Acts 1:12). So the women still could have “rested” on the Sabbath but still walked to the tomb (see commentary on Matt. 28:1).

Jesus’ resurrection, which would have occurred between 23:56 and 24:1, is not specifically recorded.

Chapter 24

24:1. “at early dawn.” Literally, at “deep dawn.” We know from Mark 16:2 that this was when the sun had just come up (see commentary on Mark 16:2).

24:4. “perplexed.” The Greek is diaporeō (#1280 διαπορέω), to be perplexed, greatly perplexed, bewildered, totally at a loss. (See commentary on Mark 16:5).

“Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“two men stood by them.” The record of the women seeing two angels occurs only in Luke. Although the Bible calls these angels, “men,” that is only so we know the form they appeared in. When the women entered the tomb and saw one “young man” sitting there, they did not know he was an angel. Then, however, “two men” suddenly appear out of nowhere in the tomb with the women, and these angels were wearing gleaming clothing (the only other use of this word “gleaming” in the NT refers to the gleam and flash of lightning). There was now no doubt in the minds of the women that they were in the presence of angels, so they became frightened and bowed down in reverence.

“gleaming clothing.” The Greek is astraptō (#797 ἀστράπτω), and it means “to light up,” thus, to gleam or to flash. In Luke 17:24 it is used of the flash of lightning. The young man (the angel) the women first met when going into the tomb was in a white robe, but that would not have been uncommon. However, when these two angels suddenly appeared, their clothing gleamed like lightning. The women were frightened by these angels that appeared.

24:5. “the men.” The Greek reads “they” spoke to the women, but the REV and many other English versions have “the men” because the text says “men” in 24:4, and it avoids the ambiguity in “they said to them,” which is the reading of the Greek. From comparing the verses that have this record (Matt. 28:5; Mark 16:6) it seems clear that only one angel
did the actual speaking, the others were in agreement with what he said, and thus the “they” in the verse.

The record of these two angels appears only in the Gospel of Luke, but it is vital because according to the Law of Moses there had to be two witnesses for something to be considered true, but now we can see that there were three angels who witnessed to the fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead (Matt. 28:6; Mark 16:6; and Luke 24:6).

Once the angel reminds the women that Jesus said he would rise from the dead, they remember that he said that (Luke 24:8).

24:6. “has been raised.” The Greek is egeirō (#1453 ἐγείρω), and it is in the passive voice, so it is not “he is risen,” or “he has risen,” but rather “he was raised,” or “he has been raised.”

24:8. “And they remembered his words.” Luke, written from the perspective of the Lord as a human being, has more about women than any of the other three Gospels [For the reason for Four Gospels, see commentary on Mark 1:1]. Luke is the only Gospel that specifically credits the women with remembering the words of Jesus. Matthew says the women had “great joy” (Matt. 28:8).

24:9. “and they told all these things to the eleven, and to all the rest.” The “they” in this verse is all the women who came to the tomb with spices after the sun had risen (Luke 24:1, Mark 16:2). It does not include Mary Magdalene, who had gone on her own very early to the tomb (see commentary on John 20:1). Mary had seen the open tomb before these women, met the Lord before these women did (cp. Matt. 28:9), and reported back to the disciples separately, before these women did (John 20:18).

Luke is the only Gospel that records the women actually returning and telling “the Eleven” (Judas had already hanged himself) and the disciples that Jesus was raised from the dead. Matthew 28:8 says the women left the tomb to go tell the disciples, but never says they actually told them. Mark 16:7 implies they were going to tell the disciples as the angels told them to, but Mark, like Matthew, never specifically says the women told the disciples. Luke, however, specifically says the women told the disciples. It is possible that because a woman’s testimony was not allowable in a court of law in the ancient Jewish culture, that Matthew and Mark omit this detail, but Luke, written from a human point of view, includes it and gives the women credit for their faithfulness to follow through with what the angels and Jesus said to do.

24:10. “told these things to the apostles.” This verse is a summary verse. It mentions all the women who reported to the apostles that Jesus was raised from the dead. The subject of the verse is what the various women said to the apostles, and this is the key to understanding the verse. All of these women had seen Jesus alive (Matt. 28:9; John 20:16), and testified to that fact, but the disciples did not believe any of them. These verses are not saying that Mary Magdalene was physically with the women when they carried the spices to the tomb. It is saying that all the women had the same testimony about Jesus being alive. Mary Magdalene’s testimony agreed with the testimony of the women who went to prepare the body of Jesus.

24:12. “Peter arose and ran to the tomb.” Luke 24:12 is omitted in some early manuscripts but contained in others, so there is a chance it is not original. However, overall the evidence supports its being original. It seems much more likely that a scribe wanting to protect Peter’s reputation would omit the verse than that a scribe would simply invent this story about Peter. Veneration of Peter started very early, and so there
would have been a lot of reason to omit things that tended to lessen his status in the eyes of the Church. That Peter would question his first trip to the tomb and make a second trip, but still not believe in the resurrection was a very human thing to do, especially given Peter’s strong-willed nature. However, for people who were venerating Peter as the leader of the apostles, one can see how there would have been a temptation to omit the verse. The NASB puts the verse in brackets to indicate that it is doubtful.

Sometime after the women reported that they had seen the Lord, but before Cleopas and the other disciple returned from seeing the Lord on their trip to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), the Lord appeared to Peter. There is no verse in the Gospels that describes the meeting of the Lord and Peter, but it is clear that there had to be a time on Sunday when Peter was alone, apart from the other disciples. By the time Cleopas and his friend, who saw the Lord on the road to Emmaus, join the apostles and the others, “Simon,” a common name for Peter, had already seen the Lord (Luke 24:34). Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 15:5 says that the Lord appeared to Peter and then to the apostles. If this verse is original, it is Peter’s second trip to see the empty tomb and would have been an excellent time for Jesus to appear to Peter alone.

“stooping down.” The Greek word is parakuptō (#3879 παρακύπτω), and it means to stoop towards something in order to look at it (see commentary on John 20:5).

24:13. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“two of them were going.” Jesus Christ appeared to two disciples, Cleopas and an unnamed disciple, as they walked to Emmaus, which is about 7 miles (11 km) from Jerusalem (the location of Emmaus is unknown, but Luke 24:13 lets us know it was about a seven miles from Jerusalem). When Jesus made his identity known to them, they hurried back to Jerusalem.

“about seven miles.” The Greek text reads “60 stadia.” The identification of Emmaus is unknown, and has been made more uncertain because a few ancient texts read, “160 stadia,” but that seems very unlikely, especially since the disciples, after realizing they had met Jesus, went back to Jerusalem and seemed to have gotten there fairly soon (even if they walked, they would have walked the sixty stadia in about two hours). A “stadion” was a measurement used by the Greeks and then the Romans, and was roughly equal to 600 feet (in ancient times, the stadion varied slightly from city to city). Thus sixty stadia was some 6.8 miles (about 11 KM).

24:21. “it is now the third day since these things came to pass.” Jesus died on the day of the week we call Wednesday (the Jews would simply say the fourth day of the week). These disciples were speaking to Jesus in the afternoon of the “first day of the week” (Luke 24:1), which we call Sunday. At first glance, and according to many translations, if these two disciples said that it was now the third day since “these things have happened,” that would make Jesus crucified on Friday, or the earliest Thursday. But Jesus was crucified Wednesday, was buried just as Wednesday became Thursday (the Jews started their day at sunset, not midnight), and Jesus was in the grave “three days and three nights” (Matt. 12:40). Wednesday sunset to Thursday sunset is one day and one night, Thursday to Friday is two, and Friday to Saturday is three, and Jesus got up as night fell on Saturday. When Sunday morning came, all the angels said was, “He is not here, he is risen,” but they did not say how long he had been up. Mary Magdalene came to the tomb while it was still dark and he was already up.
Given that information, how do we understand what these men were saying? The answer is provided in the fact that they were speaking Aramaic, not Greek. In 1851 James Murdock did a translation of the New Testament from the available Aramaic text which reads, “But we expected that he was to deliver Israel. And lo, three days [have passed], since all these things occurred.” Then in 2006 Janet Magiera did a translation from the Aramaic and arrived at basically the same translation: “But we had hoped that he was going to deliver Israel and behold, three days [have passed] since all these [things] happened.”

If Jesus was not buried until the end of Wednesday, then three days passed (Thursday, Friday and Saturday.) and the disciples spoke to Jesus on Sunday, which is exactly what the Scripture records. The mention of the three days is important, because it is a logical question to ask, “Why didn’t the disciples simply say that these things happened five days ago?” The mention of three days is important because Rabbinic literature from after the time of the New Testament shows that the rabbis taught that the soul hung around the body for three days looking for an opportunity to re-enter it, but when decomposition set in on the fourth day, the soul left (cp. Leviticus Rabba (Rabbinical commentary) 18.1 (Leviticus 15:1)). Although that particular rabbinical commentary post-dates the New Testament, it is common knowledge that Jewish traditions were very stable and lasted for centuries. The fact that we have Rabbinic literature about the soul staying around the body for three days before leaving, taken together with evidence from the New Testament such as this verse in Luke and the record of Lazarus in John 11, is excellent evidence that the belief existed at the time of Christ.

The men on the road to Emmaus had already heard from the women that Jesus was alive (24:23), but left Jerusalem, believing he was dead in spite of their report. But it seems likely that if Jesus had not been dead for a full three days and nights, these disciples might have believed there was a chance that Jesus was alive after all, and have stayed in Jerusalem. In telling this stranger on the road that three days had passed since Jesus’ death, they were in part explaining why, even though they had hoped that Jesus was the Messiah, they were giving up on that vision and going home.

Even the Greek text can be understood to read in such a way as three days had passed since “all these things happened.” For example, The Holy Bible: The New Berkeley Version in Modern English, Revised edition (Gerritt Verkuyl, Zondervan Publishers, 1969), reads: “...Moreover, three days have already passed since all those things occurred.” The point is that, by Sunday, three whole days (Thursday, Friday, and Saturday) had passed since Jesus had been buried at nightfall Wednesday night.

24:31. “and they recognized him.” Jesus Christ appeared to two disciples, Cleopas (v. 18) and an unnamed disciple, as they walked to Emmaus, which is about 7 miles (11 km) from Jerusalem. When he made his identity known to them, they hurried back to Jerusalem, only to find the disciples saying that the Lord had also appeared to Simon (Luke 24:34).

24:34. “has appeared to Simon.” Jesus Christ first appeared to Mary Magdalene close to where he was buried (John 20:16). Then he appeared to the rest of the women who had come to wrap his body with spices (Matt. 28:9, 10). Then later that day, but before he appeared to the two men on the road to Emmaus (who knew the tomb was empty; Luke 24:24), Jesus appeared to Peter. None of the Four Gospels record this meeting, but the disciples spoke of it (Luke 24:34), and 1 Corinthians 15:5 mentions it also.
There is an apparent contradiction between Mark 16:13 and Luke 24:34. Mark says that when the Cleopas and his friend came to Jerusalem and told the apostles and disciples, they did not believe. Luke, however, says that when they came and reported, the disciples already believed because the Lord had appeared to Simon (Peter). Some have tried to solve this by saying that the “Simon” is the name of the other disciple that was going to Emmaus, but the proper reading of the Greek text makes that impossible. The better solution is that the last twelve verses of Mark are not original, and the “apparent contradiction” is caused by adding the verses in Mark to the text (see REV commentary on Mark 16:9).

24:35. “related.” The Greek is exēgeomai (ἐξηγέομαι) and means in secular Greek, to lead out, be the leader, or go before. In the Bible it is used as to lead out or unfold a narrative, to relate or set forth in detail. Thus it means unfold, relate or set forth in detail, expound, describe, recount.

24:45. “Then he opened up their minds.” Jesus taught about his suffering, death, and resurrection many times. He taught about it right after the disciples recognized him as the Christ (Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31, 32; Luke 9:22). Then he taught about it again immediately after the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:9-12; Mark 9:9-13); then again when he was in Galilee shortly after the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:22, 23; Mark 9:31, 32; Luke 9:43-45), then again at the Feast of Tabernacles (John 8:21, 28); then again while he was going up to Jerusalem for the Passover, at which time he would be killed (Matt. 20:17-19; Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31-34); and then again when he was in Jerusalem for the Passover (Matt. 26:2; cp. John 12:7). In spite of all his teaching, the disciples never really understood what Jesus meant until after his resurrection when he opened up their minds to understand the Scriptures. [For more information on the disciples understanding Christ’s suffering and death, see commentary on Luke 18:34].

24:46. “out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among those who are dead.”

24:49. “take notice!” The Greek word is idou (ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“are clothed with power from on high.” Jesus is here referring to the gift of holy spirit that will be poured out on the Day of Pentecost, which will begin the Christian Church. The Apostles already had the gift of holy spirit that was available in the Old Testament, and had been on people such as Moses, Miriam, David, and Deborah (Judges 4). The holy spirit that was poured out on the Day of Pentecost did not exist before that day (John 7:39), but it was “promised” (Joel 2:28; John 16:13; Eph. 1:13). Although the Christian Church was a Sacred Secret, it was known that the holy spirit would be poured out in the Millennial Kingdom, and by this time after his resurrection Jesus knew it would be given before then (The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be Like Christ).

24:52. “having paid homage to him.” See commentary on Matthew 2:2. It should be noted that this phrase is omitted in many excellent Greek texts; however, it is possible that it was accidentally dropped from those rather than being added by a later scribe. Textual critics are divided over the issue. Whether the phrase is original or not, it seems likely that it would have been cultural for the disciples to pay some kind of homage to Jesus in these end moments, so we felt the phrase was best left in this verse.
Chapter 1

1:1. “In the beginning.” There are elements of John 1:1 and other phrases in the introduction of John that not only refer back in time to God’s work in the original creation, but also foreshadow the work of Christ in the new administration and the new creation. Noted Bible commentator F.F. Bruce argues for this interpretation:

It is not by accident that the Gospel begins with the same phrase as the book of Genesis. In Genesis 1:1, ‘In the beginning’ introduces the story of the old creation; here it introduces the story of the new creation. In both works of creation the agent is the Word of God. (F.F. Bruce, The Gospel of John, pp. 28 and 29).

The Racovian Catechism, one of the great doctrinal works of the Unitarian movement of the 14th and 15th centuries, states that the word “beginning” in John 1:1 refers to the beginning of the new dispensation and thus is similar to Mark 1:1, which starts, “The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ.”

In the cited passage (John 1:1) wherein the Word is said to have been in the beginning, there is no reference to an antecedent eternity, without commencement; because mention is made here of a beginning, which is opposed to that eternity. But the word beginning, used absolutely, is to be understood of the subject matter under consideration. Thus, Daniel 8:1, “In the third year of the reign of king Belshazzar a vision appeared to me, even unto me Daniel, after that which appeared unto me AT THE FIRST.” John 15:27, “And ye also shall bear witness because ye have been with me FROM the beginning.” John 16:4, “These things I said not unto you AT the beginning because I was with you.” And Acts 11:15, “And as I began to speak the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us AT the beginning.” As then the matter of which John is treating is the Gospel, or the things transacted under the Gospel, nothing else ought to be understood here beside the beginning of the Gospel; a matter clearly known to the Christians whom he addressed, namely, the advent and preaching of John the Baptist, according to the testimony of all the evangelists [i.e., Matthew, Mark, Luke and John], each of whom begins his history with the coming and preaching of the Baptist. Mark indeed (Chapter 1:1) expressly states that this was the beginning of the Gospel. In like manner, John himself employs the word beginning, placed thus absolutely, in the introduction to his First Epistle, at which beginning he uses the same term (logos) Word, as if he meant to be his own interpreter [“That which is from the beginning…concerning the Word (logos) of life.” 1 John 1:1]. (The Racovian Catechism; Reprinted by Spirit & Truth Fellowship, pp. 63 and 64).

While we do not agree with the Catechism that the only meaning of beginning in John 1:1 is the beginning of the new creation, we certainly see how the word beginning is
a double entendre. In the context of the new creation, then, “the Word” is the plan or purpose according to which God is restoring His creation.

**the word.** “Word” is translated from the Greek word logos (#3056 λόγος). It is important that Christians have a basic understanding of logos, which is translated as “Word” in most versions of John 1:1. Most Trinitarians believe that logos refers directly to Jesus Christ, so in most Bibles logos is capitalized as “Word” (some versions even put “Jesus Christ” instead of “Word” in John 1:1). However, a study of the Greek word logos shows that it occurs more than 300 times in the New Testament, and in both the NIV and the KJV it is capitalized only 7 times (and even those versions disagree on exactly when to capitalize it). When a word that occurs more than 300 times is capitalized fewer than 10 times, it is obvious that when to capitalize and when not to capitalize is a translators’ decision based on their particular understanding of Scripture. Below are five points to consider.

**I. In both Greek literature and Scripture, logos has a very wide range of meanings that fall into two basic categories: one is the mind and products of the mind like “reason,” (the word “logic” is ultimately from the root logos), and the other is the expression of that reason in language or life: thus, “word,” “saying,” “command” etc. The Bible itself demonstrates the wide range of meaning of logos. Some of the ways it is translated in English versions of the Bible are: account, appearance, book, command, conversation, eloquence, flattery, grievance, heard, instruction, matter, message, ministry, news, proposal, question, reason, reasonable, reply, report, rule, rumor, said, say, saying, sentence, speaker, speaking, speech, stories, story, talk, teaching, testimony, thing, things, this, truths, what, why, word and words. Although the word logos appears over 300 times in the Greek text, it is only translated “word” about 175 times in the King James Version, and 125 times in the NIV 84.

Any good Greek lexicon will also show the wide range of meaning of logos. The definitions below are from the BDAG Greek-English lexicon (Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*; University of Chicago Press, 1979). The words in italics are translated from logos:

- Speaking; words you say (Rom. 15:18 NIV84, “what I have said”).
- A question (Matt. 21:24 NIV84, “I will also ask you one question”).
- Preaching (1 Tim. 5:17 NIV84, “especially those whose work is preaching”).
- Command (Gal. 5:14 NIV84, “the entire law is summed up in a single command”).
- Proverb; saying (John 4:37 NIV84, “thus the saying, ‘One sows, and another reaps’”).
- Message; instruction; proclamation (Luke 4:32 NIV84, “his message had authority”).
- Assertion; declaration; teaching (John 6:60 NIV84, “this is a hard teaching”).
- The subject under discussion; matter (Acts 8:21 NIV84, “you have no part or share in this ministry.” Acts 15:6 NASB, “And the apostles... came together to look into this matter”).
- Revelation from God (Matt. 15:6 NIV84, “you nullify the Word of God”).
God’s revelation spoken by His servants (Heb. 13:7 NIV84, “leaders who spoke the Word of God”).

- A reckoning, an account (Matt. 12:36 NIV84, “men will have to give account” on the Day of Judgment).
- An account or “matter” in a financial sense (Matt. 18:23 NIV84, “A king who wanted to settle “accounts” with his servants”).
- A reason; motive (Acts 10:29 NASB), “I ask for what reason you have sent for me”).

The above list is not exhaustive, but it does show that logos has a very wide range of meanings. With all the ways logos can be translated, how can we decide which meaning of logos to choose for any one verse? How can it be determined what logos refers to in John 1:1? Any occurrence of logos has to be carefully studied in its context in order to get the proper meaning. We assert that the logos in John 1:1 cannot be Jesus. Please notice that “Jesus Christ” is not a lexical definition of logos. This verse does not say, “In the beginning was Jesus.” “The Word” is not synonymous with Jesus, or even “the Messiah.” The word logos in John 1:1 refers to God’s creative self-expression—His reason, purposes and plans, especially as they are brought into action. It refers to God’s self-expression, or communication, of Himself. This has come to pass through His creation (cp. Rom. 1:19 and 20), the heavens being one example the Word points out to us (cp. Ps. 19). It has also come through the spoken word of the prophets and through Scripture, the written Word. Most notably and finally, it has come into being through His Son (Heb. 1:1 and 2). The renowned Trinitarian scholar, John Lightfoot, writes:

The word logos then, denoting both “reason” and “speech,” was a philosophical term adopted by Alexandrian Judaism before St. Paul wrote, to express the manifestation of the Unseen God in the creation and government of the World. It included all modes by which God makes Himself known to man. As His reason, it denoted His purpose or design; as His speech, it implied His revelation. Christian teachers, when they adopted this term, exalted and fixed its meaning by attaching to it two precise and definite ideas: (1) “The Word is a Divine Person,” (2) “The Word became incarnate in Jesus Christ.” It is obvious that these two propositions must have altered materially the significance of all the subordinate terms connected with the idea of the logos. (J. B. Lightfoot, St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon, pp. 143 and 144. Bold emphasis ours, italics his).

It is important to note that it was “Christian teachers” who attached the idea of a “divine person” to the word logos. It is certainly true that when the word logos came to be understood as being Jesus Christ, the understanding of John 1:1 was altered substantially. Lightfoot correctly understands that the early meaning of logos concerned reason and speech, not “Jesus Christ.” Norton develops the concept of logos as “reason” and writes:

There is no word in English answering to the Greek word logos, as used here [in John 1:1]. It was employed to denote a mode of conception concerning the Deity, familiar at the time when St. John wrote and intimately blended with the philosophy of his age, but long since obsolete, and so foreign from our habits of thinking that it is not easy for us to conform our minds to its apprehension. The Greek word logos, in one of its primary senses, answered nearly to our word
Reason. The *logos* of God was regarded, not in its strictest sense, as merely the Reason of God; but, under certain aspects, as the Wisdom, the Mind, the Intellect of God (Andrew Norton, *A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians*, p. 229).

Norton postulates that perhaps “the Disposing Power of God” would be a good translation for *logos* (p. 235). Buzzard sets forth “plan,” “purpose” or “promise” as three acceptable translations. Broughton and Southgate say “thoughts, plan or purpose of God, particularly in action.” Many scholars identify *logos* with God’s wisdom and reason.

The *logos* is the expression of God, and is His communication of Himself, just as a “word” is an outward expression of a person’s thoughts. This outward expression of God has now occurred through His Son, and thus it is perfectly understandable why Jesus is called the “Word.” Jesus is an outward expression of God’s reason, wisdom, purpose and plan. For the same reason, we call the Bible the “Word” of God, and revelation “a ‘word’ from God.”

If we understand that the *logos* is God’s expression—His plan, purposes, reason and wisdom—it is clear that those things were indeed with Him “in the beginning.” Scripture says that God’s wisdom was “from the beginning” (Prov. 8:23). It was very common in Hebrew writing to personify a concept such as wisdom. The figure of speech “personification” occurs when something is given human characteristics to emphasize something. Psalm 35:10 portrays bones talking. Psalm 68:31 portrays Ethiopia as a woman with her hands outstretched to God. Isaiah 3:26 says the gates of Zion will lament and mourn. Isaiah 14:8 says the cypress trees will rejoice. 1 Corinthians 12:15 portrays the foot talking. The Bible has many examples of personification, and wisdom is personified in Proverbs. Nevertheless, no ancient Jew reading Proverbs would think that God’s wisdom was a separate person, even though it is portrayed as one in verses like Proverbs 8:29 and 30: “…when He marked out the foundations of the earth, I [wisdom] was the craftsman at His side.” Similarly, the logos was with God in the beginning, because God’s plan, purpose, and wisdom were with Him, but we should not think of these as a separate person.

2. Most Jewish readers of the Gospel of John would have been familiar with the concept of God’s “word” being with God as He worked to bring His creation into existence. There is an obvious working of God’s power in Genesis 1 as He brings His plan into concretion by speaking things into being. The Targums are well known for describing the wisdom and action of God as His “word.” This is especially important to note because the Targums are the Aramaic translations and paraphrases of the Old Testament, and Aramaic was the spoken language of many Jews at the time of Christ. Remembering that a Targum is usually a paraphrase of what the Hebrew text says, note how the following examples attribute action to the word (from Dr. John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*, Vol. 3, p. 238).

- And the word of the Lord was Joseph’s helper (Gen. 39:2).
- And Moses brought the people to meet the word of the Lord (Exod. 19:17).
- And the word of the Lord accepted the face of Job (Job 42:9).
- And the word of the Lord shall laugh them to scorn (Ps. 2:4).
- They believed in the name of His word (Ps. 106:12).

The above examples demonstrate that the Jews were familiar with using the idea of God’s “Word” to refer to His wisdom and action. This is especially important to note because
these Jews were fiercely monotheistic, and did not in any way believe in a “Triune God.” They were familiar with the idioms of their own language, and understood that the wisdom and power of God were being personified as “word.”

Like the Aramaic-speaking Jews, the Greek-speaking Jews were also familiar with God’s creative force being called “the word.” J. H. Bernard writes, “When we turn from Palestine to Alexandria [Egypt], from Hebrew sapiential [wisdom] literature to that which was written in Greek, we find this creative wisdom identified with the Divine *logos*, Hebraism and Hellenism thus coming into contact” (The International Critical Commentary: St. John. Vol. 1, p. cxxxix).

One example of this is in the Apocryphal book known as the Wisdom of Solomon, which says, “O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy who hast made all things by thy word (*logos*), and by thy wisdom hast formed man…” (9:1). In this verse, the “word” and “wisdom” are seen as the creative force of God, but without being a “person.”

3. The *logos*, that is, the plan, purpose and wisdom of God, “became flesh” (came into concretion or physical existence) in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the “image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15) and His chief emissary, representative and agent. Because Jesus perfectly obeyed the Father, he represents everything that God could communicate about Himself in a human person. As such, Jesus could say, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father” (John 14:9). The fact that the *logos* “became” flesh shows that it did not exist that way before. There is no pre-existence of Jesus in this verse other than his figurative “existence” as the plan, purpose or wisdom of God for the salvation of man. The same is true with the “word” in writing. It did not pre-exist in any form in the distant past, but it came into being as God gave the revelation to people and they wrote it down.

4. It is important to understand that the Bible was not written in a vacuum, but was recorded in the context of a culture and was understood by those who lived in that culture. Sometimes verses that seem superfluous or confusing to us were meaningful to the readers of the time because they were well aware of the culture and beliefs of those around them. In the first century, there were many competing beliefs in the world (and unfortunately, erroneous beliefs in Christendom) that were confusing believers about the identities of God and Christ. For centuries before Christ, and at the time the New Testament was written, the irrational beliefs about the gods of Greece had been handed down. This body of religious information was known by the word “*muthos,*” which we today call “myths” or “mythology.” This *muthos*, these myths, were often mystical and beyond rational explanation. The more familiar one is with the Greek myths, the better he will understand our emphasis on their irrationality. If one is unfamiliar with them, it would be valuable to read a little on the subject. Greek mythology is an important part of the cultural background of the New Testament.

Although the myths were often irrational, they nevertheless had been widely accepted as the “revelation of the gods.” The pervasiveness of the *muthos* in the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament can be seen sticking up out of the New Testament like the tip of an iceberg above the water, and archaeology confirms the widespread presence of the gods in the everyday life of the Greek and Roman people of New Testament times. The average Greek or Roman was as familiar with the teachings about the adventures of the gods as the average school child in the United States is familiar with Goldilocks and the Three Bears or Snoopy and Charlie Brown. Thus, when Paul and
Barnabas healed a cripple in Lystra, the people assumed that the gods had come down in human form (Acts 14:11), and no doubt they based their assumption on the legend that Zeus and Hermes had once come to that area in human form. While Paul was in Athens, he became disturbed because of the large number of idols there that were statues to the various gods (Acts 17:16). In Ephesus, Paul’s teaching actually started a riot. When some of the locals realized that if his doctrine spread, “the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty” (Acts 19:27). There are many other examples that show that there was a muthos, i.e., a body of religious knowledge that was in large part incomprehensible to the human mind, firmly established in the minds of some of the common people in New Testament times.

Starting several centuries before Christ, certain Greek philosophers worked to replace the muthos with what they called the logos, a reasonable and rational explanation of reality. It is appropriate that, in the writing of the New Testament, God used the word logos, not muthos, to describe His wisdom, reason and plan. God has not come to us in mystical experiences and irrational beliefs that cannot be understood; rather, He reveals Himself in ways that can be rationally understood and persuasively argued.

5. In addition to the cultural context that accepted the myths, at the time the Gospel of John was written, a belief system called Gnosticism was taking root in Christianity. Gnosticism had many ideas and words that are strange and confusing to us today, so, at the risk of oversimplifying, we will describe a few basic tenets of Gnosticism as simply as we can.

Gnosticism took many forms, but generally Gnostics taught that there was a supreme and unknowable Being, which they designated as the “Monad.” The Monad produced various gods, who in turn produced other gods (these gods were called by different names, in part because of their power or position). One of these gods, called the “Demiurge,” created the earth and then ruled over it as an angry, evil and jealous god. This evil god, Gnostics believed, was the god of the Old Testament, called Elohim. The Monad sent another god, “Christ,” to bring special gnosis (knowledge) to mankind and free them from the influence of the evil Elohim. Thus, a Gnostic Christian would agree that Elohim created the heavens and earth, but he would not agree that He was the supreme God. Most Gnostics would also state that Elohim and Christ were at cross-purposes with each other. This is why it was so important for John 1:1 to say that the logos was with God, which at first glance seems to be a totally unnecessary statement. The opening of the Gospel of John is a wonderful expression of God’s love. God “wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). He authored the opening of John in such a way that it reveals the truth about Him and His plan for all of mankind and, at the same time, refutes Gnostic teaching. It says that from the beginning there was the logos (the reason, plan, power), which was with God. There was not another “god” existing with God, especially not a god opposed to God. Furthermore, God’s plan was like God; it was divine. God’s plan became flesh when God impregnated Mary.

“and what God was, the Word was.” Although almost every English Bible translates the last phrase of John 1:1 as, “and the Word was God,” it should not be translated that way. To understand that, we first should be aware of how the Greek text of
the New Testament was written and how the Greeks used the word *theos*, “God” or “god.”

Although we make a distinction between “God” with a capital “G” and “god” with a lower case “g,” the original text could not do that. The original text of the New Testament was written in all capital letters, so both “God” and “god” were “GOD” (ΘΕΟΣ; THEOS). This meant the person reading the Scripture had to pay close attention to the context. When our modern English versions mention “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4), we know that the word “god” refers to Satan because it is spelled with a lower case “g.” But if our versions read in all capitals like the ancient Greek text and said, “THE GOD OF THIS AGE,” how would we know who this “GOD” was? We would have to discover who he was from the context. The people reading the early Greek texts had to become very sensitive to the context. An unintended consequence of modern capitalization, punctuation, and spacing in the text has made the modern reader less sensitive to the context.

What the word “GOD” referred to was further complicated by the fact that, as any good Greek lexicon will show, the Greek word *theos* (#2316 θεός) was used to refer to both gods and goddesses, or was a general name for any deity, or was used of a representative of God, and was even used of people of high authority such as rulers or judges. The Greeks did not use the word “GOD” like we do, to refer to just one single Supreme Being with no other being sharing the name. The Greeks were polytheistic and had many gods with different positions and authority, and rulers and judges who represented the gods or who were themselves of high authority, and *theos* was used of all of those. Some of the authorities in the Bible who are referred to as ΘΕΟΣ include the Devil (2 Cor. 4:4), lesser gods (1 Cor. 8:5) and men with great authority (John 10:34 and 35; Acts 12:22).

When we are trying to discover what GOD (ΘΕΟΣ; THEOS) is referring to in a verse, the context is always the final arbiter. However, we do get some help in that it is almost always the case in the New Testament that when “GOD” refers to the Father, the definite article appears in the Greek text (this article can be seen only in the Greek text, it is never translated into English). Translators are normally very sensitive to this. The difference between *theos* with and without the article occurs in John 1:1, which has 2 occurrences of *theos*: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with the *theos*, and the Word was *theos*.” Since the definite article (“the”) is missing from the second occurrence of “theos” (“God,”) the most natural meaning of the word would be that it referred to the quality of God, i.e., “divine,” “god-like,” or “like God.” The *New English Bible* gets the sense of this phrase by translating it, “What God was, the Word was.”

James Moffatt, who was a professor of Greek and New Testament Exegesis at Mansfield College in Oxford, England, and author of the well-known *Moffatt Bible*, translated the phrase, “the *logos* was divine.”

A very clear explanation of how to translate *theos* without the definite article can be found in *Jesus As They Knew Him*, by William Barclay, a professor at Trinity College in Glasgow:

In a case like this we cannot do other than go to the Greek, which is *theos en ho logos*. *Ho* is the definite article, *the*, and it can be seen that there is a definite article with *logos*, but not with *theos*. When in Greek two nouns are joined by the verb “to be,” and when both have the definite article, then the one is fully
intended to be identified with the other; but when one of them is without the article, it becomes more an adjective than a noun, and describes rather the class or sphere to which the other belongs.

An illustration from English will make this clear. If I say, “The preacher is the man,” I use the definite article before both preacher and man, and I thereby identify the preacher with some quite definite individual man whom I have in mind. But, if I say, “The preacher is man,” I have omitted the definite article before man, and what I mean is that the preacher must be classified as a man, he is in the sphere of manhood, he is a human being.

[In the last clause of John 1:1] John has no article before theos, God. The logos, therefore, is not identified as God or with God; the word theos has become adjectival and describes the sphere to which the logos belongs. We would, therefore, have to say that this means that the logos belongs to the same sphere as God; without being identified with God, the logos has the same kind of life and being as God. Here the NEB [New English Bible] finds the perfect translation: “What God was, the Word was” (William Barclay, Jesus as They Knew Him, pp. 21 and 22).

Daniel Wallace is a Trinitarian and a scholar of Greek grammar. After examining the grammatical possibilities in John 1:1 and whether the last theos in John 1:1 is indefinite (“a god”), definite (“the God”), or qualitative (that the logos has the qualities of God; the noun logos is being used to function like an adjective and give qualities to the noun logos), he concludes, “The most likely candidate for theos is qualitative. …Possible translations are as follows: ‘What God was the Word was’ (NEB)…The idea of a qualitative theos here is that the Word had all he attributes and qualities that ‘the God’ (of 1:1b) had” (Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, Zondervan, 1996, p. 269).

We agree with Wallace and the (NEB, i.e., New English Bible), that the word theos is being used in a qualitative manner and telling us that the Word has the qualities of God, but we do not agree with Wallace that the Word had “all” the attributes and qualities of God. It is not the point of the qualitative use of a noun to confer every single attribute of the adjectival noun to the receptor noun. Wallace is trying to be honest grammatically that the word “God” is being used to function like an adjective while still defending the Trinity, i.e., that Jesus and the Father are co-equal and co-eternal. But the regular qualitative use of a noun does not demand that “all” the qualities of the adjectival noun are being assigned to the receptor noun, it is enough that many major qualities are being assigned. So, for example, both God and the logos are true, holy, righteous, life-giving, etc. We do not believe that John 1:1 is setting forth the doctrine of the Trinity, but the truth that the logos (which includes the Word in every form, written and in the form of Jesus Christ) has the attributes of God.

As we said above, however, although the wording of the Greek text of John 1:1 certainly favors the translation, “and what God was, the Word was” over the translation “the Word was God,” the context and scope of Scripture must be the final arbiter. In this case we have help from the verse itself in the phrase “the Word was with God.” The Word (logos) cannot both be “with” God and “be” God. That is nonsensical. It is similar to us being able to discern that Jesus Christ is not God from reading 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15, which say that Jesus is the image of God. One cannot be both the image of the object and the object itself. We Christians must become aware of the
difference between a genuine mystery and a contradiction. In his book, *Against Calvinism*, Roger Olson writes: “We must point out here the difference between mystery and contradiction; the former is something that cannot be fully explained to or comprehended by the human mind, whereas the latter is just nonsense—two concepts that cancel each other out and together make an absurdity” (Roger Olson, *Against Calvinism*, p. 105). Richard Daane uses the term “verbalism” which he applied to certain aspects of Calvinism, but we feel it is appropriate when applied to many of the explanations of the Trinity. He wrote: “...verbalism, a theoretical game in which words really carry no ascertainable sense and phrases no ascertainable meaning.” Richard Daane, *The Freedom of God*, p. 71). Most Trinitarians assert that the Word being with God and also being God is a mystery. We assert it is a plain contradiction, a verbalism, and the truth in the verse is actually simple: the *logos*, the plan, purpose and wisdom of God, was with God, and what God was (i.e., holy, true, pure, righteous, etc.) his *logos* was too.

For more on the Gospel of John, John chapter 1, and John 1:1, see *One God & One Lord: Reconsidering the Cornerstone of the Christian Faith*, by Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit.

1:3. “All things were made through it.” The pronoun refers to the *logos*, which is an “it” not a “him.” Because historically, Trinitarians have thought of the *logos* as Jesus Christ, they have translated the pronoun as “him,” but not every version does that. The first English translation from the Greek text was done by William Tyndale (1494-1536; John Wycliffe translated into English earlier, but used the Latin as his base text). He translated the pronoun as “it,” not “him.” In 1537, the Matthew’s Bible, translated by John Rogers using the pseudonym “Thomas Matthews,” used “it,” not “him.” In 1539, the Great Bible, a revision of Matthew’s Bible, had “it.” This was important because the translation was overseen by Miles Coverdale, and in the Coverdale Bible of 1535, done some years earlier and based on the Latin, Coverdale used “him,” not “it,” but in this later version he apparently switched his preference and used “it.” When Queen Mary forbade the printing of the English Bible, translation moved to Geneva, and the Geneva Bible of 1560 became the household Bible of the English speaking people. It was the Bible used by Shakespeare, as well as the Puritans who settled New England. Under Queen Elizabeth the English Bible was once again printed in Great Britain, and the Bishop’s Bible was published in 1568. It used “it,” not “him” in John 1:3 and 4, but was never popular with the people. The major change came with the King James Bible, which used “him,” not “it” in the opening of John, and most English versions since then have done the same. Nevertheless, we should be aware that the translation “it” has good literary foundation and a solid Christian history.

1:4. “In it was life.” The pronoun refers to the *logos*, which is an “it” not a “him.” See commentary on verse 3.

1:5. “And the light shines in the darkness.” The word “shines” is the Greek verb *phainō* (#5316 φαίνω) and is in the present tense, active voice, and refers to continuing to shine. The darkness tried to overcome it, but the light continues to shine in spite of the opposition.

“and the darkness did not overcome it.” The words “did…overcome” are from the Greek verb *katalambanō* (#2638 καταλαμβάνω), which can refer to “overcome; conquer,” or “comprehend; grasp.” Thus the phrase can be translated either as “the darkness did not understand it,” or “the darkness did not overcome it.” C. K. Barrett
comments: “Kathlambanein, ‘to seize,’ may mean ‘to overcome’ or, especially in the middle [voice], ‘to grasp with the mind’, ‘to understand.’ Here it seems probable that John is (after his manner; see on 3:3) playing on the two meanings…. Since the Greek word itself bears both meanings… The darkness neither understood nor quenched the light.” (The Gospel According to St. John, second edition, p. 158. Cp. also Sanders and Mastin, The Gospel According to John).

We agree that both meanings of the word katalambanō are true and important in this verse making it a use of the figure of speech amphibologia (double entendre).

However, of the two meanings, “understood” or “overcome,” given the conflict between good (light) and evil (darkness) that has occurred since Genesis, and since the Devil had been trying to overcome the light since before the creation of man, “overcome” was the meaning we went with in the REV.

Another thing worth noticing in the verse is that the verb “shines” is present tense, active voice, indicating that the light continues to shine on, while the verb “overcome” is in the aorist tense, active voice, referring to an event that happens in a specific time. The darkness made an attack and an attempt to quench the light, but the light continues to shine.

1:7. “for testimony.” Most versions translate this phrase, “He came as a witness, to testify.” However, this does not bring out the emphasis in the Greek. The Greek phrasing here is eis marturian, composed of the preposition eis (#1519 εἰς), which here means “for the purpose of,” and marturia (#3141 µαρτυρία) meaning “testimony,” or “confirmation based on personal knowledge” (BDAG). John came for the purpose of testimony, that he may testify. To say that John came “as a witness” places emphasis on the personhood of John as the one giving testimony, when the emphasis in the Greek is on the purpose of John’s coming. He came “for testimony, so that he may testify.” (The repetition of both noun and verb forms together is the figure of speech polyptoton [Bullinger, Figures of Speech]. See also 1 John 5:10).

1:10 “and the world was made through him.” This is a wonderful verse telling us how much God cares for His creation, and highlights how God keeps on loving and giving to His creation and His people despite the fact that they are not thankful for it. Many Trinitarians think this verse refers to Jesus Christ, and use it to try to support the doctrine of the Trinity, but the verse is about the Father, not Jesus Christ.

A study of the context reveals that this section opens in verse 6 by telling us, “There came a man who was sent by God.” We are told, “God is light,” and that God’s light shown through Jesus Christ and made him “the light of the world.” Though God was in the world in many ways, including through His Son, the world did not recognize him. He came unto his own by sending Jesus Christ to them, but even then they did not receive God, in that they rejected His emissary. The fact that the world did not receive Him is made more profound in the context as Scripture reveals how earnestly God reached out to them—He made his plan and purpose flesh and shined His light through Christ to reach the world—but they did not receive Him, even though He was offering them the “right to become children of God” (v. 12).

Some scholars think the phrase, “the world was made by him,” is a reference to the new creation only (cp. Col. 1:15-20 and Heb. 1:1,10), but if it is, then it is only so as a double entendre referring to both the original and the new creations. For more...
information, see the *Racovian Catechism* pp. 89-91 (available from Spirit & Truth Fellowship).

1:12. “name.” See 1 John 3:23 note “on the name of his son Jesus Christ.”

1:13. “who was born…of God.” This verse is speaking of the birth of Jesus Christ, not the new birth of Christians (see footnote on John 1:13 in *The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul*).

“not of bloods.” The only time in the NT that blood is used in the plural. Jesus was not born of the mixture of two human “bloods,” i.e., the contribution of two humans. God contributed the sperm (via creation) that impregnated Mary. Although many Christians believe that Jesus Christ was “incarnated” into the flesh, in other words, placed in Mary as a complete baby at some form of development, that is not what happened. The Bible makes the case that Mary was the true mother of Jesus Christ, not just a surrogate mother for God. How could Jesus be a true descendant of David if there were no actual genetic link to the line of David? Furthermore, what would be the point of the genealogy in Matthew? The link between Mary and Jesus in Matthew 1:16 would not be a genetic link at all. If God simply had Mary “carry” Jesus, then his only genealogy is 100% from God, not at all from David.

“the desire of the flesh.” The word “desire” is the same word as “will” in “will of man” in the next phrase, but the flesh does not “will” so much as it “desires.” We are well aware of the “desires” that our flesh has for sleep, food, sex, etc. Christ was not born “accidentally” as it were, because of the “desire of the flesh.”

“the will of man.” Man’s will did not bring the Messiah.

1:14. “And the word became flesh.” The key to understanding this verse is realizing that “the word” is the wisdom, plan or purpose of God, just as it was in John 1:1 (see commentary on John 1:1). The word, the plan and purpose of God, “became flesh” as Jesus Christ. Thus, Jesus Christ was “the Word in the flesh,” which is shortened to “the Word” for ease of speaking. Scripture is also the Word, but it is the Word in writing. Everyone agrees that the “Word” in writing had a beginning. So did the Word in the flesh. In fact, the Greek text of Matthew 1:18 says that very clearly: “Now the beginning of Jesus Christ was in this manner.” Some ancient scribes were so uncomfortable with the idea of Jesus having a “beginning” that they tried to alter the Greek text to read “birth” and not “beginning,” but they were unsuccessful. The modern Greek texts all read “beginning” (*genesis*) in Matthew 1:18 (see commentary on Matthew 1:18).

In the beginning, God had a plan, a purpose, which “became flesh” when Jesus was conceived. To make John 1:14 support the Trinity, there must first be proof that Jesus existed and was called “the Word” before he was conceived in Mary. We do not believe that such proof exists. There is a large body of evidence, however, that shows that Jesus was foreknown by God. Furthermore, the use of *logos* to refer to a plan or purpose is also well attested. We contend that the meaning of John 1:14 is straightforward. God had a plan (the Word) and that plan became flesh when Jesus was conceived. Thus, Jesus became “the Word in the flesh.”

It is important to ask why John would say, “the Word became flesh,” which is a statement that seems so obvious to us. Of course Jesus Christ was flesh. He was born, grew, ate and slept, and Scripture calls him a man. However, what is clear to us now was not at all clear in the early centuries of the Christian era. The Bible must be understood in the context of the culture in which it was written. At the time of John’s writing, the
“Docetic” movement was gaining disciples inside Christianity (“Docetic” comes from the Greek word for “to seem” or “to appear”). Docetic Christians believed Jesus was actually a spirit being, or god, who only “appeared” to be human. Some Docetics did not believe Jesus even actually ate or drank, but only pretended to do so. Furthermore, some Jews thought that Jesus was an angel. In today’s theological literature, theologians refer to this as “angel-Christology.” John 1:14 was not written to show that Jesus was somehow pre-existent and then became flesh. It was to show that God’s plan for salvation actually became “flesh,” that is, Jesus was not a spirit, god or angelic being, but a real flesh-and-blood human being. A very similar thing is said in 1 John 4:2, that if you do not believe Jesus has come “in the flesh,” you are not of God. For more on this, see J. S. Hyndman, Lectures on The Principles of Unitarianism, 1824, p. 113, and the Racovian Catechism, pp. 117-119 (both available from Spirit & Truth Fellowship).

“lived in his tent.” The Greek verb is skenoō (#4637 σκηνόω), and it literally means “to live in a tent” or “to pitch a tent.” In fact, a very literal translation of John 1:14 would simply be that Jesus “tented” among us. It can refer to living in a place temporarily, although by New Testament times it also seems to refer to living in a place somewhat permanently. It is used five times in the New Testament (John 1:14; Rev. 7:15; 12:12; 13:6; 21:3).

John 1:14 is making a comparison between Jesus Christ and the Tent of Meeting (“Tabernacle”) in the wilderness. The verb most English versions translate as “dwelt” or “lived,” is skenoō (#4637 σκηνόω; pronounced skay-nah'-ō), which literally means to set up a tent or live in a tent. Our human bodies are sometimes referred to as “tents” (skēnos) in the Bible, because our body is our temporary dwelling while we live on earth (cp. 2 Cor. 5:1, 4; 2 Pet. 1:13, 14). Similarly, many verses refer to Moses’ Tent of Meeting as a “tent” (skēnē, cp. Exod. 40:2, 5, 6, etc.) because it was a large tent.

Jesus’ body is specifically referred to as a “tent” in John 1:14 so the glory of God that shone in Jesus’ life can be compared to the glory of God that shone in the Moses’ “tent” in the wilderness. The glory of God was associated with the Tent of Meeting (cp. Exod. 40:34; Lev. 9:23; Num. 14:10). When Moses set up the Tent of Meeting it was filled with the glory of God (Exod. 40:34), and then the glory of God was upon the tent as a pillar of cloud during the day, and a pillar of fire during the night (Num. 14:14). So God “tented” among the people in the Old Testament and they gazed upon His glory, and when Jesus Christ came, he also tented among the people who gazed at the glory of God that was so evident in his life. It was at the Tent of Meeting that God met Moses and His people. Similarly, it was in Jesus Christ that people met God. Jesus said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

“gazed upon.” The Greek word is theaomai (#2300 θεαομαι; pronounced theh-ah'-om-eye), and it means to see, to look upon, view attentively, contemplate, to learn by looking, to see with the eyes, to perceive. Although it can in some contexts simply mean “to see,” it often has a much deeper meaning, which it does in John 1:14. Hendriksen (New Testament Commentary; Baker Academic) writes: “It refers, indeed, to physical sight; yet, it always includes a plus, the plus of calm scrutiny, contemplation, or even wonderment. It describes the act of one who does not stare absent-mindedly nor merely look quickly nor necessarily perceive comprehensively. On the contrary, this individual regards an object and reflects upon it. He scans it, examining it with care. He studies it, viewing and considering it thoughtfully (1:32; 4:35; 11:45; Acts 1:11). In this prologue of

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John, Jesus is being compared to Moses’ Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle), and just as the Israelites no doubt looked and looked at the Tent of Meeting and the glory of God associated with it, so John says they looked at Jesus and saw the glory of God.

1:15. “has advanced in front of me.” John the Baptist set a wonderful example for all believers in that, as great as he was, he consistently pointed people to the Messiah. Furthermore, he recognized and humbly accepted that Jesus was his Lord, openly pointing out that Jesus was more important that he was. The words “has advanced in front of me,” points out that Jesus’ ministry had, even in this early stage, well surpassed John’s and John was pointing to Jesus and saying he was the Messiah. The Greek uses the perfect tense of the verb ginomai, “to become,” and the word emprosthen, which means “to be before, ahead of, or higher in position or rank than someone.” “To become” of a higher rank than someone is to “advance in front of someone” or to surpass him, thus, “has surpassed me” (NIV84) is a good translation. No one argues that Jesus had surpassed John the Baptist in every way.

“because he ranks ahead of me.” The simple truth is that the Messiah does, and always did, rank ahead of John. This verse, and John 1:30 are sometimes used to support the Trinity because the verse can be translated, “because he [Jesus] was before me” [John], and it is assumed that the verse is saying that Jesus existed before John the Baptist. In fact, a number of modern versions translate the last phrase something like, “because he [Jesus] existed before me.” However, there is no reason to bring the Trinity into this verse, and there are very good reasons that it does not refer to the Trinity in any way.

It is clear from the scope of Scripture and social context that John was not teaching the Trinity. There is no mention of the Trinity in the context, and had John mentioned it his disciples would not have understood what he was talking about (in fact, there is no biblical proof that John even knew of anything such as the Trinity). The Messiah the Jews were expecting was not “God in the flesh,” but a man sent from God. The Jews firmly believed in one God, and were not expecting the Messiah to be God in the flesh.

There are scriptures that we today know are prophecies of the Messiah that the Jews in the time of Christ did not apply to the Messiah. However, we also know that the ancient Jews had a lot of expectations about their Messiah that were based on Scripture. The Messiah the Jews were expecting was to be a descendant of Eve (Gen. 3:15), and descendant of Abraham (Gen. 22:18), from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10); a descendant of David (2 Sam. 7:12, 13; Isa. 11:1), that he would be a “lord” under Yahweh (Ps. 110:1), that he would be the servant of Yahweh (Isaiah 42:1-7), he will be “one of their own” and will be able to draw near to Yahweh (Jer. 30:21), and he will come out of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

This expectation perfectly fit John’s teaching his disciples that Jesus was the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29; i.e., the Lamb sent from God) and John’s statement that Jesus was “the Son of God” (John 1:34). If John had told his disciples that Jesus literally existed before he did, they would not have understood what he was saying, which would have engendered a big discussion and explanation of the doctrine of the pre-existence of the Messiah. There is no such discussion or explanation for the simple fact that John was not saying Jesus literally existed before him. John was not teaching, nor did he mention, the Trinity in this context.
Many versions have the translation that Jesus “was before” John. In that translation, the Greek word translated “was” is the verb ēn (ἦν), which is in the imperfect tense, active voice of eimi, (εἰμί) the common word for “to be” (which occurs more than 2000 times in the New Testament). In this context it is vital that we understand that the force of the imperfect tense is, “he was and continues to be.” Then comes the Greek word protos, which means “first.” It can refer to being “first” in time, and thus be translated “before,” or it can mean first in rank, and be translated “chief,” “leader,” “greatest,” “best,” etc. There are many examples referring to people being protos where protos refers to highest in rank or importance (cp. Matt. 19:30, 20:27; Mark 6:21; 9:35; 10:31, 44; Luke 19:47; Acts 17:4; 25:2; 28:17; and 1 Cor. 12:28). Similarly, protos is used of things that are the best or most important. For example, the “first” and great commandment was the first in importance, and the “first” robe was the “best” robe (Luke 15:22).

Given the mindset of the disciples and the fact that John was not teaching them about the pre-existence of the Messiah, but rather was trying to point out that Jesus was the Messiah, it seems that John was making the simple statement that Jesus had always been ahead of him in rank, going back long before they started their ministries. John’s statement that Jesus “was before” him does not have to mean that Jesus is God or even be a reference to all the prophecies of the Messiah in the Old Testament going back to Genesis 3:15. Before John or Jesus was born, when Mary came to visit Elizabeth, John leapt in the womb for joy upon being close to his savior. To John, Jesus had always been ahead of him in rank.

Of course it is possible, but there is no way to prove it, that when John said Jesus was before him, he also had in his mind all the prophecies of the Messiah in the Old Testament, and that Jesus had been in the mind of God for millennia. The existence of Christ in the mind of God is so clear that it need not be disputed. Before the foundation of the world he was foreknown (1 Pet. 1:20); from the foundation of the world he was slain (Rev. 13:8); and before the foundation of the world we, the Church, were chosen in him (Eph. 1:4). The certainty about the Messiah that is expressed in the prophecies about him definitively reveal that all aspects of his life and death were clearly in the mind of God before any of them occurred. If John did have the prophecies of the Messiah in mind when he made this statement, then it would be similar to when Jesus himself said that he was “before” Abraham (see commentary on John 8:58).

By translating John’s statement as, “…he ranks ahead of me,” we catch the essence of the verse without much ambiguity. It is clear in the context that the primary reason for John’s statement was to magnify Jesus Christ in comparison to himself, and “ranks ahead of me” does that. Furthermore, “he ranks” is timeless. The Messiah has always ranked ahead of the other prophets.

1:16. “grace in place of grace.” The Greek is charis anti charis, literally, “grace instead of grace,” or “grace for grace,” or “grace in place of grace.” There has been much theological debate about exactly what John meant by that phrase, but we find the argument by D. A. Carson to be convincing: “…it appears that the grace and truth that come through Jesus Christ is what replaces the law; the law itself is understood to be an earlier display of grace” (The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John; note on John 1:17). We believe that Carson has put his finger on the primary meaning of the phrase, and we also believe that a secondary meaning, which is reflected in the many modern translations that have “grace upon grace,” is that God’s grace is
continually flowing. The grace of God is not a one-time event, but rather something that flows continually from the fullness of God. We see no need to pick one of these two meanings to the exclusion of the other, but see that in the wording of the verse God has included both meanings, and both are true, which is a reason for the continual scholarly debate about them.

There had been grace in the Old Testament before Christ came, and with the coming of Christ God has given us more grace in place of the grace we already had. However, because we have received this grace “from his fullness,” the Greek phrase also includes the idea that the grace is flowing from God and one grace follows quickly upon another grace, thus the translation in some Bibles, “grace upon grace.” The word “grace” can be used of a gift of grace, so the translation “blessing” (NIV) or “gracious gift” (NET) both are good translations.

1:18. “seen God.” In this case, “seen God” refers to knowing Him for who he really is, not seeing Him with the eye. In many languages, “to see” is a common idiom for “to know.” In the Hebrew language, one of the definitions for “see” (Hebrew = ra’ ah) is “see, so as to learn, to know.” Similarly, the Greek word translated “see” in verse 18 (horaō) can be “to see with the eyes” or “to see with the mind, to perceive, know.” Even in English, one of the definitions for “see” is “to know or understand.” For example, when two people are discussing something, one might say to the other, “I see what you mean.”

The usage of “see” as it pertains to knowing is found in many places in the New Testament. Jesus said to Philip, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Here again the word “see” is used to indicate knowing. Anyone who knew Christ (not just those who “saw” him) would know the Father. In fact, Christ had made that plain two verses earlier when he said to Philip, “If you really knew me you would know my Father as well” (John 14:7).

Further evidence that “see” means “know” in John 1:18 is that the phrase “no man has seen God” is contrasted with the phrase “has made Him known.” So from the context and vocabulary in John 1:18, we can see that it is not talking about “seeing” God with one’s eyes; it is saying that the truth about God came by Jesus Christ. Before Jesus Christ came, no one really knew God as He truly is, a loving heavenly Father. For more information on the idiomatic uses of “seen,” see commentary on Luke 1:48; for more information on the idiomatic uses of “seen” and people who saw God, see commentary on and Acts 7:55].

“only begotten son.” There is a huge controversy about the original reading of this verse. As it stands, some Greek texts read “God” and some read “Son.” At some point in time the Greek text was changed, and either “Son” or “God” is original. The manuscript evidence is divided. Much has been written on this subject, and readers are invited to read some of the more scholarly books and commentaries that go deeply into the arguments.

We have concluded to our satisfaction that “only begotten son” was more likely the original text in John 1:18 based on the evidence. We will summarize some of the important arguments and why we have decided “Son” was likely the original reading. First, our study of the scope of Scripture reveals that Jesus is not God. That is the plain reading of dozens of verses of Scripture. There is no description of the Trinity anywhere in Scripture, or of the “hypostatic union,” or of the “incarnation,” and the fact is that every single “Trinity proof text” can be explained from the position that Jesus is the Son
of God, not God. In contrast, there are dozens of points of logic that cannot be explained if the Trinity is true, such as why, after his resurrection, Jesus spoke of having a “God.” God does not have a God—He is God.

Second, and very importantly, there is no other reference anywhere in the Bible to the “only begotten God,” while there are other Johannine references to the “only begotten son” (John 3:16; 18; 1 John 4:9). To fully understand that argument we must recognize that John 3:16, 3:18, and 1 John 4:9 have “son,” not “God” and there is no textual disagreement. So while the Bible has only begotten “Son” three times (four including John 1:18), the reading “unique God” in John 1:18 would be the only occurrence of that reading in the Bible, and we find that very unlikely.

Also, going along with the point just stated above is the fact that the Gospel of John closes with, “these are written so that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and so that by believing you will have life in his name” (John 20:31). It would be strange indeed if John chapter one said Jesus was God, but the Gospel closed by saying it showed that Jesus was the Son of God. That would be even more strange—frankly too strange for us to believe—if Jesus were God and a person had to believe he was God to be saved. In that case, the Gospel of John should have plainly said that “these are written so that you believe that Jesus is God and so that by believing you will have life in his name.” If a person cannot be saved by just believing that Jesus is the “Son” of God, then John 20:31 should not have said so.

We also concur with Bart Ehrman that the textual evidence supports the word “Son,” not “God” in John 1:18. Although the reading theos (God) appears in the Alexandrian texts, which are earlier than the Western and Byzantine texts and therefore most often considered by scholars to represent the original reading in disputed verses, there are times when the Alexandrian readings are not original. Many factors must be considered. For one thing, the Alexandrian readings are earlier because they survived in the sands of Egypt, whereas the Western texts had to be copied more often. But that does not, in and of itself, make the Alexandrian texts more accurate. Other things have to be considered. Besides, there are some Alexandrian texts that read “Son.” Also, if “God” were the original reading, it seems, especially given the desire among third century Christians to support the Trinity, that the Western, Cesarean, and Byzantine text families would have more than a few manuscripts that read “God,” after all, that is what those theologians believed, but the reading “God” is almost totally absent from those text families. Bart Ehrman writes:

“This is not simply a case of one reading supported by the earliest and best manuscripts and another supported by late and inferior one, but of one reading found almost exclusively in the Alexandrian tradition and another found sporadically there and virtually everywhere else” (The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture, p. 79).

Furthermore, “Son” predominates not only in the Greek manuscripts, but in the Latin and Syriac (Aramaic) manuscripts as well, and also is predominnatt in the writings of the Church Fathers (although some have “God” as well).

Another reason for believing that “Son” is original is the word monogenēs (“only begotten,” actually referring to “one of a kind,” some say “unique”). The fact is that monogenēs can mean “only begotten,” and that usage fits perfectly with Jesus Christ as the Son of God. There is a sense that the verse could read “unique Son,” but to what
purpose? Just because a word can mean something does not mean that definition should be used. Occam's razor, that simpler theories are the most satisfactory unless a more complex theory has greater explanatory power, applies here. Why create the difficult phrase “unique Son” when the translation “only begotten Son,” which occurs three other places in John’s writings, is understandable and biblical? Yes, Jesus was unique, but as the Son (not as “God,” because if Jesus, as part of the Trinity, was unique, then so are the Father and Holy Spirit, which would make three unique Gods, and defeat the purpose of using “unique” in the first place).

Another argument against the reading “God” in John 1:18 is that fact that there is no evidence that anyone in the culture of the time John was writing would have understood the concept of a “begotten God.” What would “monogenēs God” mean to the Jews and Greeks John was writing to? We should remember that, although John certainly wrote for Christians too, he was writing to unbelieving Jews and Greeks. We know this because John concludes his Gospel by saying, “But these are written so that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:31). So what would “monogenēs God” mean to those unbelieving Jews and Greeks? Certainly not “begotten.” What is a “begotten God?” But “unique” is no better. The Jews already had their One God (Deut. 6:4), who by definition would have been unique.

It is worth noting that by the time of the great Christological arguments and the development of the doctrine of the Trinity there were ways that theologians could explain Jesus as a “unique God” but there is no reason to assume that when John wrote anyone would think that way. This adds to the evidence that “God” was the later addition, and “Son” was original.

Some modern Trinitarians skirt this issue by claiming that monogenēs inherently has the meaning of sonship (thus the NIV2011: “the one and only son, who is himself God”). The problem with that is it not a legitimate translation, but an interpretation due to bias. There is nothing inherently in the word monogenēs that demands sonship. It is used in Greek writings of both animate and inanimate objects. Translations such as the NIV2011 are only giving voice to their theology, not translating the text.

Other Trinitarian scholars try to claim that the phrases in John 1:18 are a series of appositions, which would read something like: “the unique one, God, who is in the bosom of the Father.” That translation also has problems. Again, how could Christ be “unique” and “God” at the same time? It would just mean that there were three unique Gods, which defeats the purpose of “unique.” It seems that theologians only suggest that the adjectives are substantives because they are trying to make the simple statement, that Jesus is the “only begotten Son,” fit with their theology that Jesus is God and there is a trinity.

Another reason for favoring “Son” over “God” is that the verse is about God being revealed by Jesus (John 1:17), because the verse started with the phrase, that no one had ever seen “God.” To call Jesus in that context “the only begotten God” (or the “unique God”) would set up an inherent contradiction. If you cannot see God, how could you see “the unique God?” If, on the other hand, you could see “the unique God,” why could you not see “God” too (especially since, by the definition of “unique” being used, God the Father is unique too)? The simple answer in the verse is that the Son is not God, and so while we cannot see God, we can see the only begotten Son who has made God
known. The fact is that the reading “the only begotten Son” is textually substantiated, fine from a translation standpoint, and makes perfect sense in the context, even to Trinitarians.

It has been argued the “God” is the likely reading because in trying to reconstruct the original text, scribes usually emended a harder reading so it read more easily. Thus, a scribe reading “God” would change it to “Son” because “Son” was the easier reading, and thus the reading “Son” was created. While the principle that the more difficult reading is usually original is often correct, in this case that principle would not apply because scribes had a theological reason for changing “Son” to “God” and creating the more difficult reading—their belief in the Trinity. Verses were sometimes amended to support the Trinity, as almost all modern scholars admit happened to some manuscripts of 1 John 5:7 and 8, and may have purposely happened in 1 Timothy 3:16.


1:19. “Jews.” The Greek word is Ioudaios (#2453 Ἰουδαῖος, pronounced ē-oo-day'-os) and it has two different meanings in the Bible. One way the word “Jew” is used in the New Testament is to describe those people who are of Jewish heritage and religion—the Jewish people in general. The other way the word “Jew” is used is to refer to the Jews, especially the rulers of the Jews, who were evil and opposed Jesus, and are thus associated with evil, hate, and ungodly religious practices. It is very important to differentiate between these two uses of the word “Jew” to properly understand the New Testament. For example, the vast majority of the time the Gospel of John refers to “the Jews,” it is the second meaning, referring to the rulers of the Jews who opposed Jesus. That is the case in John 1:19.

When it comes to the more general use of the word “Jew,” by New Testament times, Ioudaios (Jew) had acquired a more generalized meaning than it had in parts of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, it had mostly referred to the people of the tribe of Judah, or to the people living in the land area of the tribe of Judah or the southern kingdom of Judah. By the first century AD, people from the kingdom of Judah had been scattered across the Middle East, Turkey, and Europe and were known as the diaspora (pronounced dee-ass'-por-a; it means “the dispersion”). Peter wrote his first epistle to the diaspora, which the ESV translates as “the Dispersion:”

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,” (1 Peter 1:1 ESV).

Strictly speaking, it was hard to exactly define the word “Jew” back then, just as it is today (disputes in modern Israel over who is, and who is not, a Jew, are a regular occurrence). The term “Jew” included religious, ethnic, geographical, and political elements, but in general it was used to define someone whose ancestry was from the tribe of Judah, the kingdom of Judah, or the broader understanding of “Judea,” and who was associated with the Jewish religion. This is supported by texts such as Acts 2:5, which says, “Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven” (ESV). The term “Jew” is used 196 times in the New Testament, but it is not evenly distributed, because 148 of those occurrences are in John and Acts.

The general use of “Jew” is always used in Matthew, Mark, and Luke (except perhaps Luke 7:3). That situation changes dramatically in John, where the word “Jew” occurs 70 times and is mostly used in its more restricted sense, meaning the rulers of the
Jews and those who opposed Jesus Christ and are associated with evil (cp. John 1:19; 2:18; 2:20; 5:10, 15, 16, 18; 6:41, 52; 7:1, 11, 13, 15, 35; 8:22, 48, 52, 57; 9:18, 22; 10:19, 24, 31, 33; etc.). There are however, some uses of “Jew” in John that are the more general meaning (cp. John 2:6; 4:9, 20, 22; 5:1, etc.). The book of Acts usually uses “Jew” in the more general sense, but sometimes uses it in the more restricted sense (cp. Acts 12:3; 13:45, 50; 14:19; 17:5; 18:12; etc.). The Apostle Paul occasionally used the word “Jew” in its more restrictive sense (cp. 1 Thess. 2:14; 2 Cor. 11:24), but usually used it in its general sense. The two uses of “Jews” in the book of Revelation use the word in its general sense.

It is important to understand the two uses of “Jew” and differentiate the “average Jew” from the “evil Jewish rulers” as we read the New Testament, because there were many good people who were Jews (including the Apostles and the majority of the early Church), and they should not be vilified for what “the Jews,” meaning the evil religious leaders, did to Jesus and God’s people.

1:21. “Elijah.” For information on why the people thought that Elijah would come, and why John the Baptist was called “Elijah,” see commentary on Matthew 17:10.

1:23. Quoted from Isaiah 40:3.

1:25. “Elijah.” For information on why the people thought that Elijah would come, and why John the Baptist was “Elijah,” see commentary on Matthew 17:10.

1:28. “Bethany.” This site is unknown, and its location has been the source of much scholarly discussion. Nevertheless, it seems clear that it was within a day’s walk from Bethany near Jerusalem, and likely would have been close to directly east of Jerusalem, thus explaining its name as “Bethany beyond Jordan.” When two towns are quite far apart, there is usually no such description: people simply recognize that the towns cannot be the same due to the distance they are separated from each other. It seems clear the messengers that came to tell Jesus that Lazarus was dead could make the journey in a day (see commentary on John 11:6). The Church Father Origen (184/185 – 253/254) went to Palestine and said that he could not find any town named Bethany, and so concluded that Jesus must have been at Bethabara (actually, there is a large variation in the manuscripts, apparently in some measure due to Origen’s report). Origen did say “We are aware of the reading which is found in almost all the copies, ‘These things were done in Bethany.’” However, when Origen is studied, it seems he did not go beyond the Jordan himself, but relied on what people said. R. D. Potter writes, “How did the name disappear in 100 or 150 years? The answer is that Origen, despite his pious assertion about visiting the scenes of Redemption, had never been there. He is reporting hearsay…. He never discovered Bethany beyond Jordan because he never went to look.” (Potter and Origen quoted in Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John).

One of the arguments that “Bethany” is the original name, besides the fact that Origen said most of the manuscripts available to him read “Bethany,” is that John 10:40-11:18 seems to make some effort to make sure the reader understands that the Bethany where Lazarus was buried was not the place where Jesus was when he got the message about Lazarus. This would support that Jesus was at “Bethany” and then traveling to “Bethany.” R. Brown (The Anchor Bible) notes the pilgrim tradition says that Jesus was baptized by John close to where Joshua crossed the Jordan, and while tradition cannot be relied on, the location seems to fit what we know about the geography.
It is sometimes argued that Jesus would not have stayed across the Jordan from Jerusalem because that was Perea, the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas, who had executed John the Baptist. However, it is logical that the death of John the Baptist had caused no small stir and would have made Herod quite unpopular, and he would have had no desire to complicate matters further, especially when Jesus had not done anything to threaten his rule. When Jesus was brought before him in Jerusalem he could have executed him, and Pilate would have been thankful to have that task taken from him, but instead Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate.

1:31. “I did not know him.” John almost certainly knew Jesus as a person, but what he means here is that he did not know Jesus as the Coming One. Even if he had a personal opinion based on the testimony of his parents—and it seems certain he would have their testimony since his mother was the one whom Mary visited when both women were pregnant and John leapt in Elizabeth’s womb—he still had no divine confirmation on his own until the baptism. In this phrase, the “I” is emphatic in Greek.

“but for this purpose I came baptizing in water: in order that he might be revealed to Israel.” Here we see one of the great purposes for John’s baptism, and Jesus was revealed to Israel though it in many ways. One was the direct testimony of John, an eyewitness of the holy spirit lighting as a dove upon him. John’s testimony had great weight, as we briefly glimpse in John 1:35-37. Another was that John’s baptism prepared the hearts of people to see the Messiah. John’s baptism was specifically a baptism of repentance, that is, a baptism that symbolized the repentance of the people, who confessed their sin before being baptized. The confession, repentance, and baptism gave John the perfect platform to speak of the Messiah and reveal him to Israel, because it was the Messiah, not the baptism, that could really cleanse a person from sin. People who have repented of their sin and are desirous of everlasting life always wish to see, and emulate their Savior, thus many believed when they were around Jesus—their hearts had been prepared to see and receive him (cp. John 2:23).

1:33. “in holy spirit.” There is no definite article. This holy spirit is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.
1:38. “What are you seeking?” The question is a deep one. It can have the essence of the NET translation: “What do you want?” But it also asks them the deep question of the heart: What is it that they really wanted in life? Were they in touch with the deep needs of their life? It is a question we should all ask ourselves: What are we really seeking in life?
1:39. “it was about the tenth hour.” The figure of speech, Epitrechon (see Bullinger, Figures), is a type of parenthesis.

The “tenth hour” is 4 o’clock in the afternoon. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].
1:41. “first.” The word “first” is debated in the text. Lenski does a good job with it. Andrew was the first of the two disciples of John to find his brother. The other disciple of John, the one not mentioned by name, would have been either James or John (the author of John), and he also found his brother, thus being the “second” to bring his brother, Andrew being the “first.”
1:47. “truly.” This is the adverb alethōs (#230 ἀληθῶς), truly. Although some versions have translated it as if it were an adjective (cp. “Here is a true Israelite” HCSB) the more
likely explanation is not that Jesus is saying Nathaniel was a “real” Israelite; lots of Jews from Galilee were likely “real” Israelites. The adverb likely modifies the whole phrase, “an Israelite in whom is no guile.” Finding a truly honest person who had no guile was certainly more difficult than finding a real Israelite, and Jesus opened his conversation with Nathaniel by commenting on his character, something Nathaniel would certainly have recognized, and something that ties in with John 2:25 which says that Jesus knew what was in people, i.e., in their hearts.

1:51. “you all.” The you is plural.

“ascending and descending on.” This is the literal reading of the Greek text, and is designed to vividly call to mind the record in Genesis 28:12 where Jacob saw a great staircase going to heaven with angels going up and down on it (it was not a “ladder” as we know it today, even though many versions use “ladder.” It was a staircase, as per the HCSB, NAB, NET, NIV, etc.).

Although the Greek uses “on” (the preposition epi), the Apostles would have understood what he meant, that it was “on” him, idiomatically meaning due to who he was, that the angels were ascending from, and descending to, him. As the Son of God, Jesus was now the focal point on earth for the angels who were coming from and going back to God.

Chapter 2

2:4. “Woman, what is that to me and to you?” This puzzling verse is explained well by Lenski. Of course Jesus’ mother is putting pressure on him to do something in the situation, but as it is in English the verse seems to make Jesus disrespectful and uncaring of the situation entirely. This verse has both Greek idiom and the figure of speech ellipsis. This makes it difficult to translate the Greek into English in an understandable way without taking serious liberty with the text.

Keys to the meaning can be found in the context, especially verse 5. Not only is Mary not upset with Jesus’ response to her, but she expects Jesus will do something to help the situation. Jesus’ statement, “what is that to you and me” is not an insult to Mary, or a statement of disregard of the situation. Rather it is a statement that Jesus himself is Messiah and Lord, and that he and Mary are not a team. The verse should be read something like: “what is that to you and me, I will deal with it alone.” He alone would take care of the situation now, just as he alone would take care of the situation when “his hour” had come, at the time of his torture and death. Mary understood his communication, and went to the servants and told them that whatever “he” said, do it.

2:6. “stone water jars.” These jars were very hard to make and expensive, since they were made of stone, not clay. The reason for the stone was that clay would absorb a little of what was put in it, and so clay vessels became unclean very easy and could not be cleansed once they were unclean. Stone, on the other hand, was harder to make permanently unclean because it could usually be cleansed by washing.

2:12. “down.” This is literally true. Capernaum was on the Sea of Galilee, which is about 700 feet below sea level, while Cana is in what is known as the Upper Galilee, which is well above sea level.
“Capernaum.” Jesus made his home in Capernaum after he left Nazareth (Luke 4:29-31). [For more information on Jesus’ move to Capernaum, see commentary on Mark 2:1].

“a few days.” The Greek literally says, “not many days,” but the idiom means a few days. Jesus moved permanently to Capernaum, but at this time his family, his disciples, and he only stayed in Capernaum for a few days is explained in the next verse, that the Passover was near and everyone went to Jerusalem to celebrate it.

2:15. “drove them all out of the temple, also the sheep and the oxen.” This is Jesus’ first appearance in the Temple after starting his ministry, and he is already demonstrating the fact that he is the representative of his Father, and actively judging, and correcting, right from wrong and dismantling the oppressive systems the world uses to keep God’s people in bondage. The wrath that he showed in his Father’s house will be mirrored and magnified at the Judgment, when sinners will be excluded, not just from an earthly Temple, but from the Kingdom of Heaven itself. When Jesus saw the evil merchants, he acted quickly and decisively, as is indicated by the fact that the four verbs in the verse, “made...drove...poured out...overturned” are all in the aorist tense.

Making the whip would be relatively easy. There was constant buying and selling of animals and many of them would have been tied up in the immediate area at any given time. No doubt there would be unused pieces of rope and chord tied to posts or pillars, or lying around. Although some people have suggested that Jesus did not use the whip on the merchants themselves, but only on the animals, the Greek text does not support that supposition. The text says that Jesus drove them “all” out of the temple, and the word “all” is masculine, agreeing with the “sellers” (τοὺς πωλοῦντας) and the “moneychangers” (τοὺς κεραματίστας) of the first part of the sentence, which is in verse 14. It is also quite likely, although not specifically stated, that Jesus repeated his actions at the Passover just before his crucifixion, likely only a year later. The records of Matthew 21:12, 13; Mark 11:15-17; and Luke 19:45-48, show that Jesus did indeed “drive” the dishonest merchants from the Temple, not just drive the animals from it. Although those records do not state that Jesus made a whip, it is likely that he used more than words to get the merchants to abandon their lucrative business.

It has been correctly pointed out by commentators that is was not the physical whip that drove out the moneychangers, but Jesus’ intensity and the fact that what he was doing was righteous, and at some level, at least, they knew that. Even though they themselves were caught up in the system and may not have thought they could change it, they still would have been aware to some degree that what they were doing was wrong, and so yielded to Jesus without a fight.

2:16. “Stop making.” The verb “making” is poieō (#4160 ποιέω), which means to do or to make. In this verse, it is in the present tense, imperative mood. The present tense indicates the action is ongoing. If we translate the verse “Do not make,” it repeats the verb into “do, make,” and it also loses the force that this was something they had been doing and were continuing to do. The imperative mood also is the reason for the exclamation point at the end of the sentence.


2:18. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].
2:19. “Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up.” This was a very fitting answer to the question the Jews were asking, which was basically, “What sign are you going to show us that proves you have the authority to do what you are doing?” Jesus had the authority to cleanse the Temple because he was the Messiah, but what sign showed he was the Messiah? The Resurrection! Jesus made this clear when he said that no sign (that is, no clear incontrovertible sign) would be given to that generation except the resurrection (Matt. 12:40). Furthermore, in his teaching on the Day of Pentecost, Peter made it clear that it was the resurrection that absolutely showed that Jesus was Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

The obvious problem in the verse is that Jesus said “I” will raise up this sanctuary, but he was dead. What did he mean? Many verses plainly state that it was God who raised Jesus (cp. Acts 2:32; 4:10; 5:30; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 6:14; Gal. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:9, 10). This is the only verse that implies Jesus raised himself, and so it is very unusual. What did Jesus mean when he said that he would raise up “this sanctuary?”

Jesus was speaking to the Jews after he turned over their tables and drove their animals out of the Temple (this was the first of the two times when he did that; he did it again at the end of his ministry, cp. Matt. 21:12; Mark 11:15; Luke 19:45). The Jews were angry and unbelieving, and Jesus was speaking in veiled terms, so much so that the Gospel of John adds, “but he was speaking of the temple of his body,” so that people reading the Gospel would understand what he said. Since Jesus was standing in the actual Temple when he said, “Destroy this sanctuary,” the natural assumption would be that he was speaking of the Temple where he was standing at the time, and indeed, the people listening to him thought he was speaking of destroying the physical Temple he was standing in.

The fact that Jesus was speaking in veiled terms to an unbelieving audience should make us hesitant to build a doctrine on this verse and say that Jesus somehow raised himself, especially when the other verses about the resurrection say “God” raised Jesus. Tempers were flaring and the Jews were against Jesus anyway. It was common for Jesus to speak in ways that unbelievers did not understand. Even a cursory reading of the Gospels will show a number of times when Jesus spoke and the unbelievers who heard him (and sometimes even the disciples) were confused by what he said.

In what sense could Jesus say “I” will raise “this sanctuary?” He was referring to the fact that he was to a degree responsible for his resurrection, just as we are for our salvation. How so? We are responsible for our salvation because we must accept the Lord Jesus in order to be saved. In a similar way, Jesus was responsible to keep himself “without spot or blemish” and to fully obey the will of the Father in order to be able to be resurrected. Jesus was the sacrifice for the sins of mankind, and a sacrifice that was blemished was unacceptable to the Lord (Lev. 22:17-20; Mal. 1:6-8). Since this event in John was at the start of his ministry, Jesus knew he had a long and hard road ahead and that obedience would not be easy. If he turned away from God because he did not like what God said to do, or if he sinned, his sin would have been a “blemish” that would have disqualified him as the perfect sacrifice. Then he could not have paid for the sins of mankind, and there would have been no resurrection. Jesus did not go into the Temple and turn over the money tables because he “just felt like it.” Scripture says he was fulfilling the Old Testament prophecy and the will of God, which he always did. Had he not fulfilled this prophecy, he would not have fulfilled all the law and would have been
disqualified from being able to die for the sins of mankind. Thus, his destiny was in his own hands, and he could say, “I will raise it up.”

It is common in speech that if a person has a vital part in something, he is spoken of as having done it. An example from ordinary life would be if a homeowner hires a worker to remodel his kitchen. In conversation about it he would ordinarily say, “I remodeled my kitchen last year,” even though he only paid to have it done by someone else. The Bible uses that same kind of language. For example, the Gospels say that Roman soldiers crucified Jesus (Matt. 27:35). Yet Peter said to the rulers of the Jews, “you” crucified the Lord (Acts 5:30). Everyone understands that the Jews played a vital part in Jesus’ crucifixion, so there really is a sense in which they crucified him, even though they themselves did not do the dirty work. An example from the Old Testament is in 2 Samuel 5 and 1 Chronicles 11. David and his men were attacking the Jebusite city of Jerusalem. The record is very clear that David had sent his men ahead into the city to fight, and even said that the first one into the city would be the general. Yet the record says, “David captured the stronghold of Zion,” because David played a vital role in the capture of Jerusalem. This same type of wording that is so common in the Bible and indeed, in all languages, is the wording Jesus used. He would raise his body by virtue of the fact that he would play a vital part in it being raised.

2:20. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

“it has taken forty-six years to build this sanctuary, and will you raise it up in three days?” The Temple, and the complex around it, took many years to build. Then it stood in its completed form for less time than it took to build because it was destroyed in 70 AD. The saying in Jewish tradition was, “He that has not seen the Temple of Herod has never known what beauty is” (Edersheim, Life and Times, Book II, p. 120).

2:22. “out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among those who are dead.”

“believed the scripture.” What scripture? Very likely Psalm 16:10, as per Acts 2:31 and 13:35, but they also may have believed Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, etc.

2:23. “Now.” This verse should have been grouped with the Nicodemus record, and therefore numbered “3:1” instead of “2:23.” A huge key to understanding why Jesus spoke to Nicodemus the way he did was that Jesus “knew what was in man” (2:25). Verse 23 tells us when and where the Nicodemus record occurred. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, so he would have lived somewhere in or very close to Jerusalem.

“signs.” The miracles that Jesus did are called “signs” (simeion; #4592 σημεῖον) in the Gospel of John. A “sign” is something that points to something else, just as a road sign points to something coming up in the road or a condition the traveler needs to know about. In John, the miracles that Jesus did are called “signs” and pointed to him being the Messiah.

“Passover.” One of the three major feasts in the Jewish calendar that every male was to attend (Exod. 23:14-17; Deut. 16:1-17; 2 Chron. 8:13). This is the first of the two Passovers that Jesus attended during his ministry. At the second he was arrested and crucified.
“believed in his name.” This means that people were believing that Jesus was the Messiah. What is not stated, but is very important, is that the people back then thought very differently about the Messiah than we do. We, with 20-20 hindsight, know about his suffering and death, his two comings (one to suffer and die; one, still future, to conquer and set up his kingdom), etc. In contrast, the people of Jesus’ day believed that as the Messiah he would simply come and at some point muster an army, overthrow the Romans and other governments of the world, and set up his kingdom on earth. Even his closest men, the Apostles, did not understand about his death and resurrection until after he was raised and had appeared to them (Luke 24:45-48). So when the Scripture says the people believed “in his name,” they “got” that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but they did not “get” what that meant as far as how Jesus would have to live out his life. For more on the custom of “the name” and “the name of Jesus Christ,” see commentary on 1 John 3:23.

2:24. “Jesus did not trust himself to them.” Even though Jesus was surely glad that people were recognizing that he was the Messiah, he did not trust himself to them. He knew that they did not really understand what the Messiah would do. Even his mother Mary came to believe he was out of his mind (Mark 3:21). See commentary on John 2:23, “believed in his name.”

“because he knew all people.” This statement shows how much revelation the Father gave to His Son, Jesus. It is not that Jesus inherently knew every person, but rather that God told him what he needed to know about people, and this sentence sets the stage for John 3:1, when Jesus meets Nicodemus.

It is obvious from Scripture that Jesus did not know everything, for he grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52), and he did not know certain things (Matt. 24:36). Whenever the word “all” is used, the student of Scripture must be careful to ascertain from the context whether it means “all” in a totally inclusive sense, or whether it means “all” in a more limited sense (see note # 5 on Col. 1:15-20). For example, 1 John 2:20 says of Christians, “you know all things.” Surely there is no Christian who actually believes that he knows everything. The phrase is taken in a limited sense of “all” according to the context.

This verse puts Trinitarians in a difficult situation, because they usually explain it by saying that Jesus was God and therefore he knew all people. But then they explain the verses that say Jesus did not know certain things by saying that those refer to his human side. We think it is reasonable to assert that you cannot have it both ways. Either the person who walked the earth as Jesus Christ, our Messiah, did not know everything, or he did. It makes no sense that he “went back and forth” between the two natures. That would have been very confusing both for his human side and those around him. There are very clear verses that say he did not know everything, and no verse that actually says that Jesus did know everything the same way God does. When a verse seems at first to say Jesus “knew all men,” it should be understood in a limited sense according to the context, just as when Scripture says Christians “know all things.”

Jesus Christ was “made like his brothers in every way” (Heb. 2:17). Yet we are not “part God, part human,” or “fully God and fully man.” In order for the integrity of Scripture to be preserved, Jesus must actually be like we are, i.e., fully human.

There is no place in Scripture where the doctrine of the “dual nature” of Christ is actually stated. It is an assumption based on piecing verses together. What the Bible does say in a straightforward manner is that Jesus was flesh and bone, not spirit; that he was a
man, and that he partook in our humanity. Also, the very concept of the dual nature of Christ involves a self-contradiction. God is infinite and man is finite, and so Christ would have to be a finite-infinite being, which we believe is inherently impossible. That is not the Jesus described to us in the Bible. No wonder Tertullian, an early Trinitarian, said, “Credo quia impossibile est” (I believe because it is impossible). We realize it is not only “impossible,” but also unscriptural, so unlike Tertullian, we choose not to believe it.

Jesus needed to hear from God to know how to judge (John 5:30), and he knew all men the same way—by hearing from God. In saying that Jesus knew all men, the Bible was confirming that Jesus was in touch with God just as were the prophets of old (but of course, much more intimately). Charles Morgridge writes: “It was an opinion prevalent among the Jews, that prophets knew the thoughts and characters of those with whom they conversed. Luke 7:39: “Now, when the Pharisee which had bidden him, saw it, he spake within himself, saying, “This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who, and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him” (The True Believer’s Defence (sic) Against Charges Preferred by Trinitarians, pp. 124-126). Furthermore, it is substantiated in Scripture that God did show prophets what people were thinking. Nathan knew of David’s secret sin (2 Sam. 12:7). Ahijah knew what the wife of Jeroboam wanted, and who she was, even though he was blind and she was wearing a disguise (1 Kings 14:4, 6). Elijah knew that Ahab had committed murder by framing Naboth (21:17-20), and he knew the information that the king of Israel wanted to know (2 Kings 1:1-4). Elisha knew that Gehazi was lying and knew of the greed in his heart (2 Kings 6:19-27). Daniel knew Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, even though Nebuchadnezzar had not revealed it to anyone (Dan. 2:5,28ff). By saying that Jesus knew all men, Scripture confirms that he was, like the prophets of old, in communication with God.

2:25. “he did not need anyone to testify about man.” This statement sets up the record of Jesus and Nicodemus, which starts, “There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus.” Because Jesus did not need anyone to testify about people, and knew what was in people, when Nicodemus came to him he already knew what Nicodemus wanted and needed. That explains why Jesus so abruptly spoke into Nicodemus’ life, saying, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born from above, he is not able to see the Kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

Chapter 3

3:1. “one of.” A partitive genitive. Nicodemus was “of” the Pharisees, meaning he was one of them. Some versions simplify the verse and just have, “Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus.” That is certainly what the text means.

“Pharisees.” The Greek word is Pharisaios (#5330 Φαρισαῖος), a transliteration of the Aramaic word perishaya, from the Aramaic word that means “separated.” The Pharisees separated themselves from things that made them unclean or were ungodly, and also separated themselves from others who they considered not godly. Our knowledge of them is limited by the sources we have. The Greek term is found for the very first time in the New Testament and it occurs in Josephus, but not in any other Jewish or Greco-Roman writings of the New Testament era. The group no doubt existed before the time of Christ, which is why it was so influential in the New Testament, but no description of it
survives from that time. The term is found in the non-canonical and later Christian texts (e.g., *The Gospel of Thomas*), and in the writings of the Church Fathers. The text called “The Psalms of Solomon,” perhaps written in the mid first century BC, has been thought of as a Pharaonic text, but never specifically identified as such.

Josephus tells us the Pharisees believed in the immortality of the soul, like the Greeks, which explains why the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16) resonated with them. However, they also believed in the resurrection from the dead, as is clear from Acts 23:6-8. It is not clear how they reconciled these two beliefs. Since Josephus tells us that the Pharisees believed the soul of the righteous went into another body, it is reasonable to believe that they thought the souls of good people waited in “Paradise,” where they could be in intimate association with the Patriarchs (cp. “in Abraham’s bosom;” Luke 16:22) until the resurrection. Many Christians hold a belief that is somewhat similar: that the souls of dead Christians are in heaven and will be joined with their resurrected bodies in the future.

That John 3:1 specifically refers to Nicodemus as a Pharisee helps us understand one reason why Jesus spoke to him about the resurrection from the dead. Jesus opened the Sermon on the Mount with a teaching about the future Messianic Kingdom on earth because almost no one understood it [Matt. 5:3-12; see Appendix 3: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”]. Similarly, one reason he opens his discussion with Nicodemus about resurrection into the Kingdom was because Nicodemus did not understand it.

“ruler of the Jews.” Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council of 70 men that was presided over by the High Priest (cp. John 7:50).

3:2. “came to Jesus.” The Bible is silent as to why Nicodemus came to Jesus, which means that either we can figure it out on our own, or it is not really important. In this case, the Bible gives us enough information that we recognize some very plausible reasons Nicodemus came.

First, we should understand that around that same time John the Baptist was active in his ministry in “Bethany beyond Jordan,” not more than a day’s journey from Jerusalem (see commentary on John 1:28). John was teaching that the Kingdom of God was very close and that the Messiah was already among them (Matt. 3:2; John 1:26), and “the whole country of Judea, and all Jerusalem, were going out to him” (Mark 1:5). That meant that huge numbers of people were being stirred up by John, and the region would have been abuzz with talk about the Messiah and the Messianic Kingdom. The impact John was making on the people was enough that the rulers of the Jews in Jerusalem sent some Pharisees to question him (John 1:24ff), and either Nicodemus would have been one of them or he would have known about the report they brought back.

Since Nicodemus would have already been stirred up by the teaching that the Kingdom was close and the Messiah among the people, he would have been especially sensitive to this new young rabbi who, in his first appearance in Jerusalem as a teacher, taught powerfully, did miracles, and even defied Temple authorities by overturning their money tables and driving away their animals. Nicodemus came to the conclusion that Jesus was a “teacher” and “sent from God.” Thus it seems at least one reason for his coming to Jesus was to find out more about his teachings and beliefs. Of course at that point Nicodemus did not believe Jesus was the Messiah. Nicodemus would have still held to the traditions and beliefs of the Pharisees; he was not coming to Jesus to be saved.
There is a wide gap between believing someone is a teacher sent from God and believing that he is the Messiah.

Perhaps a stronger reason that Nicodemus came to Jesus was that he believed John’s teaching that the Kingdom was close, and may have also believed the Messiah was somewhere among the people. That would mean he also thought there was going to be a rebellion or revolution of some sort in the near future. The Jews of Christ’s time thought that the Messianic Kingdom would replace the kingdoms on earth, but the exact way they thought that would happen is unclear. It seems certain that there were differences of opinion about it, but the bottom line was that people thought the Messiah was going to make war on the kingdoms of the world, overcome them, and set up his own kingdom. This would certainly mean the Messiah would need help overthrowing the Romans, and no doubt a godly man like Nicodemus thought it would be helpful if the Jews were more united and fought less among themselves.

Given that, it is very likely that another reason Nicodemus came to Jesus was to offer him some advice about how to be successful in Jerusalem. As a member of the Sanhedrin and an old and experienced godly man among the often ungodly Jews, Nicodemus had learned how to influence others without being personally denounced. It seems he felt he could help this young Rabbi to navigate the uncertain and shifting waters between the rival religious factions, their rival political factions, and the masses of people, all vying for what would profit them personally. Nicodemus could give Jesus practical advice as to how to be successful and effective in his ministry. But Jesus had no interest in successfully influencing the culture in Jerusalem, and knew that Nicodemus needed to rethink his theology from the ground up to know the truth of the Word. Thus it is no wonder that Jesus went right to the heart of the Kingdom issue with the statement, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born from above, he is not able to see the Kingdom of God.”

Jesus was not going to bring the Kingdom by uniting the Jews and overthrowing the Romans. The Kingdom was going to be established on earth in a totally different way, and will in large part be populated by those people whom God raises from the dead (cp. Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:9-14; Dan. 12:2). It is not by being powerful enough to overthrow the Romans that a person will be able to be part of the Kingdom, but rather by being godly enough to be part of the Resurrection of the Righteous (cp. John 5:29). For more information about how “born from above” refers to the resurrection, see commentary on John 3:3. [For more information about the Kingdom of God on earth, see Appendix 3: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”.]

“at night.” Nicodemus came to Jesus at night so that he might not been recognized. This is not cowardice, but wisdom: careful caution. Lenski writes that Nicodemus “was not sure about this young Rabbi from Galilee who might turn out a disappointment after all. So he cautiously investigates.”

“Rabbi.” The term means “teacher,” and is a respectful address. Jesus’ deeds had touched a chord in Nicodemus and he knew Jesus was sent from God. Nicodemus knew Jesus was sent from God and addresses him as such, with respect.

“we.” This refers to the “many” people who believed in 2:23. It does not refer to Nicodemus’ peers, the religious leaders, because they did not believe Jesus was sent from God, they thought he was a false prophet.
“sent from God.” The Greek is the preposition apo (#575 ἀπό) which in this context simply means “from.” Jesus Christ was a teacher from God. God sent him, just like He sent angels or the prophets; and God inspired his teachings. Some people have tried to support the Trinity or the pre-existence of Christ by this verse, but it does not have to mean that at all. Actually, the very fact that Nicodemus started by saying, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher ‘sent from God,’” shows that the verse is not referring to the incarnation or the Trinity in any way. Neither Nicodemus, nor the “we” he referred to in his statement, had been taught about the Trinity or the incarnation, nor believed it from the Law or what they learned in Synagogue. Nicodemus, and the “we” he referred to, believed exactly what Nicodemus said: that Jesus was a teacher from God, i.e., not a false prophet, and some of them no doubt believed he was the Messiah.

3:3. “born from above.” The Greek text reads gennaō anothen (#1080 γεννάω; #509 ἄνωθεν), and literally means “born from above.” Unfortunately, gennaō anothen is mistranslated as “born again” in most English versions, and that mistranslation has caused a lot of confusion in Christianity. The word anothen occurs five times in John, and all of them mean “above” or “top” (3:3, 7, 31; 19:11, 23).

“Born from above” refers to the resurrection from the dead that will occur when God above puts His spirit in dead people who are then “born” from the grave. Saying, “born from the grave” is biblically accurate, because Isaiah 26:19 says that “the earth will give birth to her dead,” as if the earth is a big womb that gives birth to people at the resurrection (the KJV, which says the earth will “cast out” the dead, is not as clear as versions such as the ESV, NIV, or NASB, which have “give birth to.” The Hebrew word can refer to birth; cp. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew English Lexicon). This same truth about the dead coming up out of the ground is found in Ezekiel 37:12-14 and Daniel 12:2. The imagery of resurrection as “birth” is in the New Testament as well as the Old. Besides here in John 3, Jesus is called “the firstborn from the dead,” referring to the fact that he was the very first one to be raised from the dead (Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5. Cp. Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15).

The Jews had no knowledge of what the New Testament calls the “New Birth” (1 Pet. 1:3) or being “born again” (1 Peter 1:23). There was no “New Birth” mentioned in the Old Testament or the Gospels. From Genesis until the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), God gave His gift of holy spirit only on a relatively few people, and when He did give it, He gave it conditionally, meaning that He could take it away. So, for example, God took His spirit from King Saul (1 Sam. 16:14), and after David sinned with Uriah and Bathsheba, David prayed God would not take it from him (Ps. 51:11).

In contrast to the way God gave the gift of holy spirit during the OT and Gospel period, after the Day of Pentecost when the Christian Church started (Acts 2), God gave holy spirit in birth, and so the Epistles refer to this as the “New Birth.” Today, Christians get “born again” when they believe. However, the New Birth was never mentioned in the Old Testament and therefore the Jews knew nothing of it.

The New Birth is part of the Administration of Grace, which is also called “the Administration of the Sacred Secret (see commentary on Ephesians 3:2 and commentary on Ephesians 3:9). John 3:1-12 is not referring to the Christian New Birth. Jesus was speaking about a “birth from above” that the Jews were supposed to know about and understand. That is why Jesus chided Nicodemus, saying, “Are you the well-known teacher of Israel, and yet do not know these things?” (John 3:10). Thus we have to look in
the Old Testament for the kind of birth Jesus spoke of, which is the birth of the body from the ground, which will happen at the resurrection (Isa. 26:19 (NIV); Ezek. 37:12-14; Dan. 12:2). Unfortunately, at the time of Christ, most Jews were ignorant about the resurrection from the dead and entrance into the Messianic Kingdom. The Sadducees did not even believe in a resurrection (Matt. 22:23). The Pharisees, on the other hand, of which Nicodemus was one, generally believed in immediate life after death, like the Greeks (see commentary on John 3:1; “Pharisee”). So when Jesus told Nicodemus about being born from above, he did not understand what Jesus was saying. Nicodemus, who had read the Old Testament many times, should have known what Jesus was talking about. Instead, however, due to his theology, he was confused by the “birth” terminology.

The Jews believed that God opened the womb allowing childbirth, or closed it causing barrenness (Gen. 20:18; 29:31; 30:2; 1 Sam. 1:5; Ps. 127:3; Isa. 66:9; Hos. 9:14). Thus, when Jesus spoke of being “born from above” Nicodemus would have correctly thought of Jesus’ words in terms of “being born with the help of God.” However, instead of correctly thinking that the dead are born from the ground by the power of God, he incorrectly thought about how a person could once again be born from his mother’s womb with God’s help. Jesus’ words are actually quite simple, but they were completely outside any theology that Nicodemus understood, so he misinterpreted them. Jesus was saying that in order to “see” (i.e., enter) the Kingdom of God, the Messianic Kingdom that will be set up on earth (Dan. 2:44; 7:14), the dead will have to be resurrected by the power of God and then enter it.

In summary, what Jesus said to Nicodemus is actually very simple: no one will see God’s Messianic Kingdom unless he is “born from above,” i.e., raised from the dead by God.

3:5. “born of water.” This phrase refers to the birth of the person from his mother’s womb, and Jesus used it because Nicodemus spoke of being born from the womb, somewhat sarcastically asking if a person could enter into the womb a second time. Jesus patiently pointed out that was not necessary, but to enter the Kingdom of God a person had to come from the womb once and be born of water (cp. that which is born of “flesh is flesh;” v. 6), and then he must be born from above, via resurrection.

There are some people who say that this phrase means a person has to be water baptized to be saved, but that cannot be the case. When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, no one had to be baptized to be saved. There in Judea John and Jesus both baptized as a sign of recommitment to obedience to the Law, and there is evidence that proselytes to Judaism were water baptized, but in no case did the Word of God, or John or Jesus, say it was a requirement for salvation.

It is clear that baptism was not a requirement for salvation in the Old Testament, so if baptism became a requirement for salvation during the ministry of John or Jesus, the Bible should tell us that, and it never does (Mark 16:16 is an addition to the original text; see commentary on Mark 16:9). Furthermore, water baptism was not universally practiced by Jesus or his disciples. When he sent out the 12 (Luke 9:1-5) and when he sent out the 72 (Luke 10:1-12), in neither case did he tell any of his disciples to baptize those who listened and believed the message. This fact is made even clearer when the rich man came to Jesus and specifically asked how to be saved (Matt. 19:16ff). Jesus answered: “If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.” Jesus did not mention baptism because it was not essential in order to be saved.
Jesus just said the phrase “born of water” when he was speaking to Nicodemus, but he never explained it, so it must have referred to something that Nicodemus could understand without any explanation. Based on that, and the context that “that which is born of flesh [with water] is flesh,” the best conclusion is that “born of water” is literal, and should be understood literally. In the context in which Jesus was speaking, before the Church Age, in order to be saved a person had to be 1) born of water (when he is born from his mother) and 2) born of the spirit (when the earth gives birth to him: Ezek. 37:12-14; Isa. 26:19.) For a more thorough understanding of Nicodemus and John 3, see Appendix H, in The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul, by John Schoenheit.

“the Spirit.” This is a reference to God, who raises people from the dead (see commentary on John 3:3). The word “Spirit,” (pneuma in Greek) does not have the definite article before it, but it is not needed in this case to make the noun “Spirit” definite because it is ruled by the proposition (See commentary on Matthew 1:18).

3:6. “the Spirit.” God is “spirit,” so it is natural that one of the names of God is “the Spirit.” It is God who creates spirit in the dead bodies of believers and gives them life.

“is spirit.” This “spirit” is the spirit God creates in people that gives life to their dead bodies. When Jesus said, “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6), he was saying something that every student of the Old Testament should have known from Old Testament verses such as Isaiah 26:19; Ezekiel 37:12-14, and Daniel 12:2, 13, and Hosea 13:14, which is that God will raise the dead. God will raise the dead by putting “spirit” in their dead bodies, which will give those bodies life. In many cases, the bodies are already disintegrated, so God will have to organize the dust into bodies, just as He did for Adam, and then put spirit into them and give them life. This verse, “that which is born of Spirit is spirit,” is actually very simple when seen in light of the Old Testament prophecies. The Spirit, who is God, creates spirit in the dead bodies of believers and gives those bodies life, and they come up out of the grave in their new, spirit-powered bodies.

3:7. “you must all be born from above.” The “you” is plural in the Greek. Thus, Jesus shifts from the singular in verse 3, “unless someone is born from above,” to the plural, “you all must be born from above” or “you must all be born from above,” making the point that the birth from above is not just for Nicodemus, but applies to everyone. The only way anyone is going to enter the Kingdom is by being “born from above,” that is raised from the dead as per Ezekiel 37:12-14.

3:8. “the Spirit breathes where it wants to, and you hear its voice.” The traditional translation of this verse is “the wind blows,” not “the Spirit breathes.” However, the Greek word pneuma (#4151 πνεῦμα) can mean “spirit” or “wind;” pneō (#4154 πνέω, pronounced pnew-’oh) can mean “breathe” or “blow;” and phonē (#5456 φωνή, pronounced phoe-nay) can mean “voice” or “sound.” Therefore, “the Spirit breathes and you hear its voice,” and “the wind blows and you hear its sound” are both legitimate translations of the Greek words. In this situation we must determine what Jesus was saying from the context and scope of Scripture, not just from the Greek words themselves.

To understand John 3 it is essential that we realize (and few commentators do!) that the context of John 3 is the resurrection from the dead, not the Christian “new birth.” Jesus spoke of being “born from above,” not being “born again,” although most English versions have “born again.” In saying “born from above,” Jesus was making a reference to resurrection: people being raised from the dead and “born” out of the grave.
The Old Testament speaks plainly of the resurrection and refers to it as the earth giving birth. Isaiah 26:19 (NIV84) says, “But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy...the earth will give birth to her dead.” Other versions that use the word “birth” in Isaiah 26:19 include: the BBE; ESV; NASB; NIV; NJB; NRSV; and Rotherham. Other Old Testament verses that speak of the resurrection of the dead include Ezekiel 37:11-14; Daniel 12: 2, 13; and Hosea 13:14. While the Old Testament plainly speaks of the resurrection of the dead and being born out of the grave, there is no Old Testament verse that speaks of the Christian “new birth.” Verses that speak of the new birth are all in the New Testament Epistles (1 Peter 1:3, 23; cp. Titus 3:5; James 1:18).

We must remember that Jesus was trying to instruct Nicodemus about great spiritual truths that Nicodemus should have known but was ignorant of (Jesus said, “Are you the well-known teacher of Israel, and yet do not know these things? John 3:10). Nicodemus was a Pharisee (John 3:1), and therefore would have not correctly understood about what happens to people when they die (see commentary on John 3:1, “Pharisee;” and 1 Corinthians 15:26, “death”). He would also have not had a correct understanding of the future Messianic Kingdom [see Appendix 3: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”].

From studying the Old Testament, Nicodemus should have known about the resurrection and the Messianic Kingdom, but he had no way of knowing about the Christian “New Birth” (being “born again”). It is because most commentators think that this chapter is about the Christian “New Birth” that it does not occur to them to look in the Old Testament for clues to understand what Jesus is trying to teach Nicodemus. [For more on John 3 not being about the Christian new birth, see commentary on John 3:3].

Once we understand that John 3 is about the resurrection from the dead, we can search the Old Testament and look for material about it. We find that the Old Testament links the breath of God with people being raised from the dead. In contrast, “wind” is never associated with the resurrection. This, then, begins to show us that in this context, “Spirit” and “breathes” are more accurate translations than “wind” and “blows.”

The Old Testament links the breath of God with both living and dying. In Genesis 2:7 it is the breath of God that gives life to Adam, just as in Ezekiel 37 it is the breath of God that gives life to the dead. Genesis 2:7 says, “So then Yahweh God formed man, [of the] dust of the ground, and breathed in his nostrils the breath of life—and man became a living soul” (Rotherham). Isaiah 40:7 and Ezekiel 22:21 link the breath of God with death. Isaiah 40:7 (Rotherham) says, “The grass, hath withered, The flower, hath faded, Because, the breath of Yahweh, hath blown upon it! Surely the people, is grass!” Since the breath of God is associated with life and death, it makes perfect sense that in the context of the resurrection that pneô means “breathe” and that Jesus was saying “the Spirit breathes,” and not “the wind blows.”

There is also good evidence that pneuma should be translated “Spirit.” The word pneuma occurs about 380 times in the New Testament (385 in the manuscript on which the KJV is based, 279 times in the Nessle-Aland 27 Greek text), and in the KJV this is the only place pneuma is translated “wind” (the NIV has “wind” here and one other place; which also could easily be translated “spirit”). In contrast to pneuma, the Greek word anemos (#417 ἄνεμος) occurs 31 times in the New Testament and always refers to wind (cp. Matt. 7:25; 8:26; 14:24; Eph. 4:14; Rev. 6:13). What is quite compelling evidence that pneuma should be translated “Spirit” is that pneuma occurs four times in four verses
(3:5-8), and it would seem incongruous if three of them were “spirit” and one “wind.” Leon Morris expresses this plainly: “…we would expect the meaning [of pneuma] to be unchanged. The passage then would mean that man cannot predict the movements of the Spirit” (The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel According to John). The flow of Jesus’ teaching and his implied references to the Old Testament all argue for the translation “Spirit.”

More evidence that pneuma refers to the Spirit and not the wind is that it is assigned a will, i.e., desires. Jesus said the Spirit breathes “where it wants to.” This is not true of the wind, which does not have a will and therefore does not blow “where it wants to.” Commentators such as Meyer and Lange point out that attributing desires to the wind would be the figure of speech “personification,” assigning human characteristics to an inanimate object. But there is no need for the figure of speech if pneuma means “Spirit.”

Translating pneuma as “Spirit” has had supporters for centuries. Commentators such as Origin (c. 185-254 AD) and Augustine (354-430 AD) believed this verse referred to the Spirit, not the wind (referenced in Lange). John Wycliffe had, “The Spirit breathes where it will” in his Bible (c. 1385). John Bengal understood the verse to mean: “the Spirit breathes where it will, and you hear its voice” (Bengal’s New Testament Commentary, c. 1742). Bengal pointed out that “breathe,” “will,” and “voice” are more appropriate to the Spirit than to the wind.

According to Leon Morris, a major reason that modern commentators favor the reading, “the wind blows” rather than “the Spirit breathes” is the phrase, “you hear its voice.” Commentators question, and with good reason, what that would mean. After all, most people who get “born again” would not say they heard the voice of God when they got saved. That would be a compelling argument against the translation “Spirit,” but instead it actually shows why it is essential to understand that this verse is speaking of the resurrection from the dead and not referring to Christian salvation and being “born again.”

As soon as we realize this verse is speaking about people being resurrected from the dead, we see that there is indeed a “voice” associated with that event. Jesus made it clear that people would hear his voice and come out of the tombs: “…the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his [Jesus’] voice and will come out” (John 5:28, 29; cp. 5:25). Paul wrote that the Christian Rapture would be accompanied by “a loud command” and the “voice of the archangel,” and then the dead in Christ would rise (1 Thess. 4:16).

The book of Ezekiel makes it clear that Jesus was trying to teach Nicodemus a truth from the Old Testament about the resurrection. According to Ezekiel, the Spirit of God would breathe into dead people who would then come to life:

Ezekiel 37:9 (Rotherham):
Then said he [God] unto me [Ezekiel], Prophesy unto the spirit,—Prophesy, Son of man, and thou shalt say unto the spirit, Thus, saith My Lord, Yahweh—From the four winds, come thou, O spirit, And breathe into these slain, That they may live.

Since the prophecy in Ezekiel was that the “spirit” would “breathe” into the dead and they would come to life, we can see why, in the context of the resurrection, Jesus
would say that the “Spirit” “breathes;” it took the breath of God to raise the dead. Then Jesus added that the Spirit breathes “where it wants to.” We should not be confused by the phrase “where it wants to,” because people’s true hearts are hidden from us. Unless the Old Testament had let us know, very few people would have thought that when Solomon died he was an evildoer in the eyes of God (1 Kings 11), whereas Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian and Darius the Persian extolled God at the ends of their reigns (Dan. 4:34ff; 6:25ff). At the Resurrection of the Righteous the Spirit of God will breathe on the righteous dead, raising those whom He wants—those who have had faith in Him—and no doubt there will be many surprises. It will certainly be the case that some people we would have never expected to be righteous will be raised, while many who we thought were righteous will be passed over. For example, in his teaching about a Pharisee and tax collector who both prayed to God, it seems surprising that the Pharisee would be judged unrighteous but the tax collector judged righteous (Luke 18:9-14).

Jesus concludes his teaching to Nicodemus by saying, “this is how it is with everyone who is born by way of the Spirit.” The phrase “this is how it is” is from the Greek houtōs [#3779 οὕτως], which generally means, “thus, so, in this manner, in this way,” etc., (cp. Complete Jewish Bible by Stern). Furthermore, we say “by way of the Spirit” because the Greek text is not a simple genitive, but ek tou pneumatos (literally, “from [by way of] the Spirit”). The preposition ek (#1537 ἐκ) only takes the genitive case, which is why “Spirit” is in the genitive case in the sentence. The preposition ek is generally used in one of these six ways: 1. Source: out of, from; e.g., “she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:18; Luke 3:8). 2. Separation: away from, from; e.g., “Out of Egypt I called my son” (Matt. 2:15). 3. Temporal: from; e.g., “he saw a man blind from birth” (John 9:1; Acts 15:21). 4. Causal: because of; e.g., “And if by grace, then is it no more of works” (Rom. 11:6; cp. Mark 9:15). 5. Partitive (in place of a partitive genitive): of, from; e.g., “they will put some of you to death” (Luke 21:16; cp. 2 John 1:4). 6. Means: by, from; e.g., “supporting them from their possessions” (Luke 8:3; cp. 16:9).

In this case the context shows us that the first use of ek listed above, “source: from, out of” is the proper meaning. The BDAG Greek-English lexicon notes that when ek is used in the context of birth, it denotes the role of the male. John 3:8 is speaking of those people who are “born,” i.e., resurrected, “from, by, or by way of,” the Spirit.

In summing up John 3, we see Nicodemus the Pharisee coming to Jesus. Being a Pharisee, he had an incorrect understanding of what happens to a person after he dies and an incorrect understanding of the Kingdom of God. Jesus begins to correct his understanding by saying that if a person is not resurrected from the dead (“born from above”), he will not be able to enter the Messianic Kingdom on earth. It was a fairly straightforward teaching, and had Nicodemus grasped it, Jesus could have gone on and instructed him in deeper spiritual things. Instead, Nicodemus completely misunderstands Jesus and borders on being sarcastic, saying, “Can a man enter a second time into the womb?”

Jesus ignores the sarcasm and presses forward with his teaching, referring to how the Old Testament says the dead will be raised: “The Spirit breathes where it wants to, and you hear its voice, but do not know where it comes from and where it goes; this is how it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” Nicodemus again did not grasp what Jesus was teaching, and said, “How are these things able to happen?” At that point Jesus
openly challenges Nicodemus’ ignorance, saying, “Are you the well-known teacher and don’t know this?” Then Jesus goes on to make a sweeping statement about how in general the leaders of the Jews (“you people;” the “you” is plural in Greek) do not accept what Jesus is teaching, and he expresses some futility about teaching them deep spiritual truths: “If I told you people about earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”

At that point, at the end of John 3:12, the conversation ends, and John 3 returns to the narrator (see commentary on John 3:13). We do not know what happened after verse 12 between Nicodemus and Jesus because the Bible is silent on the matter. We do know that Nicodemus tried to defend Jesus when the Jews wanted to arrest him (John 7:50), and he also contributed to Jesus having a proper burial (John 19:39), so what Jesus did and said obviously had a big effect on him. But did Nicodemus ever go from believing that Jesus was “sent from God” (John 3:2) to believing that he was the actual Messiah? Scripture is silent on this. Nicodemus is never mentioned after Jesus’ burial, including not being mentioned among the disciples in Acts. Thus we do not know if Nicodemus truly came to believe that Jesus is the Messiah or if he remained in his conviction that Jesus was a prophet sent from God. In fact, we will not know that until the Rapture or resurrection, when the Spirit breathes life where it wants and some of those who are dead hear the voice and get up while others remain dead in the grave, awaiting the second resurrection. Thus this record of Nicodemus, which was penned in the Acts period likely after Nicodemus was dead, contains a subtle irony. Jesus’ teaching that the Spirit breathes life where it wants to, and we do not know where it comes from or is going to, applies to Nicodemus himself. We do not know the heart of Nicodemus and whether on that Great Day the Spirit will breathe life into him or not. We certainly hope he came to believe the truth.

“by the Spirit.” In this case, “Spirit” has a capital “S” because it refers to God. The Old Testament revealed that God (also called, “the Spirit), was the one who will give birth from the dead. [See Appendix H in The Christian’s Hope, by Schoenheit.] This is not referring to the gift of holy spirit or the Christian New Birth.

3:11. “you people.” The “you” is plural in Greek, here represented by “you people.” When Jesus says, “you people,” he is specifically referring to the Jewish leaders. Although Jesus was no doubt upset by the fact that the Jews in general had not accepted him or his teaching, in this case he is most specifically speaking about those people in leadership positions among the Jews. John 3:1 told us that Nicodemus was a “ruler” of the Jews, and John 7:50 lets us know that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council of 70 men, so Nicodemus was a very powerful man.

“are not accepting our testimony.” Although some people believed in Jesus as Messiah, the majority did not, and that was especially true of the rulers of the Jews, a point that becomes especially clear at his trial. Nicodemus, at this point in his spiritual journey, was only able to say that Jesus was from God. He did not yet see him as the Messiah, and perhaps he never did.

3:12. “earthly things.” The things that Jesus taught about, though having to do with God or having originated from God, were also related to the earth. For example, the Messiah himself, the Laws of God, and the resurrection. These things had to do with God’s relation to earth and were also part of the revelation of the Old Testament. There should have been no (or very little) debate about them. Instead, the religious world was
completely perverted by tradition and wrong teaching. Yet when Jesus tried to correct the situation by his teaching and signs, the religious world stood against him and the common people were usually confused. Frankly, the same situation exists in the Christian religion today. There are so many unbiblical beliefs and traditions that someone presenting the truth is usually either scoffed at or ignored.

3:13. “And no one.” Jesus did not speak the words recorded in John 3:13 (or any of the words from verse 13 to the end of chapter 3). Jesus did not say he was in heaven while he was standing in Jerusalem speaking to Nicodemus. Jesus stops speaking at the end of verse 12, and that is where the red letters in red-letter Bibles should also stop. Verse 13 is part of the narrative of the Gospel of John, not Jesus speaking. Most of the Gospel of John is the narrative of John. John opens up with narrative, and the majority of chapter 1, and most of the rest of John, is narrative. John chapter 3 opens with narrative (“There was a man of the Pharisees...”), and that narrative continues in verse 13.

Although most people do not realize it, scholars debate what part of John chapter 3 was spoken by Jesus, and at what point the words of Jesus stop and the narration of the Gospel of John restarts. Although the best way to see this debate is by reading the commentaries and articles in theological journals, an easy way to see the debate is by comparing different versions of “red-letter Bibles;” the red letters stop at different places in different Bibles. In the ESV, NASB, and NIV84, Jesus stops speaking (and the red letters stop) at verse 21, but in the NIV (2011 edition), the red letters stop at John 3:15, and John 3:16 is in black letters and is considered part of the narrative. In contrast to those two possibilities, we agree with E. W. Bullinger and assert that Jesus stops speaking in verse 12 and the narrative starts with verse 13. The Companion Bible by Bullinger has notes that make a good case for the fact that Jesus’ speaking ends at verse 12 and John, the narrator, begins with verse 13. In fact, Bullinger lists seven different reasons for Jesus’ talking ending at verse thirteen. Verses 14 and 16 agree with this entirely (see the commentary on those verses).

Bullinger’s seven reasons are: 1) Because the past tense of the Greek verbs that follow verse twelve indicate completed events. 2) Because the expression “only begotten Son” is not used by the Lord of himself, but is used by John describing the Lord (John 1:14, 18, 3:16, 18, 1 John 4:9). 3) Because “in the name of” (3:18, using the Greek word en) is not used by the Lord, but by John (1:12; 2:23, 1 John 5:13). 4) Because to “do the truth” occurs elsewhere only in 1 John 1:6. 5) Because “who is in heaven” (v. 13) points to the fact that the Lord had already ascended at the time John wrote. 6) Because the word “lifted up” refers both to the sufferings (v. 3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34) and to “the glory which should follow” (8:28; 12:32; Acts 2:33; 5:31). 7) Because the break at verse 13 accords best with the context, as shown by the Structure of the section.

Strong and straightforward evidence that Jesus is not speaking after verse 12 comes from just reading the verses in the Greek (and sometimes even the English) and paying attention to the verbs and the content of the verses. For example, verse 13 is very clear: “No one has ascended in to heaven...except the Son of Man.” The verb “ascended” is in the past tense in both Greek and English, and shows us that Jesus had already ascended to heaven when this verse was written. This is confirmed by the last phrase of the verse, which says that Jesus “is” in heaven. The phrase, “which is in heaven,” has all the evidence of being original, and should appear in English Bibles as it does in the King James Version (this point is covered below, under “who is in heaven”).
Orthodox scholars have come up with “explanations” of why they believe this verse says Jesus has ascended into heaven but is still on earth talking to Nicodemus, but they are contrived explanations, invented due to the commentators’ pre-conceived theology. There is no need for anything other than a straightforward reading of this verse to understand it.

The verbs in John 3:14 continue letting us know that Jesus had already ascended to heaven, and was not on earth talking to Nicodemus. Verse 14 says that “just as” Moses “lifted up” the serpent (aorist tense in Greek), even so the Son of Man “was lifted up” (also aorist tense). The tense of the verb “lifted up” is the same for both the serpent of Moses and the Son of Man. Thus, the natural reading of the text is that they both the serpent and the Son of Man were lifted up in the past. Of course, because the orthodox teaching is that John 3:14 occurred long before the crucifixion and ascension of Christ, the natural reading of the Greek text is ignored, and the past tense reading of the last verb is made to read in English as if it were future, so most English versions read that the Son of Man “will be” lifted up. As in verse 13, the natural reading of the verbs show that Jesus had already been crucified; “lifted up.”

The verbs in verse 16 continue to show that Jesus’ death is in the past, and that Jesus was not talking to Nicodemus but rather that verse 16 is the narrative of John (at this point many commentators agree, including the translators of the 2011 NIV, whose red letters stop with verse 15). The text clearly says that God “loved” the world and “gave” His Son. These things were already done, not future events. The serpent being “lifted up,” Christ’s being “lifted up,” that God “loved” the world, and that God “gave” His Son—all of these verbs in the aorist tense, and all refer to past events. This is why even the English versions say God “gave” His Son instead of “will give” him.

So how do orthodox commentators explain these past tense events, especially how God supposedly “gave” His Son long before Jesus died? R. C. H. Lenski, on many subjects a very good commentator, explains the past tense verbs this way: “This verb ‘gave’ really refers to an act that took place in the other world, where any consideration of time would be inadequate, meaning only that we are in a poor human way speaking of things beyond us.” So in other words, Lenski claims that when the Bible says God “gave” His Son before He actually “gave” him, it was because the event happened in “the other world” where time is not counted like we count time. That explanation is contrived and ignores the plain reading of the Greek. We contend that there is no need to make up such bizarre explanations of verses which can be read and understood in a simple and straightforward manner. After all, is there any other place that Jesus speaks in a way that we cannot simply understand, but have to explain by saying that Jesus spoke of a future event in the past because the act “took place in the other world”? Certainly not to our knowledge.

Beyond a plain and straightforward reading of the Greek text, which places the events after verse 12 in the past, another reason to believe that Jesus stopped speaking in verse 12, and verse 13 resumes the narrative of John, is that from verse 3 to verse 12, whenever Jesus speaks, he uses “I.” However, after verse 12, we find the third person “him” in the text. The logical reason for that shift is that from verse 13 on, the Apostle John was writing about “him.” In verse 3, Jesus is speaking and he says, “I say.” In verse 5 he says, “I say.” In verse 7 he says, “I said.” In verse 11 he says, “I say,” and in verse 12 he says, “I told” and “I tell.” In verse 13, there is a sudden shift. We no longer see “I,”
we see “him,” and other references to Jesus in the third person. For example, in verse 13, the text refers to “the one” from heaven, and in verse 14, instead of saying “everyone who believes in me” (which Jesus did many times in the Gospel of John, cp. John 6:35; 7:38; 11:25, 26; and 12:44, 46), the text says, “everyone who believes in him.” When the evidence is weighed, the words from John 3:13 to the end of the chapter were not spoken by Jesus, but penned by the narrator, the Apostle John, long after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension.

“who is in heaven.” This last phrase of this verse as it appears in the KJV and REV is omitted in the modern Greek texts, but its originality is still disputed. Although the modern Greek texts such as Nestle-Aland and SBL text omit the phrase, and the modern English Bibles based upon those texts omit it also, there is good reason to believe the scholars compiling those modern texts have made a mistake in this instance. The reason the modern texts omit the phrase is that it is omitted in the Egyptian texts (the Alexandrian text family). Although the Egyptian witnesses carry a lot of weight, they are not the final word on the originality of any verse. The phrase is included in the texts of every other Greek text family, and it is also in early texts other than Greek, such as the Syriac, Coptic and Armenian texts.

When a word or phrase is in some Greek manuscripts, but not in others, scholars typically use a number of tests to try to reconstruct the original text. One of those tests is, “What do the earliest texts say?” Another is, “Is there a reading which is dominant among all the various text families and the early versions that are in other languages?” A very important test is, “Which reading is the most difficult?” This is important because scribes normally took difficult readings, either difficult grammatically, or difficult to understand, and simplified them. In this verse, the “difficulty” test is very important because the early Egyptian texts omit the phrase, but from a pure “difficulty” standpoint, having the phrase as part of the verse is much more difficult than not having it. The verse reads more simply without it. Thus the evidence of the “difficulty” test, and especially combined with the fact that only Egyptian texts omit the phrase, would lead us to conclude that the phrase is original. One thing is certain: the phrase was either invented by scribes and added to the original text, or it was original and was deleted from the original text. That leads us to the question, “Are there historical factors that would make a scribe alter the text one way or the other?” We will see that there was a reason Egyptian scribes would have deleted the phrase, “who is in heaven.”

The phrase “who is in heaven” is difficult because according to Christian tradition, the words in verse 13 were spoken by Jesus when he was in Jerusalem speaking with Nicodemus (which is not correct, as we saw above). So the fact that the verse says “who is in heaven” created a huge problem. How could the Bible say Jesus was in heaven when he was on earth speaking with Nicodemus? The scribes had an easy solution to that problem: omit the difficult words. While it is easy to see why an Egyptian scribe would want to omit those words, no one has ever been able to give a reason why any scribe would want to invent those words and put them in the Bible. There just does not seem to be any good reason why an early scribe would add, “who is in heaven,” to a verse that read much more clearly without it.

While the phrase “who is in heaven,” seems out of place to the ordinary reader, this was even more true in Egypt, where huge debates about the Deity of Christ were going on, and where many scribes did not believe in the Trinity. At least the Trinitarian
scribes believed that Jesus could be on earth and in heaven at the same time, so they would not have seen a need to modify the verse by omitting the phrase (R. C. H. Lenski is an example of a Trinitarian commentator who has no problem with Jesus being both in heaven and on earth at the same time: “…he is both here and is still in heaven” p. 252). But to the non-Trinitarian scribes in Egypt, it would make no sense at all that Jesus could be on earth and in heaven at the same time. Thus in Egypt, there would have been pressure to omit the difficult phrase, “who is in heaven.”

We assert that on the basis of the tests that are usually used to determine which texts are original, and from the fact that the phrase, which properly understood does make perfect sense, that the phrase is original. The non-Trinitarian scribes in Egypt removed the phrase about the Son of Man being in heaven because they misunderstood it, and they saw it as a contradiction in the text.

But if the phrase “who is in heaven” is original, does that mean the explanation is believing in the Trinity? Absolutely not. The key to understanding John 3:13 is not that Jesus was on earth and in heaven at the same time, but rather that Jesus did not speak the words recorded in John 3:13.

As we have seen in the earlier commentary entry on this verse, there is a very simple answer to why the phrase, “who is in heaven,” is in the text: Jesus was in heaven and the words were not spoken by Jesus but penned by the Apostle John as part of the narrative of the chapter. But why would the scribes, even Egyptian scribes, not have recognized that? Did the inclusion of the phrase have other implications besides the Trinity? The answer is yes, it did. Verse 13 (and also 14-21) was also traditionally ascribed to Jesus because of its implications about the state of the dead. It is well understood by theologians and Bible scholars that no one could go to heaven before Jesus died and paid for the sins of mankind. Since every human has sin, if even one person could go to heaven before Jesus died for the sins of mankind, then that would mean that people could go to heaven without having had their sins paid for, and thus Jesus did not have to die to pay for sins—the death of the Messiah became unnecessary.

But in the first century it was commonly believed that people’s souls lived on after the body died, and if the souls of righteous people, like Abraham and Sarah, could not go to heaven, where did they go? We know the Bible actually teaches that when a person dies he is dead and in the ground, awaiting the resurrection, but that truth was not solidly believed by the early church and still is not widely believed today. The Jews who were Pharisees who were getting born again and joining the early Church believed in immediate life after death, and so did the Greeks and Romans. That meant that new converts to Christianity, both Jew and Gentile, brought the belief into the Church that the soul lived on after the body died. The fact that Paul had to write about what happens when people die (1 Cor. 15) shows there was division about it even when the Apostles were still alive, and soon after the death of the Apostles belief that the soul (or spirit) continued to live on after a person died was quite firmly established as orthodoxy. Thus it was, and still is, a common belief that the souls of believers who died before the time of Jesus Christ went to a place of waiting that some theologians refer to as “Paradise,” and it is supposedly similar to Abraham’s bosom in Luke 16).

According to orthodox teaching, what happened to the righteous souls in Paradise that were awaiting Jesus’ death and resurrection? They waited in “Paradise” until Jesus ascended to heaven, at which time he took all those righteous souls with him to heaven.
We are now in a position to see how John 3:13 could cause problems for people who believed the soul lives on after death. Since John 3:13 says that “no one has ascended into heaven,” if Jesus himself spoke the words, then the doctrine of immediate life after death was not challenged and not threatened. Jesus was still on earth talking to Nicodemus, so the souls of righteous dead people were still waiting in Paradise. However, if verse 13 was the words of John the narrator and was written after Jesus had ascended to heaven, then the doctrine of immediate life after death has problems. If John penned the words, “no one has ascended up to heaven” long after Jesus ascended, then when Jesus ascended into heaven he did not take the righteous souls with him. There would be no reason for righteous souls to be in a “waiting area” after Jesus ascended, so if they did not go up to heaven with Jesus, then it is logical that the orthodox teaching that the soul lives on after the body dies is wrong, and that when people die they are actually fully dead and in the grave, awaiting the resurrection or Rapture (which we assert is the true teaching of Scripture).

In examining John 3:13, we assert that the textual evidence shows the final phrase is original: Jesus had ascended into heaven and was in heaven, but no one else was in heaven. We also assert that the textual evidence shows that Jesus did not speak the verse, but rather it is part of the narrative of the Gospel of John. That makes this verse one of many verses in the Bible that teaches that no one is in heaven. The dead are asleep until Jesus comes and raises them up at the Rapture, the First Resurrection, or the Second Resurrection (see the commentary on 1 Cor. 15:26; and Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, Is There Death After Life?).

3:14. “Even as Moses lifted up the serpent...the Son of Man was lifted up.” Although almost all the versions treat Jesus’ lifting up as if it is future, a quick look at the Greek text shows that, from the writer’s standpoint, it is in the past. The Greek verb “to lift up” is the same for both the serpent and the Son of Man, hupsoō (#5312 ὑψῶ), and both are in the aorist tense. The translators ignore this, believing that Jesus is the one speaking in the verse and therefore referring to his future crucifixion, but the fact is that Jesus was not saying it, John was, as part of the narration of the Gospel of John, and the crucifixion was many years in the past when John was writing. [For verse 14 not being the words of Jesus, see commentary on John 3:13, “And no one”].

3:15. “life in the Age to come.” The Greek phrase that we translate “life in the Age to come” is zōē aιώνιος (#2222 ζωή; #166 αἰώνιος). The word zōē is the noun, “life,” while aιώνιος is the adjective, “Age.” (Occasionally the phrase occurs as aιώνιος zōē, with the noun last; John 17:3; Acts 13:46, but that is the exception, and there is no difference in meaning). English Bibles usually translate the phrase zōē aιώνιος as “eternal life” or “everlasting life,” but we feel that most of the time that is not a good translation, and can even be confusing. The phrase zōē aιώνιος (“Age life”) refers to everlasting life which begins in the Messianic Age, also known as the “Millennial Kingdom” (cp. Rev. 20:1-6). [For more information on everlasting life, see Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].

3:16. “For God.” Jesus did not speak the words of this verse to Nicodemus but they are part of the narration of the Gospel of John, penned by John long after Jesus had ascended to heaven. One way we can tell this is that John 3:16 is the teaching about how to be saved after Jesus died and resurrected, not before. When Jesus told people how to be saved when he was alive, although he did tell them to believe in him, he also told them to
keep the commandments. For example, he told the rich young ruler that to have everlasting life he had to keep the commandments (Matt. 19:17). More evidence that John 3:16 is part of the narration of the Gospel of John and not Jesus speaking to Nicodemus is that the verse says, “He gave His only begotten Son.” This refers to Jesus’ death as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind, and it is referred to as a past event. But God’s giving His Son was still future when Jesus spoke to Nicodemus. [For more on verse 16 not being the words of Jesus, see commentary on John 3:13, “who is in heaven”].

“so loved.” The word “so” is a translation of the Greek word houtō (#3779 οὕτω), which is an adverb, and refers to “in this way” or “this much,” depending on the context. Thus, John 3:16 can open with the phrase, “God loved the world in this way: He gave....” as the Holman Christian Standard Bible does, or it could open by saying, “This is how much God loved the world: He gave....” Both meanings are in the Greek word houtō. In this case, both meanings are accurate. Giving His Son is both the way God showed His love, and shows us how much He loved the world. The English word “so” contains elements of both “how” and “how much,” so it is a good translation of houtō.

“so that.” The Greek word hina (#2443 ἵνα), plus the verb in the subjunctive mood shows this to be a purpose-result clause (see commentary on Matt. 2:15), “resulting in...what was spoken being fulfilled.” By giving his Son, God both intended to, and His action resulted in, saving those who believe.

“will not perish.” The Greek verb apollumi (#622 ἀπόλλυμι) means “perish.” It is in the subjunctive mood, which is usually known as the mood of condition, reflecting an “if” or a possibility. This verse is an example of when translating the Greek text literally can cause problems for an English reader. The average English Bible student reads John 3:16 in most versions, and reads something like, “that whoever believes in him should not perish.” But why the word “should?” The word “should” makes it seem like if a person believes, he “should” not perish (or “may” not perish, as the NRSV, Darby, and Young’s Literal Translation say), but maybe he will perish.

The key to understanding the verse is that the subjunctive mood of the verb apollumi is due to its association with hina, “so that,” which often takes a subjective mood (see commentary on “so that” above in this verse). So the subjunctive mood in this case is due to a grammatical construction, not due to there being an “if” about our salvation. Some modern versions besides the REV, such as the HCSB and the NET, are ignoring the “literal” translation due to the confusion it causes, and translating the verse the way a Greek reader would have understood it—that if anyone believe in the Son, that person will have everlasting life.

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].

3:17. “send the Son into the world.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

“to judge.” It was not God’s purpose or intent to send Jesus into the world to judge the world. God sent Jesus into the world to save the world. However, because of mankind’s rejection of God, Jesus will judge the world to insure that those who accept God will have a wonderful everlasting future.

3:18. “name.” See 1 John 3:23 note “on the name of his son Jesus Christ.”
3:20. “worthless.” The Greek is *phaulos* (#5337 φαῦλος), and means, “worthless, “good for nothing.” It is not necessarily that the works are “evil,” but just worthless. We are created to do good works (Eph. 2:10), and if we waste our lives in that which is worthless to God, there is a consequence for that.

“are exposed.” The Greek is *elegchō* (#1651 ἐλέγχω), and can mean “reprove, correct, convict.” Here the sense is more that the person is afraid he will be discovered, and then of course reproof would follow. The subjunctive mood of the verb comes from the preposition *hina* earlier in the phrase, but that does not demand a translation with “would” or “should” (cp. the KJV, “lest his deeds should be reproved”). The verb *elegchō* is in the aorist tense, speaking not to the fact that the discovery would be sudden or complete in one act, but rather to the fact that it would occur.

3:25. “ceremonial cleansing.” The Greek is *katharismos* (#2512 καθαρισμός), and it refers to “cleansing,” especially ritual or ceremonial cleansing, that is a cleansing that is ritual in nature and does not actually cleanse in and of itself. For example, baptism is a “ritual cleansing,” because no amount of washing in water will wash away sin. Yet, if God commands it, and the person obeys, then God sees the act of obedience and cleanses the person from sin.

The connection between 3:25 and 3:26 is subtle but unmistakable. A certain Jew got into an argument with John’s disciples about ceremonial cleansing, and baptism was a type of ceremonial cleansing—it did not cleanse from sin, but it represented that the person was cleansed from sin. That discussion would have raised other questions about baptism in the minds of John’s disciples and thus made the bridge into verse 26.

3:28. “can testify.” John’s point here is not that his disciples were in fact testifying that he did not claim to be the messiah, but that they could. He calls on them to be witnesses on his behalf. The Greek reads, “You all testify for me,” using the dative of advantage.

3:29. “the friend of the bridegroom.” In this context, the friend of the bridegroom is John himself. This is a general, not a specific, reference to the Eastern wedding, where the friend of the bridegroom is a true friend and is just happy that the bridegroom is so happy. John had been faithfully ministering and baptizing, but now “all” were going to Jesus (v. 26.). Was John envious? Not at all, and he illustrated his point by comparing his feelings to a common occurrence: the happiness of the friend of the bridegroom because the bridegroom was happy.

3:32. “no one.” The figure of speech, *hyperbole*, exaggeration, as the next verse shows (and we know Jesus had some disciples). The phrase “no one” harkens back to 3:11, that the rules did not accept Jesus’ testimony, and also states hyperbolically that the majority of the people rejected him as well. As his ministry went on, more and more people believed in him.

3:36. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.] “life.” Here the word “life” refers to “life in the Age to Come,” which can be determined from the context. See commentary on John 5:40, Luke 10:28.

Chapter 4
4:6. “just as he was.” The Greek is houtō (#3779 oú̂tō; pronounced hoo'-toe), and it means “in this manner, thus, so, in this way.” Lenski points out that in this context it means “as he was.” As Robinson points out, the “thus” [of the KJV] refers to his weary state (Word Pictures in the New Testament). Jesus got to Jacob’s Well about noon, worn out from the trip, and sat down “just as he was,” in that tired condition, by the well, while his disciples went to town to buy food. Jesus was human, and got tired like all of us do. Yet even in his tired state he draws energy from his faith and conviction, and speaks with the woman at the well, then the Samaritans. Verses like this should provide great inspiration to us as Christians. When the Bible says that Jesus Christ loved us, and did his Father’s will, not his own, verses like these are the proof. Jesus pushed himself to love people and do the will of the Father, and we should follow his example.

“the sixth hour.” The “sixth hour” was about our noon. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].

4:10. “you would have been the one to ask.” The emphasis in the Greek is hard to reproduce in English, but it is very important to get the impact of what is being said. In both verse 9 and verse 10 the “you” is emphatic, being expressed on its own and not as part of the verb. We might get the sense by capital letters: 9So the Samaritan woman says to him, “How is it that YOU, a Jew, asks me for a drink, since I am a Samaritan woman?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) 10Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who is the one who is saying to you, ‘Give me to drink,’ YOU would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”

“living water.” In Jewish terminology, “living water” is flowing water, especially water that flows from a source such as a spring or river, and is not stagnant, such as well water.

4:11. “Lord.” One of the uses of “Lord” was a title of polite address, like we today say “Sir.” This woman did not know who Jesus was at this time, but still used the polite and formal form of address.

“nothing to draw with.” Many wells of the time were just a hole in the ground, or a hole with a short wall of rocks to keep dirt from being kicked it. Each person who wanted water had a rope and bucket of some sort. The most common “buckets” were skin bags or “buckets” that would not break if they hit the sides of the well, although clay jugs were used as well, but great care had to be taken with them.

4:14. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

4:15. “come all the way here.” A brief look at how much work it took to live before modern water pumps and pipes. Just getting water to drink and cook with was hard work.


4:24. “spirit.” God is “spirit,” that is, He is an immaterial substance. The word “spirit” has many meanings. This is true in English, and also true in Hebrew (ruach = spirit) and Greek (pneuma = spirit). The Greek noun pneuma comes from the verb pneō, “to blow or breathe.” Thus, to the ancient Greeks, pneuma was “breath,” and it came to be associated
with invisible things that exerted a force or power. Although pneuma is a noun, it is a “verbal noun,” (a noun that has the inherent characteristics of a verb or is grammatically related to a verb), so pneuma is always associated with the invisible power exercised by it. The word “wind” is a good example of a verbal noun, a noun that cannot be divorced from the power or force associated with it. There is no such thing as “wind” without action, even though “wind” is a noun. Similarly, pneuma is associated with its action or power. In fact a good basic definition of pneuma, “spirit,” is something invisible that exerts a force. That is why some of the things that are called “spirit” in the Greek language are: God (John 4:24); the gift of God known as holy spirit (Acts 2:38); angels (Heb. 1:14); demons (Matt. 8:55); “breath” or “life” (Luke 8:55); wind; and attitudes, thoughts, or emotions (Matt. 26:41). All of these things are invisible but exert force or power. [For more information on “spirit” and its different uses, see Appendix 6: “Usages of Spirit”.

4:26. “I…am he.” A clear indication of Christ’s love. He clearly reveals himself to this woman, whose heart is pure and simple, so that she can believe. To others he veiled his identity and had them search (cp. John 10:24-26).

4:27. “with a woman.” The Greek reads with “a woman,” not “the woman,” as some versions have. The separation between the sexes in public was such that the disciples were amazed that Jesus was speaking publicly with any woman at all.

4:28. “left her water jar.” The woman believed that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, so she left the mundane things of her life behind in order to share the news. Many of us would do well to do the same. How much “life” consumes our time and energy such that we cannot share the Messiah with others? The text notes that she left the water jar she was going to bring her water back to town in, but there were other things, such as her rope (which would have been very valuable) that she must have left also which are not mentioned. The point was not to give a laundry list of what she left behind. A reader familiar with biblical life, upon hearing she left the water she came for, would realize she left the other stuff as well.

4:29. “everything.” Of course Jesus did not tell the woman everything she ever did. However, it is often the effect of personal prophecy that a person feels very connected to God and the one who gives the prophecy.

4:32. “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” It was the custom that people did not usually eat and talk. Meals were customarily eaten in silence. Thus Jesus did not want to start eating when the people were coming to talk to him.

4:34. “the will of him who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

4:35. “You have a saying.” The Greek is a question that expects an affirmative answer. The evidence is that Jesus was referring to a common saying or proverb of his time. It is not attested in the literature we have found, but that would be true of many sayings today. They are not written down much and would be easily lost. We do not have much “common literature” from the time of Christ.

The evidence is good that Jesus is not making a literal statement; that is, it was not literally four months until the literal harvest. It seems clear that he was traveling in hot weather. He was tired from the travel (4:6), and it was about noon, so it would be
understandable that he was thirsty. If he was traveling in or near summer, the harvest would have already started. If he was traveling a full four months before harvest then it would have been the rainy season and much colder, and there would be plenty of water so that he would not have had to ask a Samaritan woman for some.

Sayings about things coming later or people having to wait for things are common in most societies, such as our “All things come to those who wait” (the more modern version of which is “Good things come to those who wait”). This record seems to be a case of Jesus getting his disciples to see the urgency of the times. While they may have been accustomed to having to wait for things, or not hurry to get things done, Jesus tells them that they do not have a lot of time and they cannot “just wait” for the harvest, the harvest fields are ready now, and they need to be diligent to harvest while they can. The same can be said for us today. We cannot be fooled into thinking we have lots of time to evangelize and can take our time. Our time may be short, and anyone with whom we would like to speak may not have much time either.

“Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“white to harvest.” While it was true that the grains turned from green to a pale golden-white color as they were ripe to harvest, that was not what Jesus was referring to. The men of the city were coming to meet him, and their robes would have been the whitish color of the standard robe of the day.

4:47. “down.” This is literal. See commentary on John 4:49, “come down.”

4:49. “come down.” This is quite literal. Capernaum was almost 700 feet below sea level. Most people know that the Dead Sea is the lowest spot on the face of the earth. The surface of the Dead Sea is almost 1300 feet below sea level. But the Sea of Galilee is also below sea level, almost 700 feet, and Capernaum is on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

4:52. “seventh hour.” About our 1 PM. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].

4:54. “when he had come out of Judea into Galilee.” This was not Jesus’ second sign, but his second sign in Galilee. John does not include the signs he did in Judea in this counting (cp. John 2:23).

“again.” The word again goes with “did,” Jesus “did again” signs in Galilee. He had done them in Judea. John 2:23 says he did “signs” (plural). Besides that, he demonstrated his prophetic ministry to Nicodemus (John 3) and the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well (John 4). When Jesus did return to Galilee, the people welcomed him because they had seen the signs he did in Jerusalem at the Feast of Passover (John 4:45). This second sign in Galilee was a healing, and we can certainly assume that some of the signs in Judea were healings. Now Jesus heals “again” in Galilee as a sign of his being the Messiah.

Chapter 5

5:3. See commentary on verse 4.

5:4. The last sentence in John 5:3 (that occurs in some versions such as the King James) and John 5:4, were added to the text as an explanatory note. They were not part of the original text. There are many pieces of evidence to support the conclusion that this part of
the text was not original: it is omitted in the earliest and best manuscripts; in more than twenty Greek witnesses there are markings that it was not original; it has a number of words that are not found elsewhere in John’s writings; and it has a number of variant forms in the manuscript tradition, showing that when it was added, different scribes added it differently [For more information, see Metzger, Textual Commentary].

The information that became our John 5:3, 4 likely started as a marginal note that explained what the man in our 5:7 was talking about, when he said he did not have anyone to lower him into the pool when the water was stirred. We have evidence from the Church Father Tertullian (145-220) that he knew of the tradition or belief that an angel stirred the water. At some point, the note by our 5:7 got copied into the text and became the 5:3, 4 of some of the early English versions, such as the KJV.

In the early manuscripts, which were all hand written, when a scribe would accidentally omit a word or phrase, the only way to preserve it was to write it in the margin so the next scribe could copy it back into the text. But this created a problem because sometimes the marginal commentary of the scribes got copied into manuscripts as if they were part of the original text. Thankfully today, due to the fact we now have discovered over 5,700 Greek manuscripts and we can compare them all by computer, most marginal readings (like this one in John 5:3, 4) can be decisively determined to be an addition and taken out of the modern versions.

5:10. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

“The man who had been healed.” The Greek is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun), and simply reads, “The Jews said to the healed,….” [For more on substantives, see the commentary on Matthew 5:37].

5:15. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

5:16. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

5:17. “is always working.” The verb working is in the present tense, which Lenski calls the durative present, and thus the word “always” is implied in the verb in this context, or as Neuman and Nida assert, the phrase “until now” means “always;” God has always been at work, without taking a break (cp. NIV: “My father is always at His work”). The Jews were upset with Jesus because he healed on the Sabbath. Jesus’ answer to them was short and to the point. God is always working, even on the Sabbath, and so is His Son, Jesus. That is why the Jews correctly concluded that he was making himself equal to God. Not identical with God, but equal to Him, as His Son, in the way he operated.

5:18. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

“But also was calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.” This verse shows us that Jesus knew who he was and what he was doing. It is sometimes taught that Jesus either never claimed to be the promised Messiah, or that he only took on that role as his ministry progressed and he realized that the people thought he was the
Messiah. But the truth is that Jesus knew he was the Messiah and lived his life in obedience to the will of his heavenly Father.

Some Trinitarians claim that this verse is evidence that Jesus was God, because it speaks of Jesus making himself equal with God. That is not what the verse is saying. The people in the time and culture of the Bible knew that children often carried the authority of the family. For example, the son of a king had authority. When Christ said that God was his Father, the Pharisees correctly interpreted that to mean that he had God’s authority on earth, something that Jesus was in fact saying (cp. John 5:17ff).

Actually, this verse is unsupportive of the doctrine of the Trinity. It accurately records that Jesus was saying that “God” was his father, not that he was himself God, or that he was “God the Son.” It is clear that Jesus’ authority came from the fact that he was the Son of God, not God Himself.

There are a couple fundamental ways of understanding John 5:18, and neither supports the Trinity. One is that Jesus was “equal” to the Father in a limited sense because in that culture children carried the authority of the family. The second is that it was the Jews who claimed that Jesus was making himself equal with God, and they were wrong.

Jesus could have been making himself equal to the Father in a limited sense. For example, in John 5 he spoke of people honoring the Son just as they honored the Father. Also, he spoke about dead people hearing his voice and coming up out of the graves. The concept of people being “equal” is found in several places in the Bible. For example, when Joseph was ruling Egypt under Pharaoh, Judah said to him, “You are equal to Pharaoh himself” (Gen. 44:18). Paul wrote about men who wanted to be considered “equal with us” (2 Cor. 11:12). No Christian we are aware of believes that Joseph and Pharaoh or Paul and his opponents are “of one substance,” and make up “one being” simply because they are called “equal.” We believe that John 5:18 should be handled like the others verses that mention equality. Jesus was using God’s power and authority on earth, and was thus “equal” to God in the same way Joseph, who was using Pharaoh’s authority and power, was equal to Pharaoh.

It is also possible that the Jews were claiming that Christ was saying more than he actually was saying, and that Jesus almost always emphasized that his Father was greater than he was. In fact, in the very next verse, John 5:19, Jesus says that the Son can only do what he sees the Father doing.

It is also possible that the two explanations above are both partially true: Jesus was saying he was the Son of God, which gave him some equality with God in his authority, but also the Jews, in their attempts to defame Jesus, were exaggerating what he was saying and telling people that he was claiming to have power and authority that, in fact, Jesus never claimed.

[For more discussion on this verse see, Charles Morgridge, *True Believer’s Defense Against Charges Preferred by Trinitarians*, 1837, p. 118; and *The Racovian Catechism*, in Polish 1605; in Latin 1609; in English 1818; both books are available through Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, p. 133. See also Patrick Navas, *Divine Truth or Human Tradition*, pp. 173-185].

5:19. “the Son is not able to do anything on his own.” This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his father, God. See commentary on John 8:28.
“the Son also does in the same way.” Cp. NRSV. The Greek for “likewise” is homoiōs (#3668 ὁμοίως), meaning, “likewise, so, similarly, in the same way” (BDAG). 5:20. “is a friend to.” The Greek is phileō (#5368 φιλέω). It is hard to translate the verb phileō in this context and keep the English as a verb. If we say “the Father loves the Son,” as most versions do, we lose the meaning of phileō here. We could say, the Father is friendly to the Son,” or “the Father is fond of the Son,” but these seem too weak. We meet “friendly” people all the time, but they are not friends. We could say the father “befriended” the Son, but the verb in Greek is in the present tense, and “befriended” seems to be a past action. We think “is a friend to” is the best way to carry the meaning of the Greek text into the English. For a more complete understanding of phileō, and how it is different from agapē love, see the note on John 21:15.

“so that.” Purpose-result clause. See Matthew 2:15 commentary, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.” These works are done for the purpose of marveling, and are performed with the result that people marvel.

5:23. “the Father who sent him.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

5:24. “is hearing…is believing.” Both the verbs “hearing” and “believing” are in the present tense, active voice, meaning the action is currently occurring. It is important to remember when reading the Gospels that there was no new birth with its guarantee of salvation before the Day of Pentecost; the new birth is an aspect of the Administration of Grace [For the guarantee of Christian salvation, see 1 Peter 1:23, “born again”]. In the Old Testament and Gospels a person had to maintain his faith to be saved, so the fact that the hearing and believing were a current reality is important to the proper understanding of the verse.

“him who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

“does not come.” The verb erchomai (“does come” #2064 ἔρχομαι) is in the present tense. The Gospel of John has a constant tension between the present and the future, and that tension is well represented in this verse, since the person “has crossed over” (past tense), “does not come” (present tense), and “has” (present tense), “life in the Age to come” (which will be fully manifested in the future when the “Age to come” arrives). The person is hearing Jesus and believing in God, and according to Jesus, believing was the work that God required to have everlasting life. Jesus said, “This is the work of God: that you believe on him whom he has sent” (John 6:29). If we were to translate the verbs in John 5:24 quite literally, the verse would read something such as this: “Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who is hearing my word and is believing him who sent me has, at this time, life in the Age to come, and does not come into condemnation, but has crossed over from death into life.”

Because “the one who is hearing my word and is believing him who sent me” was believing at that time, he has everlasting life at that time too (of course, if he quits believing, his everlasting life is not guaranteed). The present/future tension in the Bible is a challenge to translators as well as believers. We have to take the time to learn what God
is trying to tell us when He goes back and forth between the past, present, and future. In this case, although the Day of Judgment is future, God is continually reckoning people’s sins and their good works, so although a person’s judgment and condemnation (or exoneration) will not be fully realized until the Day of Judgment, there is a sense in which that condemnation is happening today, and the Greek communicates that sense by having “does not come” in the present tense.

In translating the verse, some versions place the emphasis on the fulfillment of the judgment, which will occur on the Day of Judgment, and therefore have that the believer “will not” be condemned (cp. HCSB; NET: NIV). Other versions more literally follow the Greek text and say the believer “does not” come under condemnation, meaning that he is not piling up sins that will be condemned on the Day of Judgment and thus he will not be condemned on that great Day (cp. ESV; NASB; NRSV).

Another thing to pay attention to in the verse is that it does not say, “believes in him who sent me,” but “believes him who sent me.” Many people believe “in” God but do not demonstrate that they believe God by doing what He says to do. By hearing and believing Jesus we are hearing and believing God. John 5:30 and 14:10 teaches us that Jesus’ words are God’s words.

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”]

5:28. “in the tombs.” This verse, among many others, clearly shows that when a person dies, he is dead in the ground. Jesus did not think, or teach, that when a person died only his body went into the ground, but his soul (or spirit) went to “heaven” or “paradise.” The people are in the tombs, and they will be resurrected to life from being dead in the ground.

5:29. “Resurrection of Life.” The “Resurrection of Life” is also called the “first resurrection” and the “Resurrection of the Righteous” (see commentary on Acts 24:15). The word “life” is sometimes used for “everlasting life” or “life in the Age to Come.” Here it is obvious when Christ says the Resurrection of Life that he is referring to the life that will last forever. Most Christians misunderstand the verses about the resurrection because they think dead people are already alive in heaven or hell. In that case, why have a resurrection? But it is tradition that the soul or spirit lives on after the death of the body. The Bible says the dead are fully dead until they are raised from the dead at the Rapture or a resurrection (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:29, “death”).

“worthless.” The Greek is phaulos (#5337 φαῦλος), and means, worthless, good for nothing. It is not necessarily that the works are “evil,” but just worthless. We are created to do good works (Eph. 2:10), and if we waste our lives in that which is worthless to God, there is a consequence for that.

5:30. “am not able to do anything on my own.” This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his father, God. See commentary on John 8:28.

“the will of him who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

5:36. “that the Father sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts.
For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

5:37. **“the Father that sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

“**nor seen his form.**” This verse, and there are many others like it, is a problem for Christians who have been taught that no one has ever seen God. Actually, God does come into concretion in a human form that we (and angels) can see and understand. He does this so that He can better relate to His creation. God created mankind so He could intimately fellowship with us, so it is reasonable that He occasionally becomes visible and takes on human form to be intimate with His creation. This also fits with Genesis saying that God created us in His image. There are Old Testament verses in which Yahweh appears in the form of a man, and those appearances continue in the New Testament. Scripture records a number of people to whom God appeared: Adam and Eve (they heard His footsteps, Gen. 3:8), Abraham (Gen. 12:7; 15:1; 17:1;18:1), Jacob (Gen. 28:13), Moses and the elders of Israel (Exod. 24:9-11), Samuel (1 Sam. 3:10), Solomon (two times: 1 Kings 3:5; 9:2; 11:5), Micaiah (1 Kings 22:19-22), Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-5), Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:26-28), Amos (Amos 7:7), Daniel (Dan. 7:9-14), Stephen (Acts 7:56) and the Apostle John (Rev. 5:1-8). In contrast to many great men and women of God who saw God in a visible form, Jesus upbraided the unbelieving Jews by saying: “You have never heard his voice at any time, nor seen his form” (John 5:37). For more on God taking on human form, see the commentary on Acts 7:55.

5:38. **“him who he sent.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

5:39. **“life in the Age to come.”** This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].


5:47. **“since.”** The Greek word “if” often has the meaning, “since.”

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**Chapter 6**

6:4. [the Passover]. There is excellent contextual and ancillary evidence that the words, “the Passover” were not in the original text, even though they are in the Greek texts that we have today. See Walter Cummins, *The Acceptable Year of the Lord*, p. 65-73.

6:9. **“young boy here who has.”** The fact that the boy had so much when other people had nothing suggests that he was an enterprising young man who brought bread and fish to sell to the crowd that was following Jesus. If so, Jesus would have paid for the food and then given it to the multitude.

6:10. **“sit.”** The Greek word literally means “recline,” *anapiptô* (#377 ἀναπίπτω). The Jews of this period followed the Greek custom of reclining, or leaning on one’s side to eat. Here Jesus commands the disciples to have the people recline, which, functionally,
would mean get ready to eat. Contrary to popular artistic renditions, Jesus himself and the disciples were reclining at the Last Supper (Luke 22:14; John 13:12).

6:14. “the prophet.” The crowd was referring to the prophet that Moses said would come (Deut. 18:15). There has been much scholarly discussion about who the Jews thought this prophet was. Likely the designation “prophet” is used here because that is the bottom line truth that everyone agreed on—that this man was the prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15. Beyond that, it seems clear from what we know of the Jews in that time period and area (Galilee; the home base of most of the Pharisees, there was more influence of the Sadducees around Jerusalem) that some of them believed “the prophet” was the Messiah himself, some believed the prophet was a forerunner to the Messiah and distinct from the Messiah (cp. 1:20, 21), and some likely believed that the man who started as the prophet may have become the Messiah (F. L. Godet; Commentary on John’s Gospel).

The sad truth in this record is that the people did not want the Messiah who actually stood before them and was calling for humility and self-sacrifice. They wanted the Messiah they had projected in their minds, one who would meet their selfish needs and deliver them from oppression. We learn from this very chapter that as soon as Jesus stopped “entertaining” the people with signs and miracles (which actually demonstrated who he was) and called for their commitment and sacrifice, “many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him” (v. 66). Followers of Christ should make no mistake; we are to be prepared to turn away from worldly attractions and become broken bread for people, even as Jesus poured out his life for us as a sacrifice and an example.

6:15. “Therefore, when.” There is much detail left out of this part of John that is important to understanding the record. See commentary on Mark 6:45.

6:17. “to Capernaum.” Jesus and his apostles actually landed in “Gennesaret” (Matt. 14:34; Mark 6:53). The Gospel of John says that they sailed “to Capernaum.” It is likely that Jesus planned to go to Capernaum shortly, but landed at Gennesaret and healed people there, then made the short walk to Capernaum, where he was when the people found him (John 6:24). For more information, see the note on Matthew 14:34.

6:21. “and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.” Several times the Bible records that God miraculously moved people from one place to another, and this is one of those times. Another was when God moved Phillip to Azotus (cp. Acts 8:39).

6:27. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.

6:29. “in him who he has sent.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.


6:33. “life.” Here the word “life” refers primarily to “life in the Age to Come,” which we can tell by reading the context (see commentary on John 5:40). However, it also has overtones of “life” now, life that is real life. Jesus came so that our lives now would be rich and meaningful, and also so that we would have everlasting life.
6:35. “bread of life.” This is primarily a genitive of production, i.e., “the bread that produces [and sustains] life.” See commentary on John 6:48.

“Whoever comes to me will never ever hunger, and whoever believes in me.” The verbs “comes” and “believes” are singular. Trust in God is an individual matter. No one has trust in God or gets saved as a member of a group. Each person must decide on his or her own.

6:37. “All those whom the Father gives me will come to me.” The ones that God “gives” to Jesus are the ones He “draws” to Jesus (see commentary, John 6:44). God “draws” people and gives to them as they respond to Him and come closer and closer to Him. The Father does not “give” people to Jesus apart from their freewill, or make choices for people that they are then forced to follow. A simple reading of the majority of the Bible shows this. God is constantly commanding people to do things that they do not do. That alone shows people’s freewill.

There are Christians who believe that people have freewill, but due to their sin nature they cannot make a truly godly choice, such as for salvation, so it is freewill, but in effect only the freewill to choose between different evils (this was the position of John Calvin and is the accepted position of the Reformed Churches). These Christian teach that in order for a person to make a truly godly choice they need God’s intervention and mercy. However, that belief does not fit with what Scripture says about the nature of God, who is universally loving and merciful.

It is very common in the Bible that God gets angry with people who are disobedient or defiant, and that includes both believers and unbelievers (cp. Exod. 4:14; Num. 11:1; 12:9; 32:13; Deut. 29:20; Judg. 2:14; 2 Sam. 6:7; 1 Kings 11:9; 15:30; 2 Chron. 25:15). This anger is genuine, not “faked” in some way, or disingenuous. God is genuinely disappointed in people and angry with them if they disobey or defy Him specifically because people have the ability to choose to obey or disobey Him. However, if the Reformed believers are correct, then God not only knew the people would disobey Him, He actually contributed to their disobedience by not giving them the mercy to make a good decision. But that is simply not the way the text reads. If God keeps people from obeying, then is angry when they do not obey, then God is not “loving” in any usual sense of word, and would really be quite irrational. In fact, if a human were to behave that way, psychologists and sociologists would label them irrational at best and perhaps even sociopathic. It is important that we take to heart that the descriptions of God, such as that He is loving, righteous, just, good, etc., and take those words in the common way they are used in our speech, and not think that they have some kind of “special meaning.” Otherwise, how are we to understand the command to “be imitators of God” (Eph. 5:1). If we are going to imitate God, then we have to be truly loving, giving, good, righteous, etc., and God does too.

6:38. “I have come down from heaven.” Jesus said that he came from heaven, meaning that He came from God; God was his source. The Jews would not have taken Christ’s words to mean that he “incarnated” or was somehow God. It was a common use of language for them to say that something “came from heaven” if God were its source.

James 1:17 is a good example about things coming down from God. Is says that every good gift is “from above” and “comes down” from God. What James means is clear. God is the Author and source of the good things in our lives. God works behind the scenes to provide what we need. The verse does not mean that the good things in our
lives come directly down from heaven. We use the same language today. Many Christians say “the Lord” blessed them when they receive a blessing by way other people but realize that the ultimate source of the blessings was the Lord. Some people even use the phrase “blessings from heaven,” just meaning that God ultimately somehow was behind the blessings that were given. Jesus’ words should be understood the same way we understand James’ words—that God is the source of Jesus Christ, which He was. Christ was God’s plan for the salvation of mankind, and God directly fathered Jesus. The fact that Jesus said he came down from God does not make him God, as some Trinitarians claim.

It was common to speak of things coming from heaven when what was meant was only that God was the ultimate source. When God wanted to tell the people that He would bless them if they gave their tithes, He told them that He would open the windows of “heaven” and pour out a blessing (Mal. 3:10). Of course, everyone understood the idiom being used, and no one believed that God would literally pour things out of heaven. They knew that the phrase meant that God was the origin of the blessings they received. So, for example, one way God would “pour blessings out of heaven” was to give the rain and sun so the crops were abundant. Still another example is when Christ was speaking and said, “John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven or from men?” (Matt. 21:25). Of course, the way that John’s baptism would have been “from heaven” was if God was the source of the revelation. John did not get the idea on his own, it came “from heaven.” The record about John’s baptism makes the idiom about heaven clear: things could be “from heaven,” i.e., from God, or they could be “from men.” The idiom is the same when used of Jesus. Jesus is “from God,” “from heaven” or “from above” in the sense that God is his Father and thus his origin. [For discussion on a related point, that God “sent” Jesus, see commentary on John 6:57].

“not to do my own will.” This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his father, God. See commentary on John 8:28.

“the will of him who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

6:39. “the will of him who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

“them.” The Greek word is autos (#846 αὐτός), and it is singular, which is why literal versions such as the KJV have “it.” However, in this context it is clear that the Greek is what grammarians call a “collective singular,” where the singular is used but it stands for a group (D. A. Carson, The Gospel According to John; and NET First Edition text note). We have collective singulars in English in words like “deer” or “fish,” but do not use “it” that way. So bringing the autos literally into English as “it” is actually unhelpful, because whereas the collective singular “it” would not confuse a native Greek reader, it is confusing in English. The subject is the people, the “them,” who will be raised from the dead.

This verse contains the figure of speech anacoluthon (cp. Lenski), which is why it reads in such a choppy fashion.
6:40. “sees…believes.” The verbs are singular. See commentary on John 6:35.

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.]

6:41. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

6:44. “No one is able to come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” This verse is sometimes used to prove the theory of predestination or to assert that God chooses those who will be saved and those who will not. However, if we examine the verse in its context and in light of the whole scope of Scripture, we will see that this verse is not speaking of predestination, but is referring to God’s constant efforts to help and bless people, and to bring them to Himself. In fact, instead of being a verse supporting predestination, when it is properly understood, this verse and the verses around it are a testimony to the freewill of man and that we humans ultimately decide whether or not we will believe and obey God, and thus determine our own eternal fate.

In the context, the Jews had been grumbling about the claims Jesus was making about himself (v. 41, 42). God was trying to draw even those hard-hearted Jews to Himself, but they were suspicious and spiritually blind. Their hardheartedness was what was keeping them from properly seeing the great miracles that Jesus was doing and then concluding that he was a prophet of God and perhaps even the Messiah. They should have been at least convinced by Jesus’ miracles that he was a prophet of God; after all, many common people had made that connection, and these leaders should have been much more educated about the Law and the actions of a prophet than the common people. A few chapters earlier, the Pharisee named Nicodemus properly concluded: “...you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one is able to do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (John 3:2). However, unlike the humble and pure-hearted Nicodemus, these Jews in John 6 were fighting against God, who was actively working in Jesus’ life by signs and miracles to demonstrate that he was the Messiah. All this is made plain in the next verse (v. 45), which Jesus quoted to show what he meant when he said that no one could come to him without the Father drawing him.

In John 6:45, Jesus quoted Isaiah 54:13 and explained its implications. Jesus quoted the phrase, “They will all be taught of God,” which shows that God is trying to reach, and teach, everyone. No one is excluded from our loving heavenly Father’s attempts to touch their hearts and teach them truth. However, not everyone listens to God. The Pharisees, for example, rejected God’s plan for them when they refused to be baptized by John (Luke 7:30). In fact, most of the Jews did not submit to God’s will when it came to faith in Christ (Rom. 10:3). Jesus quoted Isaiah 54:13 to show that God was attempting to teach everyone, then he further explained that “Everyone who has heard from the Father, and has learned, comes to me.” Thus he made the point that God is always trying to teach everyone, but some people close their ears (Ps. 58:3-5; Ezek. 12:12; Zech. 7:11; Matt. 13:15; Acts 7:51; 28:27; 2 Tim. 4:4) and harden their hearts (Zech. 7:12; Heb. 3:8, 15; 4:7). Thus, these prideful people did not learn from God, and were not drawn to Jesus Christ. But the people who are humble and hear God’s voice and pay attention to it and follow it, come to Jesus as a result. Their coming is their own choice, but they come because God is constantly trying to draw them to Himself. Again,
Isaiah 54:13 and other verses make the point that God’s will is that everyone come to Him (cp. 1 Tim. 2:4). That these Jews did not believe in Jesus due to their failure to listen to God was their choice and their problem, not God’s.

It is important to notice that at no time in the discourse did Jesus excuse the Jews, as if their attitude towards him was not their fault. Of course, if the doctrine of predestination is true, then somewhere in Jesus’ dialogue with these Jews we would have expected Jesus to have some pity on these unbelievers, realizing that they could not believe unless God helped them believe, and so unbelief was not their fault. However, he never said, or implied, anything like that. In studying the doctrine of predestination, we must realize that at all through the Bible, Jesus, and the other writers as well, when addressing unbelievers, always laid the blame for the unbelief on the unbelievers themselves, never on God. But if the doctrine of predestination is correct, the basic unbelief of unbelievers is always God’s “fault,” never theirs. That is because according to the doctrine of predestination, if God does not specifically move a person to believe, that person will remain in unbelief. In fact, when there were some in the audience who did not believe, (v. 64), and some disciples who went away (v. 66), Jesus turned to his disciples and asked, “Do you want to go away as well?” (v. 67). The fact he asked them if they “wanted” to go away shows that he was respecting their choice to stay with him as a disciple, or leave him. Belief or unbelief; it is our choice, not God’s.

“the Father who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

6:45. Quoted from Isaiah 54:13. See commentary on John 6:44.

6:47. “whoever believes.” The noun and verb are singular. See commentary on John 6:35.

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].

6:48. “I am the bread of life.” This verse is a metaphor. The phrase, “bread of life” is primarily a genitive of production, i.e., “the bread that produces [and sustains] life.”

A paraphrased translation could read, “I am the bread that gives life.” Our regular bread, and even the manna God gave in the desert, only sustained life. In contrast, Jesus is the bread that truly gives life. Jesus contrasted himself with manna in verse 58, and pointed out that the people who ate it were dead. Only Jesus Christ can truly give life, everlasting life.

Using the metaphor, “I am the bread that gives life,” and comparing himself to bread, should have been clear to his audience. The word “bread” is αρτός (#740 ἄρτος), and it is used primarily of bread, but because bread was the most important food, it was also used of food in general (a synecdoche of the part for the whole). Everyone knows that bread, food, is essential to life, so when Jesus said he was the bread of life, they should have known that he was saying that it was he, not literal bread, that was essential if someone was going to have everlasting life.


6:51. “I am the living bread.” Jesus repeats the metaphor he had used in verse 48 (see commentary there), but added the word “living.” Christ does not abandon the metaphor
of bread, but now expands it, because bread sustains our life but is dead; it is not a living thing. In contrast, Jesus will give us life and is himself living. He continues the figurative comparison of himself to bread when he says that the bread he will give is his flesh, that he will give for the life of the world.

As we saw in the metaphor he used at the Last Supper (“This is my body which is broken for you”), in this context also, Jesus lets us know that his flesh will be broken for us, and that he will give it “for the life of the world.” This phrase is loaded with meaning. The word “for” is the Greek word *huper* (#5228 ὑπέρ), meaning, “on behalf of, in place of, instead of.” The word “world” is a metonymy for the people of the world. The essence of the phrase is that Christ would give his life on behalf of the people of the world, so they could have life.

By referring to himself as bread, Jesus sets up a scenario in which he can use the metaphor of being bread in combination with the common idiom and understanding that to “eat” something was to fully partake of it (see commentary on verse 54).

6:52. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

6:53. “eat the flesh...drink his blood.” See commentary on verse 54.

“life.” Here the word “life” refers primarily to “life in the Age to Come,” which we can tell by reading the next verse, John 6:54. However, it also has overtones of “life” now, life that is real life. Jesus came so that our lives now would be rich and meaningful, and also so that we would have everlasting life (see commentary on John 5:40).

6:54. “The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood.” Jesus had already referred to himself as bread (see commentary on verse 48, 51). Now when Jesus spoke of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, he was using idioms that were common enough in his day that they should have understood him. Nevertheless, people did not understand, not because they did not understand the idiom, but because they did not believe Jesus was the Messiah, or that being committed to him was the way to everlasting life. Therefore, when he spoke of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, they were confused. Eating and drinking were common activities that required personal involvement, so it is easy to see why they became idioms for involvement and commitment. For example, Jeremiah 15:16 (KJV) says, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.” By saying he ate the Word, Jeremiah portrays his enjoyment of it and commitment to it. Of course, the idiom “eat” can be used in a destructive sense too, such as when Psalm 53:4 (ESV) says evildoers “eat up” God’s people like bread (cp. Micah 3:3). To eat the bread of sorrow (Ps. 127:2 KJV) is to have or receive sorrow. To eat the fruit of your way (Prov. 1:31) is to receive consequences for your actions (cp. Isa. 3:10).

The word “drink” was also used idiomatically for involvement. Proverbs 4:17 says the wicked will drink the wine of violence, meaning they will be committed to violence and be intoxicated by it. Jeremiah 2:18 has a great example of using “drink” to show commitment. God asks the “house of Jacob” (Jer. 2:4), “And now what do you gain by going to Egypt to drink the waters of the Nile? Or what do you gain by going to Assyria to drink the waters of the Euphrates?” No one would travel from Israel to Egypt or Assyria just to drink from their rivers. God is reproving His people from going to those pagan lands to “drink,” i.e., be committed to, their pagan ways. Job 21:20 speaks of
drinking the wrath of God in the sense of being involved with it, i.e., receiving it (cp. Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:22; Jer. 9:15; 25:15-17; 49:12; Ezek. 23:32). Psalm 36:8 speaks of godly people who drink of the river of God’s delights. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that Christians have been made to “drink” of the spirit of God; we have received it and are involved with it in our daily activities. Eating and drinking are also used idiomatically in English to describe mental activities. If someone really liked something, we say he “ate it up.” If someone believes something without properly thinking it over, we say he “swallowed it,” or “swallowed it whole.” If we have learned something, but have not had time to fully comprehend it, we say we “have not digested it yet.”

By asking people to eat his flesh and drink his blood, Jesus was asking people to be committed to him, and the response of the people is telling. They said Jesus’ words were hard, many disciples turned from him (John 6:60, 66).

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.

6:57. “the living Father sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. That God sent Jesus into the world can have a couple different nuances. For one thing, Jesus is the “last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45), and just as God created Adam, so God created Jesus by Fathering him in Mary. Thus, God’s sending Jesus can refer to his conception and birth, and then subsequent ministry to save mankind, or it can simply refer to the much later event of God sending Jesus to fulfill his ministry to be the savior of mankind. That latter meaning, for example, is what John 17:18 (NET) means when Jesus prayed to God and said: “Just as you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world.” Jesus commissioned his apostles and sent them out just as God had commissioned him and sent him out.

There are Trinitarians who insist that because God “sent” Jesus, Jesus must be God. But that is reading far too much into the simple concept of being “sent.” The idea that something has been “sent” by God was commonly used and simply means that God is the ultimate source, or “sender,” of what was sent. There is no reason to believe that Jesus’ being sent by God makes him God—nothing else that is “sent” by God is God. The phrase just means what it says, that God sent Jesus. The Bible has dozens of examples of things being sent by God, all meaning that God was the source. God sent bad weather on Egypt (Exod. 9:23), fiery serpents upon the Israelites (Num. 21:6), Moses (Deut. 34:11), prophets (Judges 6:8), and many more people and things. John the Baptist was a man “sent from God” (John 1:6). The words of John the Baptist about being sent are very clear and, if taken the same way some Trinitarians take Jesus being “sent” by God, would make John God too. John said, “I am not the Messiah, but I’ve been sent ahead of Him” (John 3:27 HCSB). We all know that what John meant by “I’ve been sent ahead of him” simply means that God commissioned John at a time that preceded the Messiah. But if someone already believed John to somehow be a fourth member of the Godhead, then what John said could be used as evidence supporting that belief. The point is that the only reason someone would say that Jesus’ being “sent” by God meant that he was God or was pre-existent in heaven would be if he already held that belief. The words themselves do not say or mean that.
Actually, the fact that God, or the Father, “sent” Jesus proves that Jesus is not part of the Trinity: co-equal and co-eternal with God. Jesus made it clear that the one who “sends” is greater than the one “sent.” In John 13:16 he said, “A servant is not greater than his lord, neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him.” Then he made that very clear when he said in the very next chapter, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28).

The culture of that day made it clear that the “lord” was greater than the servant, and the one who sends someone is greater than the one who is sent. Thus, by Jesus’ own standards, the fact that he says he was “sent” by God shows that although he is the Son of God, he was still a servant to God, his Father. And that is exactly how the early Christians related to Jesus: as their lord, but God’s Son and God’s servant. For example, they prayed in Acts that Jesus was God’s “Servant” (cp. Acts 3:13; 4:27, 30; also, see commentary on Acts 3:13).

Another piece of evidence that Jesus’ being sent by God does not make him God and “co-equal” with the Father is that the Bible never says Jesus “sent” God (or “the Father”) to do anything. If the Bible says more than forty times that God sent Jesus, and both Jesus and the Father are God and co-equal, why does the Bible never say Jesus sent the Father to do anything? The answer is simple and clear from Jesus’ own mouth: the one who sends is greater than the one who is sent. Jesus is not God, and the fact that he says he was sent by God proves it.


6:62. This verse does not refer to the ascension but to Jesus Christ’s resurrection from the dead. See One God & One Lord.

6:64. “(For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him).” This verse shows the great love and patience of Jesus, because even though he knew who would betray him, he knew people have freewill and can change if they want to. Some Trinitarians claim this verse proves that Jesus was God just because the word “beginning” is in the verse. Nothing could be further from the truth. Even a cursory word study will show that the word “beginning” has to be defined by its context. Any good lexicon will show that the word “beginning” is often used to describe times other than the start of creation. Examples abound: God made them male and female at the “beginning,” not of creation, but of the human race (Matt. 19:4). There were “eyewitnesses” at the “beginning,” not of creation, but of the life and ministry of Christ (Luke 1:2). The disciples were with Christ from the “beginning,” not of creation, but of his public ministry (John 15:27). The gift of holy spirit came on Peter and the apostles “at the beginning,” not of creation, but of the Church Administration that started on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 (Acts 11:15). John 6:64 is simply saying that Christ knew from the time he began to choose the Apostles which one would betray him.

When this verse is understood in its context, it is a powerful testimony of how closely Jesus walked with his Father. First, there is nothing in the context that would in any way indicate that the word “beginning” refers to the beginning of time. Jesus had just fed the five thousand, and they said, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world” (6:14). Right away that tells you that the people did not think Jesus was God, but a prophet. The people wanted to make Jesus king, but only because he filled their stomachs (6:15, 26). When he challenged them to believe in him (6:29), they grumbled (6:41). As Jesus continued to teach, the Jews began to argue among themselves (6:52),
and even some of Jesus’ disciples began to grumble at the commitment Jesus was asking from them (6:60, 61). Jesus, knowing his disciples were upset with his teaching, did not back off, but rather pressed on, even saying that he knew some would not believe (6:64). The result of this discussion was that some of his disciples left him (6:66). It is telling that the disciples left him at a time when Jesus was asking for their personal commitment. The fact is, and always has been, that some believers are more than happy to hang around as long as you do not ask much of them, but when they are required to give much of themselves, then they leave. Jesus taught that in the Parable of the Sower, when he said that some believers leave as soon as persecution arises. [For more on this verse not supporting the Trinity, see Don Snedeker, Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals, p. 215].

6:65. “no one is able to come to me, unless it is given to him by the Father.” This is a restatement, in different words, of verse 44, and a reflection of verse 37 (see commentary on John 6:37 and 6:44). God is always trying to draw people to Him. We can understand why God has to draw people to Him in order for them to come to Him. Of course, He cannot, and does not, act against a person’s free will, but when they want to come to Him, they need His help. For one thing, God is spirit. He is invisible and immaterial, so people who come to Him have to get some guidance as to how to do it. For another thing, people who believe and strive to live godly lifestyles are fighting against their sin nature, which is pushing them toward selfishness and a self-centered lifestyle. People can become selfless and God-centered in their lives, but it takes a diligent effort and some help from God. Thirdly, there is the spiritual battle that we need help from God to fight. The Adversary is always trying to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), to oppress and ensnare people (Acts 10:38; 1 Tim. 2:26), and pervert the ways of God (Acts 13:10). Since the Adversary is constantly working behind the scenes to keep people from God, God has to be constantly working behind the scenes to make a way for people who want to come to Him to do so. With all that is working against people being godly, if God were not working to bring people to Him, they could not come, which is why it makes perfect sense for Jesus to say, “no one is able to come to me, unless it is given to him by the Father.”

By saying what he said, Jesus was trying to highlight the spiritual truth that since God is always working to draw people to Himself, if people are not coming to God, it is due to decisions they themselves are making. This was the point of the Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15). God is always sowing His word into every person’s heart, but not every person receives it the same way. As the parable points out, some people do not hold the Word in their minds very long and so the Devil takes it from them. Some people abandon the Word due to trouble or persecution, and some ignore it and instead focus on this world and what it has to offer. Only some people make decisions that allow the Word to grow and produce fruit in their lives. But nevertheless, God is sowing into every heart. In the Parable of the Sower, it is never hinted or stated that people do not choose the Word because that is the choice God made for them, or the people who do choose the Word do so because that is the choice God made for them. The simple fact is that most people are selfish, and they want to be that way. They harden their hearts and close their eyes and ears to the things of God (Matt. 13:15). Jesus made that clear in John chapter three. He said, “people loved the darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil. For everyone who makes a practice of doing worthless things
hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.” (John 3:19, 20).

6:68. “words of life.” The possibilities for understanding this genitive are multiple. The genitive of relation would make the phrase, “words relating to life,” or “words about life.” Also, the genitive of production would make the expression say, words that produce, or lead to, life in the Age to come. This record is associated with the feeding of the 5,000, which is Matthew 14, and before Peter declared that Jesus was the Christ (Matt. 16). So although Peter may not have been certain Jesus was the Messiah at this time, he still knew that Jesus had the words that were about, and led to, life in the Age to come.

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.

6:70. “a Slanderer.” “Slanderer” is a name for the Devil. The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διαβόλος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. Jesus was using a name for the Devil to import that meaning into the text. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

Chapter 7

7:1. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

7:5. “for not even his brothers believed in him.” Jesus’ brothers were James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (Matthew 13:55). It is an amazing truth that Jesus’ own brothers did not believe he was the Messiah, and there is no evidence that any of them did until after his resurrection (cp. Acts 1:14; 15:13; 1 Cor. 15:7). In fact, it is possible that one of the reasons for Jesus going to Galilee after his resurrection was to see his family. We know Jesus went to Galilee after his resurrection, and met with many people there, apparently including one meeting in which were more than 500 people (cp. Matt. 28:7, 10; Mark 14:28; John 21:1; 1 Cor. 15:6. It is assumed that the meeting with more than 500 took place in Galilee because on the Day of Pentecost, only about a month later, there were only 120 disciples gathered in Jerusalem. In contrast, it seems that Jesus could have gathered more than 500 in Galilee).

Taking care of one’s family is a very important part of a person’s walk with God, and it certainly would fit with the example that Jesus set for us that he would go to Galilee in part to convince his family that he was indeed the risen Christ, and in convincing them assure them of having everlasting life.

One of the reasons we know that none of Jesus’ brothers believed that he was the Messiah until after his resurrection was at the crucifixion Jesus told the Apostle John to take care of Mary his mother, and he told Mary that John would take care of her (he did this by saying to John, “Look! Your mother.”) Jesus would have only done this if Joseph, Mary’s husband and Jesus’ step-father, was dead, and if none of Jesus’ brothers were considered to be an appropriate caretaker to Mary. Since Mary was a believer of great
faith, it would not have been in her best interest to be taken care of by her children who did not even believe their brother was the Messiah she claimed him to be. Their consistent refusal to believe that Jesus was the Messiah in spite of what he and Mary no doubt did to try to convince them would have made them inappropriate caretakers for Mary [For more on this, see commentary on John 19:27].

At some point after the resurrection, at least some of Jesus’ brothers came to believe. In fact, Jesus’ brother James rose to lead the Church in Jerusalem after Herod Agrippa executed the Apostle James who was the son of Zebedee and brother of John (Acts 12:2). Although history is silent as to how Jesus’ brother James came to lead the Church, it is clear that he did. He first appears in a leadership role in Acts 12:17, then can be seen to be the leader by Acts 15:13. He is also the writer of the Epistle of James. Another brother of Jesus, Judas, also became a leader in the Church and wrote the Epistle of Jude.

7:6. “right time.” The Greek word is kairos (#2540 καιρός), here meaning the right or proper time. Jesus had a mission from God, and a “right time” to go to Jerusalem. Nyland (The Source New Testament), catches the meaning in her translation: “It isn’t the right time for me yet—but for you, any time is right!”

The context is not just about going to Jerusalem. Jesus’ brothers were urging him to show himself to the world. In saying that it was not the “right time” to go to Jerusalem, Jesus was saying that now was not the right time to go to Jerusalem and reveal himself. He knew he would go later, and when he did, it was in secret (7:10). Nevertheless, when Jesus did get to the feast of Tabernacles, he did reveal himself to those with eyes to see and ears to hear. He made many bold statements, saying he was the light of the world and “unless you believe that I am the one, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24).

When he told his brothers that the “right time” for them was always here, he was saying that because his brothers did not have a mission from God, and because his brothers were still “of the world” (his brothers did not yet believe in him; 7:5), for them the “right time” to go to Jerusalem was any time. It made no difference to the world who they were.

7:8. “I am not going up to this feast because my time is not yet fully come.” Jesus said he was not going up to the feast, but then he went. There is an apparent contradiction here, which is solved by understanding the subject being discussed. The brothers wanted him to go up to the feast to make him known as the Messiah because they did not believe in him (v. 5). He was going, but not as they asked, i.e., to make himself known as Messiah.

7:10. “as if.” There is a textual debate surrounding the originality of the particle hos (#5613 ὡς) in this verse. Hos means “like,” “as,” or “as though.” Some translations such as the NASB keep it in the text, “He Himself also went up, not publicly, but as if, in secret” (emphasis added); others leave it out: “he went also, not publicly, but in secret” (NIV). The textual sources that include the “as if” are better, but the transcriptional probability of hos being added is also very likely; the evidence is divided (Metzger, Textual Commentary). We believe the particle is original, however. It is not that Christ went to feast in secret, but his late arrival at the feast was as though he came in secret; that is, everyone else had already arrived and he came in like one who would come in secretly. The hos softens the meaning. After the roads had cleared, Jesus came so as not to make a show of himself to the world as his brothers would have liked (vv. 3-8).
7:11. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

7:13. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

7:15. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

7:16. “My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me.” This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his father, God. See commentary on John 8:28.

“that sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

7:18. “of one who sent him.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

7:28. “on my own.” Greek is ap’ emautou, literally, “from myself.” The word ap’ is a contracted form of the preposition apo (#575 ἀπό), which in this case indicates the idea of agency [see Appendix 11: “Greek Prepositions”]. Jesus is saying he does not stand as his own representative; he is not an agent, as it were, sent from himself, but rather it was the father who sent him. To communicate this denial of self-agency, the NET translation reads, “on my own initiative,” and that is the general idea of the verse, but we thought just saying, “on my own” communicated well.

“he who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

7:29. “he sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

7:33. “to the one who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

7:35. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

7:37. “Now on the last day, the great day of the feast.” The Feast of Tabernacles started on the 15th day of Tishri (the seventh month—usually in our September) and lasted 8 days (Lev. 23:34-36). Although there are several scholars who feel that the last and great day of the feast is the seventh day, most scholars feel that the last and great day
was the final day, Tishri 22, which was a special Sabbath like the first day. As a special Sabbath, it was a specially appointed time of gathering (a solemn assembly, Lev. 23:36).

7:38. “The one who is believing in me,…out of his belly...” This is the figure of speech, Anacoluthon, in which the flow of a sentence is abruptly changed (Bullinger, Figures of Speech).

“will have rivers of living water flowing out of his belly.” In the Greek, the verb “flow” is future tense, active voice, meaning that the river will flow and flow, not just “flow” one time, or only occasionally. Charles Williams (The New Testament in the Language of the People) goes so far as to translate that a believer will have “rivers of water continuously flowing from within him.” Believers should expect, and act upon, this promise and allow the spirit of God to flow from them day after day by speaking in tongues, interpreting, giving words of prophecy, and endeavoring to walk by the spirit.

“as the Scripture has said.” This phrase does not have to be a formula for a direct quotation from the Old Testament (there is no such verse), but rather an introduction of scriptural thought, i.e., the essence of what Scripture teaches. As long as what is being spoken reproduces the essential meaning of the biblical text, it is “as the scripture has said.” Modern preachers and teachers do this all the time. They say, “The Bible says...” but give the essence, rather than a quotation. Isaiah 58:11b states, “You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.” Zechariah 14:8 mentions that living waters will flow from Jerusalem, and it is thought by many that Jesus was relating this to what he was saying, because that verse was one of the traditional readings at the Feast of Tabernacles. The Scripture foretold that the spirit would be poured out into the believer (cp. Isa. 44:3-5; 59:21; Joel 2:28, 29; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26, 27; 37:14). Jesus here adds that the ones who receive the spirit of God are those who believe in him.

“rivers of living water will continuously flow.” The manifestations of the spirit of God that flow from believers have God as their source and thus can flow continuously in a believer’s life. The reason Jesus would pick this illustration would have been immediately apparent to those people attending the Feast of Tabernacles. For the first seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles, a priest would bring water from the Pool of Siloam and pour it, along with wine, on the altar of the Temple. However, on the eighth day no water was brought. Opinions differ as to how the water ceremony got started and what it symbolized, but it seems likely that it referred to the water from the rock that Moses struck in the wilderness. Then, on the eighth day, no water was brought, symbolic of the water of Canaan that the people now could freely partake of. Thus, it seems natural that on this day when no water was brought that Jesus would cry out that if anyone was thirsty, he could come to Jesus and drink.

“Out of his belly.” Theologians have disputed whether or not “his” refers to the Messiah or the believer. In the Old Testament, God was the fountain of living water, the source of spiritual and physical sustenance, and Christ then became the source of holy spirit after he was glorified. However, the Greek text naturally refers “his” to the believer, not the Messiah (cp. Lenski, C.K. Barrett). Although the believer is the most obvious “him,” it is not impossible that the Messiah is also being indirectly referred to. In John 4:14 Jesus speaks of spiritual water, and makes the point that he is the source, although it comes “springing up” (NASB) or “gushing up” (NRSV) from within the believer.
“belly.” The Greek word is koilia (κοιλία), and it means 1) the whole belly, 2) the lower belly, the lower region, the receptacle of the excrement 3) the gullet 4) the womb, the place where the fetus is conceived and nourished until birth 5) the innermost part of a man as the seat of thought, feeling, choice. The exact meaning is determined by the context. It seems obvious that “living water” will not flow out of a person’s belly, so what is the verse saying? Scientists are now discovering that the gut, the belly, plays a very important part in the emotional life of a person. The gut, also called the enteric nervous system, has as many nerve cells as the brain, and studies are now showing that it can react, or “think,” independently of the brain. This is why we have a “gut feeling” about something, or a “gut reaction,” or why we get an upset stomach when we are afraid or anxious. In contrast to the “heart” (Greek is kardia, where we get “cardiac”), which is more closely related to what we “think,” the belly, kidneys (Rev. 2:23) and bowels (2 Cor. 6:12) are more closely related to how we “feel,” our emotions and emotional state. The point being made in John 7:38 is that the person relates to the spirit on an emotional “gut level,” and not just a mental one, although the mind is certainly involved in our spiritual walk. But our emotional connection to our spiritual life is important too, and highlighted here. Although some versions read “heart,” it misses the point, and to make the vague reference, “within him,” as some versions do, is to water down the teaching so much no point can be made of it. Other verses that refer to the “belly” in a way that relates to the emotional life are Romans 16:18 and Philippians 3:19. [For the note on “kidneys” see Rev. 2:23, and for the note on bowels see 2 Cor. 6:12].

7:39. “as yet there was no spirit.” The Greek text says “…for as yet there was no Spirit….“ This clearly shows that the gift of holy spirit in the Millennial Kingdom, which Christ knew about and understood, was going to be so completely different from the gift of holy spirit that God gave in the Old Testament that the promised holy spirit did not exist yet. We have today what was promised to Israel. The obvious presence of holy spirit in the Old Testament and people’s not realizing that this “spirit” was the gift of God that would be different in the Millennial Kingdom (and for us) than it had been in the Old Testament, had a serious consequence. Wanting it to “make sense” to them, men who copied the Bible added to this verse as they copied it. Therefore, among the thousands of Greek texts in existence, there are several different later renditions, among them that the spirit “was not yet given,” “was not yet upon them,” and “not yet came.” See Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, p. 218.

The Old Testament prophets had foretold that a new spirit was coming in the future, one that was different from the spirit God gave in Old Testament times. It was foretold to come as part of the Messianic Kingdom and the New Covenant that God would make with Israel (Isa. 32:15-18; 44:3-5; Ezek. 11:17-21; 36:26, 27; Joel 2:28, 29). The Old Testament prophets and Jesus foretold the coming of this new spirit, saying it would be “poured out” (i.e., given in fullness) into all the believers (Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28, 29). Jesus knew that it would come before his kingdom, perhaps to help believers to endure the Great Tribulation (John 15:26-16:16).

Although the Christian Church was a sacred secret, hidden in God and not foretold in the Old Testament, God has given the Christian Church the gift of holy spirit that He promised to give in the Millennial Kingdom. Thus in Acts and the Church Epistles this new holy spirit is sometimes referred to as “the promised holy spirit (Eph. 1:13; cp. Acts 2:33; Rom. 8:23).
When a person believes Jesus Christ is Lord, he is “born again” (1 Pet. 1:3, 23; Titus 3:5; James 1:18), and what gets born inside the Christian is this new gift of holy spirit. [For more on the holy spirit and new birth, see Appendix 1, “The Permanence of Christian Salvation”].

7:53-8:11. A lot has been written from a textual point of view about the record of the woman caught in adultery. Every indication is that it was not part of the original text. The oldest and best manuscripts do not include it. Furthermore, it is absent from a diverse number of manuscripts from different manuscript families (see Metzger, A Textual Commentary on The Greek New Testament).

One of the signs that shows scholars the record is not original is different scribes put it in the Bible in different places. For example, in the Greek manuscripts that do have the record, it occurs in four different places in John, and even occurs in the Gospel of Luke. If the record were original but taken out of some manuscripts by zealous scribes who did not like the idea of Jesus letting adultery go unpunished, the manuscripts that still contained the record would always have it in the same place. That the record of the woman caught in adultery occurs in different places is very good evidence it is not original.

Very importantly, the record breaks the flow of Jesus’ presentation in the Temple during the Feast of Tabernacles. This is the most compelling reason for removing the record from John 8 and moving it to the end of the book of John, and why we do so in our version. Jesus began his teaching in John 7 during the Feast of Tabernacles, which was the longest of the three feasts of the Mosaic Law that every Jewish male was commanded to attend (Exod. 23:14-17). By the first century, many people did not journey to Jerusalem three times a year, which was a three-day walk from Galilee. Many people would come only one time a year, and if they lived much further, not even that often. When they would make the journey for the Feast of Tabernacles, it often made sense to stay for the entire festival season, which, in the Jewish calendar, was longest in the month of Tishri (our September/October). The month of Tishri had the Feast of Trumpets (Tishri 1), the Day of Atonement (Tishri 10), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Tishri 15-22). After the Feast of Tabernacles, the festival season came to a close and people started to return home.

Jesus started his powerful presentation in John 7 inside the Temple, about midway through the Feast of Tabernacles (7:14) by confronting the Jews about trying to kill him and saying to judge rightly (7:17-24). He was accused of being demon-possessed (7:20).

On the last and most important day of the Feast (7:37), Jesus taught about holy spirit coming to those who believed in him (7:37). This caused some to believe he was the Christ (7:41) and the Jews to try to arrest him (7:45-52). Undaunted by the apparent danger, Jesus continued to try to wake up the huge crowd that would be gathered at that last day of the Feast. He told them he was the light of the world (8:12), and was contradicted at every turn by the Jewish leaders. Finally, he addressed those who believed in him about being his disciples and being set free (8:31) while directly confronting his Jewish adversaries and telling them plainly they were from the Devil (8:41-47). The intense debate continued until the Jews finally picked up stones to kill Jesus, and he left the Temple area (8:59). There is no way to tell how large the crowd would have been who heard Jesus reveal in quite clear ways that he was the Messiah, but it would have been well into the thousands.
If John 7:53-8:11 is left in place, then it ends the Feast of Tabernacles, and begins a new “regular day” at the Temple (John 7:53-82). Thus, not only is the debate between Jesus and the Jews interrupted, but the huge crowd that would have heard him speak about being the Messiah and how the Jews were of the Devil would have not been present because they would have gone home the day before. Thus, we feel compelled to do more than just put the record of the woman caught in adultery in brackets, but to move the record to the end of John to preserve the powerful presentation of Jesus on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

In spite of the textual evidence that the record was added, we keep it in John because it has all the earmarks of being a true story. It is likely that it was an amazing event in Jesus’ life that was well remembered by his followers and at some point written down and then inserted into the Gospel of John (and Luke), but scribes could not agree where to put it.

**Chapter 8**

8:9. “in the midst.” At first reading this phrase seems to contradict the context, which says the accusers left. However, the accusers were not the only people at the scene. One can just imagine how the religious leaders brought the woman to Jesus and thrust her toward him saying she had been caught in the act of adultery, and demanding to know how he would judge the case. In short order these vicious men would have formed a circle or semicircle around Jesus, each wanting to hear exactly how he would answer them. Behind these men onlookers and curious people would gather, mixed with the disciples of Jesus. When Jesus answered the religious leaders and they melted away one by one, the outer circle would still remain and thus the woman and Jesus, though left alone from the accusers, would still factually be “in the midst” of the crowd.

8:11. “do not sin any more.” The record of the woman caught in adultery is sometimes quoted to show that the death penalty that God commanded in the Old Testament is no longer valid, and we should not use it. It is argued that since Christ forgave a criminal (an adulteress) we should forgive the criminals in our society. However, when we take the time to study the record, we can see why Jesus said, “Go, and from now on do not sin any more.”

First, it is easy to prove that the religious leaders who brought her to Jesus were not interested in justice. Jesus was not a judge in Judea, especially not of capital cases. Capital cases were tried by the Sanhedrin, the ruling counsel of the Jews. Therefore Jesus had no recognized legal authority to render judgment on the case. That leads us to ask, “Why did the Jews bring the woman to Jesus in the first place?” John 8:6 answers that question—to have something with which to accuse him.

Secondly, the religious leaders were themselves breaking the Mosaic Law by bringing the woman without the man with whom she committed adultery. The Law of Moses clearly said that both the man and the woman were to be executed (Lev. 20:10 and Deut. 22:22). If this woman was caught “in the act” of adultery as the Jews stated, then why did they not bring the man too? The answer is obvious: the woman was set up. For those reasons, Jesus knew that this was a trap, and not “justice” in any sense of the word.
The Jews had indeed formed a clever trap. The Romans had forbidden them to execute people (John 18:31), so if Jesus said to stone the woman, the Jews would have had Jesus arrested for breaking Roman law. However, if Jesus said not to stone her because the Romans forbade it, then the Jews would have defamed him for elevating Roman law over Mosaic Law. It seemed that no matter what Jesus said, he would “lose.”

Jesus got out of the trap by convicting the people’s consciences, which in this case was made easier by the fact that the accusers knew in their hearts that they were willing to take this woman’s life just to trap Jesus. The Jews were already almost certainly guilty of conspiring to commit adultery and also the sin of perjury in the situation, which in a capital case meant getting the penalty of the crime—in this case, death (Deut. 19:16-21). Had Jesus led a mob and stoned the woman based on their testimony, they would have also been guilty of murder. It was obvious from Jesus’ answer to them that he had figured out their sin, and challenged them, saying if they were without sin they could cast the stone; and so one by one they left until there were no accusers left. That is a very important fact, because according to Mosaic Law there had to be eyewitnesses if someone were to be executed. In fact, the witnesses had to cast the first stone (Deut. 17:6, 7). Since Jesus was not a witness, he, by law, could not condemn the woman.

Although Jesus could not legally condemn the woman according to the demands of the Mosaic Law, he nevertheless knew she was in trouble because of her wayward lifestyle, and so he warned her to leave her sinful life. If she did not, not only would she incur the wrath of God on Judgement Day, but at some point she was likely to get caught and executed for her adultery. Thus he said to her, “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

A careful reading of this record with a knowledge of the Mosaic Law and the Roman law in force at the time clearly reveals that this record has no bearing on whether or not there should be a death penalty today. Jesus did not simply excuse a criminal, he prevented a perversion of justice. The Romans executed many criminals during the life of Jesus, and there is no record of him ever trying to intervene in the criminal justice system in any way.

8:12. “the light.” Jesus referred to himself as “a” light in John 9:5 and 12:46 (Greek text; cp. YLT). He reflected the light of God, and knew that other people who reflected the light of God into the world were also lights. The only time Jesus referred to himself as “the” light is John 8:12, and when we read what he said in its context, we understand why he did that.

Jesus said he was “the” light while speaking at the Feast of Tabernacles (also sometimes called “the Feast of Booths,” John 7:2), which is one of the three feasts that the Law of Moses said the Jews were to attend each year (Exod. 23:14-17; ESV). The Feast of Passover occurred in the spring, the Feast of Pentecost occurred in the summer, and the Feast of Tabernacles occurred in the fall, usually our September. The way it was celebrated at the Time of Christ, the Feast of Tabernacles was an eight day feast, and the Feast of Tabernacles that is recorded in John 7 and 8 was the last of the three major feasts of Exodus that Jesus attended before he was killed at the Passover Feast the next year.

In the record in John 7 and 8, Jesus was trying to reveal that he was the Messiah, but was doing so in a way that those with an open heart would understand, while those with cold hearts would not. Jesus’ words and actions did indeed convince people, because day after day as the Feast progressed, more and more people believed in him. John 7:31
says “many in the crowd put their faith in him.” Then, John 7:41 says people declared, “He is the Christ.” Then, on the last day of the feast, John 8:30 says, “Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.” Thus, in the context of revealing that he was the Messiah, it makes sense that Jesus said he was “the” light of the world. He was not being exclusive and claiming to be the only light, he was claiming to be the major light, the promised Messiah.

The fact that Jesus said to the people, “you are the light of the world,” (Matt. 5:14) shows us that he did not think of himself as the only light. We all have the privilege and responsibility to reflect God’s light. In contrast to people and even the Messiah, who all reflect the light of God, God Himself is not “a” light, or even “the” light, God is “light” (1 John 1:5). In God is no darkness at all. He shines brilliantly and has done so forever.

“life.” Here the word “life” refers primarily to “life in the Age to Come,” which we can tell by reading the context. For example, verse 21 speaks of people dying in their sin. However the word life also has overtones of “life” now, life that is real life. Jesus came so that we would have everlasting life but also so that our lives now would be rich and meaningful (see commentary on John 5:40).

8:16. “for I am not alone in my judgment, but I and the Father that sent me.” This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his father, God. See commentary on John 8:28.

“the father that sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

8:18. “the Father that sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

8:22. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

8:25. “You—who are you.” The second person singular of “to be” makes the “you” at the beginning of the phrase emphatic. The Jews were asking and asking who Jesus was, but not accepting his answer (cp. 7:19ff; 7:30ff; 8:13ff). Jesus’ answer in this verse is difficult in the Greek, and Lenski writes, “The reply of Jesus constitutes one of the most disputed passages in the New Testament.…” Nevertheless, Lenski gives an excellent explanation of it. First, ten archē does not have the force of “the beginning,” but rather “in general,” or “altogether” (Lenski; Thayer on archē). Second, the word lalō (from laleō) is a present active, although almost all versions translate it as a past tense. Christ was telling the Pharisees who he was even as they were asking him who he was, so he answered, “I am what I am [presently] telling you.” Christ had just told them (v. 12) that he was the light of the world, an obvious Messianic reference (“a light for the Gentiles” (Isa. 42:6) and the glory of Israel). Because they did not know that Jesus was speaking of the Father (v. 26) then they certainly did not understand that he, the one sent by the Father was obviously the Messiah.
8:26. “he who sent me is true.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

8:28. “lifted up.” This refers to the crucifixion, as is clear from that fact that Jesus says, when “you” (Jews) have lifted up the Son of Man.” The reason there is any confusion at all is that there is no evidence in the writings that have come down to us from antiquity that the term “lifted up” was used of crucifixion. However, that does not mean it was not used that way, or it may have been that Jesus was being purposely obscure, which he sometimes was.

“then will you know that I am the one.” The sentence should end after “one” (or “he” if the translation is “that I am he”). “The one” refers to the one whom they were expecting: the Messiah. There is no connective, such as “that,” between that statement and the next one, even though the major versions (KJV; HCSB; ESV; NIV; NRSV; etc.) all put one in the text. D. A. Carson writes, “Probably we should read a full stop after “I am.” In the next words, nothing in the Greek text corresponds to the NIV’s ‘that.” Rather, Jesus goes on to say, ‘And I do nothing on my own...’ recapitulating the argument of 3:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:16; etc.” (The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John). Other scholars agree, cp. Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John.

Lenski (The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel) points out that the word “know” is an ingressive aorist, and means “come to know” The “then” is not tied to the immediacy of the crucifixion, as if as soon as Jesus was crucified the Jews would know he was the Messiah, but to the whole context. We approach Jesus’ words as they are written, but we must remember that they were spoken in a quickly moving and tense verbal context. Thus the Jews “coming to know,” or “coming to realize” that Jesus was the Messiah was tied to his crucifixion and what would happen after it, all of which are part of the context of Jesus’ statement.

“And I do nothing of myself.” A new sentence starts with the word “And.” When deciding how to punctuate a verse, we must be sensitive to the grammar, context, and scope of Scripture. In this case, Jesus continues a theme that he taught over and over in John, that he had not come on his own and that he was not acting on his own initiative or from his own power (cp. 5:19, 30; 6:38; 7:16; 8:16, 28, 29; 12:49, 50). Thus this verse is a continuation of something he had been teaching all along. Furthermore, there is no compelling to connect the two halves of the verse. The verse makes much more sense, and flows with the teaching of Jesus, to have it read as two separate sentences. Then also, the last sentence in the verse flows seamlessly into the next verse, verse 29.

This verse, and the other verses mentioned above that are similar to it, show the dependency that the Son had upon the Father. This is very good evidence that Jesus is not God in the flesh, but the Son of God. Even Jesus’ statement to the Jews, that he was the one,” reflected back to the Messiah they were expecting, and they were expecting a human being, a man from the line of David. If Jesus were God, and especially if a person had to believe that to be saved, this was a perfect time for Jesus to say so. Instead, he said he was the Messiah the Jews were expecting.

8:29. “and he who sent me is with me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different
contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

“for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his father, God. See commentary on John 8:28

8:42. “came from God.” God created Jesus when he was conceived in Mary. [For more explanation of the phrase that Jesus came from God, see commentary on John 6:38].

“but he sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

8:44. “the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διαβόλος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

8:48. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

8:51. “see death.” This is an idiom for “die,” and in this case “see death” is used idiomatically for experiencing “everlasting death.” Jesus is not saying that a person who keeps his word would not die in the flesh, but that he would not die an everlasting death. The words “live” and “life” were sometimes used of everlasting life (see commentary on Luke 10:28), and the words “die” and “death” were sometimes used of everlasting death, as is the case here in John 8:51.

8:52. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

8:53. “Surely.” The “surely” is implied by the me (not) which expects a negative answer.

8:54. “He is our God.” Early manuscripts say “He is our God,” and early manuscripts say “He is your God.” It is more likely that the “our” was changed to “your” as the scribes would not like to possibly imply that the Jews were saying that God was Jesus’ God also. The punctuation that makes the reading clear was not in the early texts.

8:57. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

8:58. “I am the one.” Trinitarians argue that this verse states that Jesus said he was the “I am” (i.e., Yahweh, the God who revealed Himself to Moses in the Old Testament), so he must be God. Saying “I am” does not make a person God. The Greek that is translated as “I am” is egō eime, and it was a common Greek way to identify oneself. For example, only ten verses after Jesus said, “I am,” the man who Jesus healed who had been born blind identified himself by saying exactly what Jesus said; egō eime (“I am;” John 9:9). Thus, Jesus and the man born blind both identified themselves by egō eime (“I am”) only ten verses apart.

Sadly, unless a person looks at the Greek text, he will never see that “I am” was a common Greek way to identify oneself. In what seems to be a clear case of Trinitarian
bias in translating the Greek text, when Jesus says, \textit{egō eime} (“I am”) in John 8:58, our English Bibles read, “I am.” But when Jesus says \textit{egō eime} in other places in the New Testament, or other people say \textit{egō eime} (“I am”), the Greek phrase gets translated differently. So, for example, some English translations of what the man born blind said are: “I am the one” (or “I’m the one;” CJB; HCSB; NASB; NET); “I am he” (BBE; ERV; KJV; YLT); “It is I” (Darby); and, “I am the man” (ESV; NIV). The only English Bible we know of that has “I am” in John 9:9 is the New American Bible.

There are many other examples of the phrase \textit{egō eime} (“I am”), being translated as “I am he” or some other similar phrase. Jesus taught that people would come in his name, saying “I am,” and will deceive many (Mark 13:6; Luke 21:8).

Jesus said \textit{egō eime} (“I am”), in a large number of places, but it is usually translated “I am he,” “It is I,” or “I am the one,” which are good translations because \textit{egō eime} was used by people to identify themselves. Examples of Jesus using \textit{egō eime} include: John 13:19; 18:5, 6, and 8; Jesus identifying himself to the apostles on the boat: Matthew 14:27; Mark 6:50; and John 6:20; and Jesus identifying himself to the Jews, saying \textit{egō eime}, translated “I am the one I claim to be” (NIV84, John 8:24 and 28.). These translations where Jesus says \textit{egō eime} but it is not translated “I am” shows that the translators understand that just saying \textit{egō eime} does not mean you are claiming to be God.

At the Last Supper, the disciples were trying to find out who would deny the Christ. They used \textit{egō eime} as the standard Greek identifier. Jesus had said one of them would betray him, and one after another they said to him, \textit{mēti egō eime, Kurie} (literally, “not I am, Lord;” Matt. 26:22 and 25.) The apostles were not trying to deny that they were God by saying, “Not I am.” They were simply using as the common personal identifier \textit{egō eime} and saying, “Surely not I, Lord”.

In Acts 26:29, when Paul was defending himself in court, he said, “I would to God, that …all who hear me this day, might become such as I am [\textit{egō eime}].” Obviously Paul was not claiming to be God. There are more uses of the phrase “I am,” and especially so if we realize that what has been covered above is only the nominative singular pronoun and the first person singular verb than we have just covered. The point is this: “I am” was a common way of designating oneself, and it did not mean you were claiming to be God. C. K. Barrett writes:

\textit{Egō eimi} [“I am”] does not identify Jesus with God, but it does draw attention to him in the strongest possible terms. “I am the one—the one you must look at, and listen to, if you would know God” (\textit{The Gospel According to St John}, p. 342).

A major problem that occurs when we misunderstand a verse is that the correct meaning goes unnoticed, and that certainly is the case with John 8:58. If the phrase \textit{egō eime} in John 8:58 were translated “I am he” or “I am the one,” like all the other places where Jesus says it, instead of coming to the erroneous conclusion that Jesus is God, we would more easily see that Jesus was speaking of himself as the Messiah of God who was foretold throughout the Old Testament.

Trinitarians assert that because Jesus was “before” Abraham, Jesus must have been God. Jesus did not literally exist before his conception in Mary, but he “existed” in the plan of God, and was foretold in prophecy.
It is also worth noting that many people misread John 8:58 and think it says Jesus saw Abraham. We must read the Bible carefully, because it says no such thing. It does not say Jesus saw Abraham, it says Abraham saw the Day of Christ. The text does say that Christ was before Abraham, but that does not have to mean Jesus existed literally as a person before Abraham. We did not have to literally exist as people for God to choose us before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), we existed in the mind of God. Similarly, Jesus did not exist as an actual physical person during the time of Abraham, but he “existed” in the mind of God as God’s plan for the redemption of man.

A careful reading of the context of the verse shows that Jesus was speaking of “existing” in God’s foreknowledge. John 8:56 says, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad.” This verse says that Abraham “saw” the day of Christ (the day of Christ is usually considered by theologians to be the day when Christ conquers the earth and sets up his kingdom—it is still future). That would fit with what the book of Hebrews says about Abraham: “For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10). The Bible says Abraham “saw” a city that is still future. In what sense could Abraham have seen something that was future? Abraham “saw” the day of Christ because God told him it was coming, and Abraham “saw” it by faith. Although Abraham saw the day of Christ by faith, that day existed in the mind of God long before Abraham. Thus, in the context of God’s plan existing from the beginning, Christ certainly was “before” Abraham. Christ was the plan of God for man’s redemption long before Abraham lived.

Jesus did not claim to be God in John 8:58. In very strong terms, however, he claimed to be the Messiah, the one whose day Abraham saw by faith. Jesus said that before Abraham was, “I am the one,” meaning, even before Abraham existed, Jesus was foretold to be the promised Messiah. Jesus gave the Jews many opportunities to see and believe that he was in fact the Messiah of God, but they were blind to that fact, and crucified him.

Some other sources that comment on John 8:58 and conclude that Jesus’ using “I am” did not make him God are: Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting, The Doctrine of the Trinity; Mary Dana, Letters Addressed to Relative and Friends Chiefly in Reply to Arguments in Support of the Doctrine of the Trinity (1845; available from Spirit & Truth Fellowship); Charles Morgridge, The True Believer’s Defence Against Charges Preferred by Trinitarians (1837; available from Spirit & Truth Fellowship); Andrews Norton, A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians; Don Snedeker, Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals; Patrick Navas, Divine Truth or Human Tradition?

8:59. “they picked up stones to throw at him.” The Jews were so arrogant that they thought if anyone was the Messiah they would know it, so they considered it blasphemy and worthy of death if someone claimed to be the Messiah. Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah, so they picked up stones to kill him.

Trinitarians claim that the Jews picked up stones to stone Jesus because he was claiming to be God (John 8:59), but that is an assumption. There is a different explanation that is supported by better evidence: the Jews picked up stones to kill Jesus because they understood he was claiming to be the Messiah. At Jesus’ trial, the High Priest asked, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God” (Matt. 26:63). First of all, we should notice that no one at the trial asked Jesus if he were God. However, if they thought he had been claiming to be God, that
would have certainly been a question they would have asked. At the trial the High Priest asked Jesus in very clear terms if he was the Christ because that is what the Jews knew Jesus was claiming to be. Second, when the Jews heard Jesus’ clear answer (“Yes, it is as you say”), they accused him of blasphemy and said, “He is worthy of death” (Matt. 26:66). They felt he was worthy of death in the record in John 8, but in that record they picked up stones to kill him, while after hearing his “blasphemy” at the trial, they took him to Pilate and got the Romans to execute Jesus. It was technically illegal for the Jews to execute anyone, but in times of great emotion the law was sometimes ignored. That would have happened in John 8 if Jesus had not gone away, it almost happened to Paul in the Temple (Acts 21:31), and it did happen to Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:58-60).

Chapter 9

9:1. “And as he passed by.” The record reads like Jesus just left the Temple and saw the blind man. It is possible, but not necessary, that that is what happened. The man was healed on a Sabbath day (9:14), and the last day of the Feast was a Sabbath. John 7:37 mentions “the last, the great” day of the feast, which most scholars believe is the eighth day of the feast, which, according to Leviticus 23:36 was a Sabbath. Thus, it is possible that Jesus simply left the Temple on that last day of Tabernacles and saw a man who was blind who had been brought there, likely to beg, much like the lame man in Acts 3. However, it is also possible that Jesus simply remained in Jerusalem after the Feast of Tabernacles and the record of the blind man occurred later, on another Sabbath.

9:2. “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents.” The Jews taught that the sins of the parents could cause a baby to be afflicted. However, the full question of the disciples seems very strange to us, because how could the man sin before he was born? The answer is not reincarnation or some form of transmigration of the soul (i.e., the person did not sin in an earlier life), but rather that that Rabbis taught that a person could sin even in the womb (Cp. John Lightfoot: A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica; and William Hendriksen: New Testament Commentary: John). If this man sinned in the womb so that he was born blind, then he would have then been born “entirely” in sin, as the religious leaders confidently asserted in verse 34.

“so that he was born blind.” Hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood result clause, see Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in...what was spoken being fulfilled.” The disciples assumed that someone’s sin unintentionally resulted in this man’s blindness. Jesus specifically rejects this thinking in verse 3. His response takes the disciples’ thoughts away from who is to blame, and leads them to think only of working the healing works of God in this man’s life.

9:3. “Neither did this man sin nor his parents.” Here Jesus specifically refutes a common thought of his day, that a child could sin in the womb and bad things happen to people because of sin.

“let the works of God be revealed in him.” This phrase is open to several different translations. The translator’s understanding of the passage, how he believes it fits into the context and the scope of scripture, in accordance with his theology, will determine his opinion as to how it is best brought into English. The Greek reads, hina phanerōthē ta
erga tou theou en autō. The controversy surrounds the use of the particle hina (#2443 ἵνα) with phaneroō, the verb for “revealed” (#5319 φανερῶ), in the subjunctive mood. The question is whether this use of hina with the subjunctive is to be understood here to indicate purpose or command. This same Greek construction can be used in purpose and command clauses, with purpose clauses being the more common of the two (Wallace, Greek Grammar, p. 471-72, 476-77). A purpose clause indicates why something happened, it shows the intention behind the action: e.g., “Children were being brought to him in order that he might lay [Greek = hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood] his hands on them and pray” (Matt. 19:13). A command clause, on the other hand, issues an order or command: e.g., “Come and lay [Greek=hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood] your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live” (Mark 5:23). [For more on result clauses, see Matt. 2:15 commentary “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled”].

Because it is the same Greek form of hina with the subjunctive, there can be disagreement as to whether purpose or command is meant. This disagreement shows up in the varying translations of Mark 5:12 for instance, when the demons plead to go into the herd of swine. Some versions translate the second part of their plea as purpose, “Send us into the pigs so that we may enter them” (cp. NASB; HCSB; KJV; ASV), while most modern versions translate it as a command: “Send us into the pigs. Let us enter them” (cp. ESV; NIV; NRSV; NET; NAB; NJB). Interestingly, we see precisely the same split between the translations with regard to Titus 3:13, “see that they lack nothing” (command: ESV; NIV; NRSV; NET; NAB; NJB) as opposed to “so that they lack nothing” (purpose-result: NASB; HCSB; KJV; ASV). (See also Revelation 14:13 for similar disagreement between translations).

Since John 9:3 has hina with the subjunctive, we must ask whether it is meant to be a purpose or command clause. It is rendered as a purpose clause in most translations, “He was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him” (NRSV); however, this translation has serious consequences to the meaning of the text. It makes the man’s blindness intentionally brought upon, so that he could not see for the better part of his life, simply for the purpose of being healed this day—that “God’s works” may be manifest by his healing. Such an interpretation goes against the teaching of scripture, that God is love (1 John 4:16), has plans not to harm us (Jer. 29:11), and that it is Satan who is our enemy, the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4) who has the power of death (Heb. 2:14). Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8), his ministry was to heal those oppressed by Satan (Acts 10:38). The Gospels nowhere portray this warfare mindset of Jesus as going about healing those oppressed by God (See Boyd, God at War, pp. 231-34).

Accordingly, a number of scholars agree that John 9:3 should be read as a command clause, “But let the work of God be revealed in him.” (see Boyd, God at War, pp.231-34; Boyd also notes M. Zerwick, Biblical Greek, trans. J. Smith, pp. 141-42; C.F.D. Moule, An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek, 2nd ed., pp. 144-45; Nigel Turner, Grammatical Insights into the New Testament, p. 145ff.) In this way, the Greek is understood just like Ephesians 5:33, which has the same construction: “let [Greek=hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood] the wife see that she respects her husband.” [For other command clauses see also: Matt. 20:33; Mark 5:23; 10:51; 12:19; 1 Cor. 7:29; 16:16; 2 Cor. 8:7; 2 Cor. 8:7; 1 John 3:11; 3:23]. This translation fits best with the
context of the verse, as well as the rest of the gospels and the scope of scripture. In the context, the disciples falsely assume that someone’s sin resulted in this man being born blind. Jesus corrects this wrong thinking, saying it was not the result of anyone’s sin, and then he points them to the proper response of seeing such a man. He models what he came to do—to destroy the work of the devil and heal those oppressed by him—“Let the works of God be manifest in him,” he says, showing compassion for the man. Then he turns to his disciples and reminds them that they must work the works of God while it is day. Rather than painting a picture of a capricious God who makes a man blind for the purpose of healing his blindness, this passage reveals the son of a loving God, who makes the works of his Father manifest by healing a man oppressed by the devil.

There are two other grammatical options for understanding this verse, which we feel are less likely than the command clause but are worth mentioning here. First, it is also possible that Jesus’ words should read as a result clause. On this understanding the verse would not be speaking of the purpose of the man’s blindness, but only of its result, “he was born blind with the result that the works of God are manifest in him.” This understanding, like the purpose clause reading, requires that the phrase, “he was born blind” be supplied since it is not in the original Greek. This view has for it the fact that the disciples used a result clause in verse 2, asking Jesus whose sin resulted in the man’s blindness. To this Jesus reverses their thinking from whose sin resulted in the blindness to how the blindness can result in the manifestation of the works of God.

Secondly, there is the option that the phrase is in fact a purpose clause, but nevertheless is not to be read that he was born blind for a purpose. Rather, it should be read with what follows. In that case it would read: “Jesus answered, “Neither did this man sin, nor his parents. But in order that the works of God be revealed in him, we must work the works of him who sent me while it is day.” But this is highly unlikely, for there is no other clear instance of a purpose clause gathering its main verb from what follows, usually the action comes from what precedes the hina clause not after. Romans 7:13 is a near parallel, but it is a result clause, not purpose.

9:4. “We.” There are texts that read “I,” but the better textual support is for “we.” It is understandable that the copyists, particularly early in the Christian era, would be uncomfortable with “we,” wanting to put all the focus and power upon Jesus. Nevertheless, the true reading is very empowering to those who work for the Lord. “We” must all work, if work is to get done for the Lord. The “night” that Jesus referred to would be during the Tribulation period, after the Rapture, when not much work will be done for God. That will be a dark time indeed.

9:5. “a light of the world.” Although almost every translation reads, “the” light of the world, the Greek text does not read that way. John 8:12 says Jesus is “the” light, but not this verse. In the context of “we” must work the work of God, Jesus is “a” light, and we are lights also. Believers have always been lights in the world, shining the way to God (Matt. 5:14).

9:17. “the blind man.” Here “the blind man” is used as a commonly known designation for the man. He was actually no longer “the blind man” since he could see.

9:18. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].
9:22. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

9:34. “And they cast him out.” After at first not believing that he was blind (v. 18), because that would then give credit to Jesus for healing the man and doing a great miracle, the religious leaders now refer back to the fact that he was “born” blind, and accuse him and excommunicate him on that basis. The Rabbis believed that a person could sin while in the womb, and reap the result of that sin at birth (see commentary on verse 2). Because the man was born blind, the Jews assert that he was born “entirely” in sin, and was in no position to teach them anything. This is spiritual blindness and evil at its worst, yet is happens often in religious circles. It often happens that someone who is healed supposedly gets his healing “in the wrong way” or “from the wrong person” and is excluded from fellowship on that basis. The leaders ignore the healing that has occurred and hurt is piled upon hurt by supposedly well-meaning people.

9:38. “bowed down before him.” See commentary on Matthew 2:2. When he was healed, this man believed that Jesus was a prophet (v. 17). It is clear from the record that the man does not believe Jesus is God. He spoke of God not hearing sinners, but hearing this “man,” Jesus. Jesus, however, sought him out, and asked if he believed on “the Son of Man,” a Messianic title. The man answered, “Who is he, Lord (in this case, “Lord” is the cultural equivalent of “sir.”). When Jesus identified himself as the Son of Man, the man said, in clear terms, “I believe you,” thus accepting Jesus as the Messiah. At that point it would have been appropriate and cultural for him to bow (or fall on his face) before Jesus. This is where the exact action that accompanies proskuneō is not clear. What is clear is the act of homage the man paid to Jesus.

9:39. “will see.” The verb with “blind” and “see” is in the subjunctive mood, thus many versions have “may” instead of will. But the Greek conjunction hina is the reason the verb is subjunctive, (#2443, hina, ἵνα; usually translated “that,” “in order that,” or “so that,” but see commentary on Matthew 2:15). Thus, when hina is used, the verb must be translated according to the context, not strictly by the mood of the verb. Jesus says he came for judgment, which will mean that those who are blind will see, while those who say they see will be blind.

Chapter 10

10:1. “Truly, truly.” The Greek is amēn amēn (#281 ἀμήν). It was a strong affirmation or way of emphasizing what someone was about to say. In the three other Gospels it is not doubled, it is only, “truly I say to you.” However, it occurs 25 times in John and is always doubled. The doubling adds emphasis, and is technically the figure of speech geminatio, a form of epizeuxis. The figure geminatio occurs when the same word is repeated with the same meaning for emphasis with no words between the word that is repeated (see Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible).

This teaching of Jesus is very much like a parable in that it contains many figures of speech and has many levels (thus it can be called a parable). It certainly was an illustration from everyday life in biblical times, and the sheepfold, shepherd, doorkeeper, and sheep would be familiar to everyone. Beyond that simplicity, the teaching becomes
complex, involving the figure metaphor (“I am the door,” etc.) and hypocatastasis (“sheep.” We learn from the scope of Scripture that “sheep” are believers).

A sheepfold was an open area in the countryside surrounded by a wall that was usually topped with interwoven briars and thorns so that wild animals and thieves could not get to the sheep inside. The folds were often quite large, and would accommodate several flocks at once. That is why it was so vital that the sheep knew the shepherd’s voice, who not only called to them, but often called them by name, as in this parable (10:3). As the shepherd called to his sheep, often in the early morning while it was still quite dark, the sheep would know the shepherd’s voice and leave the other sheep and go out with their shepherd (10:3). The sheep would not know the voice of a stranger, and so would never follow a stranger (10:5). The biblical shepherd went ahead of his flock, calling, speaking to them, or singing, and his sheep would follow him (10:4). This is in contrast to the Western shepherd, who herds his sheep in front of him, and follows them. The doorkeeper of the fold would let legitimate shepherds and hired hands in, but not allow unauthorized people to enter. The doorkeeper is not named in this teaching, but the scope of the teaching shows us it must be God.

This parable of Jesus has multiple layers of meaning. For example, Jesus is both the door of the fold, and the Good Shepherd. The multiple layers of meaning draw us deeply into the teaching, inviting us to spend time reading and re-reading the parable, considering all that it is saying to us. Because of the layers of meaning, it cannot be read once through and “simply understood.” Often the multiple layers of meaning are confusing to an unsaved or unspiritual person, who thinks the biblical writers should have written something simple and straightforward. They wonder, “How can Jesus be both the door and the Good Shepherd? How can the fold represent everlasting life and also just safety on this earth?” It is that kind of information that can be confusing that causes some scholars to call the teaching “nonsense” (cp. The Gospel and Letters of John by Urban von Wahlde). In reality, it is the profound Word of our Heavenly Father who loves us on multiple levels and wants us to explore that with Him as we read and pray.

The sheepfold represents two different things in the parable. The “fold” is everlasting life (“If anyone enters by me, he will be saved;” 10:9). However, it also is simply a place where the sheep can be safe, because they “go in and out, and find pasture” (10:9). It is easy to understand the two meanings, because while it is true that God’s sheep have everlasting life, they also need the guidance and support of the Good Shepherd right now, while they go in and out in life.

A point of the parable that we should not miss is that the thieves and robbers enter the fold by stealth, not to stay there and have everlasting life (if they wanted that, they would just enter by the door and be a sheep), but to get to the sheep. They come to steal, kill, and destroy (10:10), not to have everlasting life. They are thieves, robbers, strangers, and wolves (10:1, 5, 12). Often God’s people are naïve about how many thieves and robbers there are who do not love the flock, but by design or ignorance, hurt the sheep. Also, there are good people who try to shepherd the flock but who do it for reward, not out of love and devotion, and these “hired hands” do not adequately protect the sheep and thus contribute to their being hurt (10:12).

We can tell from the use of “thieves” in 10:1, that “the thief” in 10:10 is anyone who is trying to take the sheep away from the Good Shepherd, but it also certainly points
to that Great Thief, the Devil, who is ultimately behind all the attacks on the sheep. All those who work to destroy the sheep are doing the work of the Devil.

“fold.” The Greek is aulē (#833 αὐλή; pronounced ow-lay'). It was used in the time of the Greek poet Homer (c. 850 BC) to refer an uncovered space surrounded by a wall in which was the house and stables for livestock. So in the biblical culture it came to be used for a roofless area enclosed by a wall out in the open country in which flocks were kept at night, a sheepfold. It was also used for the uncovered court-yard of a house. Also, in the Septuagint it was used of the open courts of the Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle), and the Temple in Jerusalem, and the New Testament uses aulē of the Temple courtyard as well (Rev. 11:2).

“door.” The Greek word is thura (#2374 θῦρα), “door.” The meaning of “door” is just as we use it today, usually the door to a building, or room in a building. It was different from “gate” (Greek: pulē, #4439 πύλη; pronounced poo'-lay), which often referred to gates that opened into courtyards or wide areas (such as the gate of the Temple.

10:4. “he goes before them.” This is a custom of shepherds in biblical times. The Western shepherd drives his sheep, the Eastern shepherd leads them.

10:6. “veiled language.” The Greek is paroimia (#3942) and it occurs 5 times in the NT. It is “a brief communication containing truths designed for initiates, veiled saying, figure of speech, in which esp. lofty ideas are concealed” (BDAG Greek-English Lexicon). It is also translated “proverb” in 2 Peter 2:22.

10:10. “kill.” The word is from the Greek word thuō (#2380 θαύω), meaning “to sacrifice.” Elsewhere in the Old and New Testaments it is used nearly exclusively to refer to the killing of animals (for ritual sacrifice or celebration). There were several other Greek words for kill (e.g., apokteino, anaireō, diaxeirizomai, phoneuo), so it is very telling that the Lord used this word to describe the Thief (the devil). The choice to employ thuō shows us that humans are just like animals to the devil, and he seeks to kill us with no regard, just like animals. (See Acts 10:13 for another interesting usage of this word).

10:11. “life.” The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. This is one of the many verses that shows that psuchē, soul, is not immortal. [For a more complete explanation of psuchē, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].


10:19. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

10:24. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

“souls.” The Greek word translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; and attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here psuchē
is used broadly, and means “us” (as it is translated in most versions), but the fact that “soul” is used and not just the Greek word “us” lets us know that these religious leaders were emotionally invested in getting an answer to their question. The Greek has psuchē in the singular, “our soul,” but in English we would say, “our souls.” Note how this section of John shows us some of the common uses of psuchē, because it refers to human “life” in 10:11, 15, and 17. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

10:26. “of my sheep.” This is the partitive use of the preposition ek (#1537 ἐκ) and the genitive case. The partitive usage indicates a part of some greater whole; in this case, Jesus denies that these Jews were a part of the larger group of “his sheep.”

10:28. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].

10:30. “I and the Father are one.” Jesus and the Father operate in perfect unity, and it should be the goal of every Christian to be “one” with them, even as Jesus wanted us to when he prayed to God: “that they may be one as we are one; I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be perfected into one” (John 17:22, 23 Young’s Literal Translation).

There is no reason to take this verse to mean that Christ was saying that he and the Father make up “one God.” To be “one” was a common idiom, and in fact it is still used the same way today when two people say they are “one. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians about his ministry in Corinth, he said that he had planted the seed and Apollos had watered it. Then he said, “he who plants and he who waters are one” (1 Cor. 3:8 KJV). In the Greek texts, the wording of Paul is the same as that in John 10:30, yet no one claims that Paul and Apollos make up “one being,” or are somehow “of one substance.” Furthermore, the NIV translates 1 Corinthians 3:8 as “he who plants and he who waters have one purpose.” Why translate the phrase as “are one” in one place, but as “have one purpose” in another place? The reason is the translator’s bias toward the Trinity. But translating the same Greek phrase in two different ways obscures the clear meaning of Christ’s statement in John 10:30: Christ always did the Father’s will; he and God have “one purpose.” The NIV translators would have been exactly correct if they had translated both John 10:30 and 1 Corinthians 3:8, instead of just 1 Corinthians 3:8, as “have one purpose.”

Jesus used the concept of “being one” in other places, and from them one can see that “one purpose” is what he meant. John 11:52 says Jesus was to die to make all God’s children “one.” In John 17:11, 21, and 22, Jesus prayed to God that his followers would be “one” as he and God were “one.” We believe the meaning is clear: Jesus was praying that all his followers be one in purpose just as he and God were one in purpose, a prayer that has not yet been answered.

Sadly, the Trinitarian bias in reading John 10:30 has kept many people from paying attention to what the text is really saying. Jesus was speaking about his ability to keep the “sheep,” the believers, who came to him. He said that no one could take them out of his hand and that no one could take them out of his Father’s hand. Then he said that he and the Father were “one,” i.e., had one purpose, which was to keep and protect the sheep. No wonder Jesus prayed that we believers be “one” like he and his Father. Far too many believers are self-focused and do not pay enough attention to the other believers around them. Cain thought he did not have to be his brother’s keeper, but we should
know differently. If we are going to be “one” like God and Jesus are “one,” then we need to work hard to help and bless God’s flock [For more information on “I and the Father are one,” see, Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting, The Doctrine of the Trinity, Christianity’s Self-inflicted Wound, p. 289-291; Frederick Farley, The Scripture Doctrine of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, 1873, reprinted by Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, pp. 60, 61; and Charles Morgridge, True Believer’s Defense Against Charges Preferred by Trinitarians, 1837, reprinted by Spirit & Truth Fellowship, pp. 39-42.]

10:31. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

10:33. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

“defaming words.” The Greek noun is blasphēmia (#988 βλασφημία; pronounced blas-fay-me'-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. See “defaming words,” 10:36. [For more on blasphēmia, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

“a god.” The Greek word Theos (2316 θεός), God or god, does not have the definite article and should be translated “a god” or “divine.” Since the Jews would never believe a man could be Yahweh, and since it was common in the Aramaic and Hebrew to call an important man “god,” that is the way we translated it. [For a much more detailed explanation on the words for “God” being used of God’s representatives, see commentary on John 20:28 and Hebrews 1:8].

10:34. Quoted from Psalm 82:6.

10:36. “him whom the Father made holy and sent into the world.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 20:28 and Hebrews 1:8.

“You speak defaming words.” The Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. The religious leaders thought it was defaming and insulting to God that Jesus would refer to himself as the Son of God. [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

10:38. “come to know and continue to know.” The Greek verb, used twice, is ginōskō (#1097 γινώσκω). The first ginōskō is in an aorist tense active voice and here means, “come to know,” or “get to know.” The second ginōskō is in the present tense, active voice and refers to an ongoing knowledge, “continue to know.” Lenski’s commentary has, “that you may come to realize and go on realizing.” The force of the two verbs is expressed more idiomatically, but correctly in A Translator’s Handbook to the Gospel of John: “that you may know once and for all….” Most modern versions say something similar to “know and understand,” using “understand” to express ongoing knowledge, but there is a fundamental difference between knowing something and understanding it. Also, there is the fact that it would not just be one work that would convince people that Jesus was the Christ, but ongoing works that could be seen and believed, thus continuing to reinforce the knowledge that Jesus was the Christ.
“the Father is in union with me, and I am in union with the Father.” This is the use of “in” that refers to the sense of sphere and relation, which some Greek grammars refer to as the “static en.” It often refers to being in a relationship, and that is certainly true with the phrase, “in me” and “in the Father.” The preposition en (#1722 ἐν), like all prepositions, has many different meanings, depending on the context. In fact, the BDAG Greek-English lexicon says of en:

“The uses of this preposition are so many and various, and often so easily confused, that a strictly systematic treatment is impossible. It must suffice to list the main categories, which will help establish the usage in individual cases.”

What BDAG is saying is that there are so many meanings of the preposition en (“in”), that we need to get an understanding of its major uses and then we can gain a feel for how it is used in specific places. The important meaning of en for the study of these verses in John and the many other verses that speak of us being “in Christ,” “in the Lord,” “in him,” etc., is that it signifies a close association or relationship. The BDAG Greek-English lexicon says:

“Especially in Paul or Johannine usage, [en is used] to designate a close personal relation in which the referent of the ἐν-term is viewed as the controlling influence: under the control of, under the influence of, in close association with...In Paul the relation of the individual to Christ is very often expressed by such phrases as ἐν Χριστῷ [in Christ], ἐν κυρίῳ [in the Lord], etc.,...in connection with, in intimate association with, keeping in mind.”

In light of what the BDAG Greek-English lexicon is saying, some of the ways the preposition en can be translated include, “in connection with,” “in association with,” or “in union with.” When two people (or groups of people) are “in” one another, they are in relation to each other, and the degree of intimacy and connection is defined by the context and scope of Scripture. Thus, for example, in John 10:38, Jesus speaks of the Father being “in” him and he “in” the Father, which is certainly a very close relationship. Some time later, during the Last Supper, Jesus again says he is “in” the Father and the Father “in” him (John 14:10, 11). Then Jesus developed his teaching to show that because the Apostles follow Jesus he can say, “I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (John 14:20).

When Jesus says to the Apostles, “you in me, and I in you,” he is using the same wording that he used when he speaks of being “in” the Father. In fact, Jesus prayed in John 17:21 that people will believe so “that they also may be in us” (in the Father and Jesus).

A study of Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper shows that he placed a lot of emphasis on he and the Father being “in” each other (John 14:10, 11, 20; 17:21, 22), and similarly taught about the disciples being “in” him and he “in” them (John 15:4-7). Thus, just as God and Jesus have an intimate relationship and are in union with one another, so God, Jesus, and believers are to be in an intimate relationship with one another. This
intimate relationship is expressed by the word “fellowship” in 1 John 1:3, and according to that verse our fellowship, i.e., our full sharing and intimate joint participation, is to be with each other, God, and Jesus. Thus 1 John 1:3 expresses by the word “fellowship” what the Gospel of John expresses by the word “in.”

Another word in John that expresses the union and fellowship between God, Jesus, and the believer is the word “one.” Jesus said that He and the Father were “one” (John 10:30), meaning one in purpose, unified, in intimate relationship with each other. The Jews were offended at his statement, but he explained it by saying he was “in” the Father and the Father “in” him (John 10:38). Jesus expanded what he said about He and his Father being “one” at the Last Supper, when three times he prayed about the believers being “one” just as God and Christ were one. He prayed, “that they may be one, just as we are” (17:11), and “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us” (17:21), and “so that they may be one, just as we are one; I in them, and you in me, that they may be perfected into one” (17:22, 23). It is clear from all the uses of “one” that Jesus and God being “one” does not refer to them being “one God and of the same essence,” but rather one in purpose.

That the word “in” is referring to a relationship, a very close relationship, is clear from Jesus elucidating his teaching by using the same vocabulary and speaking of a branch being “in” a vine: “Remain in me, and I will in you. As the branch is not able to bear fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine…” (John 15:4). The branch is not “inside” the vine, nor is “in” referring to being of the same mystical essence. It is a simple truth that the branch is in union with the vine; in an intimate relationship with it and united for the same purpose: to produce fruit. Similarly, God and Christ are in an intimate relationship and are in union with each other, and believers are to be in union with them in their hearts and minds.

A few English versions make the relationship between God, Christ, and us somewhat clearer by translating the en (in) as “in union with,” or “unified with” instead of simply “in.” So, for example, in John 10:38, Charles Williams’ translation reads, “the Father is in union with me and I am in union with the Father” (he also uses “in union with,” rather than just “in” in other places in John). The New Testament translated by Edgar Goodspeed also uses “in union with” in John 10:38; 14:10, 11, 20; and “united with” in John 15:4, 5, 6, 7). The Complete Jewish Bible by David Stern also reads, “united with” instead of just “in” in John 10 and 14. The New English Bible uses “united with” in John 14:4. The point is that when the Bible says that the Father, Jesus, and believers are “in” each other, or being “one,” it refers to being in a relationship with each other; being in union with each other.

After the Christian Church started on the Day of Pentecost, and salvation via the New Birth became available, the Church became “in” Christ, “in union with” Christ, in an even more powerful way. Christians have the blessings they have by virtue of being united with Jesus Christ (see commentary on Ephesians 1:3).

Although the concepts of “in” and “one” in John 14-17 are very simple and point to a close relationship, the concepts are greatly complicated by the doctrine of the Trinity. According to the Trinity, Jesus and the Father are “one God,” so when the Bible says they are “in” each other and “one,” Trinitarians have to give these words a mystical meaning and say they refer to God and Jesus’ being unified in essence and one-and-the-same being. However, that understanding of “in” and “one” can come only when those words
are taken away from the straightforward reading of the whole Gospel, especially the
narrative of the Last Supper, and a pre-conceived understanding of the Trinity is read into
the verses.

God being in Christ, Christ being in the disciples, the disciples being in Christ,
and the branch being in the vine, should all have the same meaning in the same teaching.
If we simply read the entirety of Jesus’ teaching, using all the verses that use the same
Greek construction with “in” to guide our interpretation, the conclusion is an easy one.
God and Christ are “in” each other and want the disciples to be “in” them; and God and
Christ are “one” with each other and want the disciples to be “one” with each other and
“one” with them. God, Jesus, and the disciples should be in close relationship with each
other.

Another difficulty caused by Trinitarian doctrine is that in John 17 Jesus prays
that the disciples “may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they
also may be in us... that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me,
that they may become perfectly one” (17:21-23). We should pay attention to the fact that
when Jesus prayed, “that they may be one even as we are one,” the words “even as” are
the translation of the Greek word kathos (#2531 καθοσ), which means “in the same
manner,” “in the same way.” The only way all the disciples can be “one” is if they are
united in heart and mind, and since Jesus was praying that the disciples would be unified
“in the same manner” in which he and God were unified, we can know that Jesus was
united with his Father by being of the same heart and mind. There is no difficulty here
unless it is created by Trinitarian doctrine.

Meyer, himself a Trinitarian, confirms that the unity being spoken of in John is a
unity of the heart and mind. He says that the unity referred to in John 10:38 is not
“essential unity,” as in the Trinitarian understanding, which Meyer identifies as the “old
orthodox explanation,” but rather it is a “dynamic unity.” He identifies this “dynamic
unity” as “nothing else than that of inner, active, reciprocal fellowship” (Meyer’s
Commentary on the New Testament). [For more on “in” and the relationship it refers to,
see commentary on Ephesians 1:3]. (The Greek preposition eis can have the same
meaning as en and refer to a relationship; see commentary on Romans 6:3).

Chapter 11

11:3. “friend.” The Greek is the verb phileō (#5368 φιλέω), “to be a friend to.” It is hard
to translate the verb phileō in this context and keep the English as a verb. If we translated
quite literally, which is simply not the way we would talk in English, we would have to
say, “He who is your friend is sick,” and understand the verb to be “is your friend.”

Jesus had a special attachment to Lazarus. For a similar construction see
commentary on “is a friend to,” in John 5:20, and for a more complete understanding of
phileō, see the commentary on John 21:15.

11:4. “is not ending in death.” The Greek has an unusual construction here. The Greek
phrase πρὸς θάνατον would literally mean something such as “with a view to death,” as if
you could translate it, “This sickness is not with a view to death.” The point was not that
Lazarus would not die, because in fact he was already dead (see commentary on John
11:6). The phrase means that the final result of the sickness would not be death. Jesus
already knew he would raise Lazarus from the dead, something he plainly stated in 11:11. Newman and Nida write: “The Greek expression ‘this sickness is not to death’ means that ‘death will not be the final result of this sickness’ (A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of John). While Newman and Nida say “final result,” Robertson (Word Pictures in the New Testament) and Vincent (Vincent’s Word Studies) both say death would not be the “final issue.” H. Meyer translates the phrase: “it is not to have death for its result.” Also, the verb is in the present tense, although that makes it hard to translate into English without it being awkward English. Thus some translations read, “will not” end in death, while the REV attempts to keep the present tense verb and also communicate that the phrase is speaking of an ultimate result: thus, “is not ending in death.”

Jesus knew Lazarus was dead when the messengers arrived to say he was sick, something we learn by putting the record together, understanding the context, scope of Scripture, and geography. Nevertheless, he did not tell people that, but worded his statement in a way that was true without revealing what he knew. He did not say Lazarus would not die, what he said was that the final result of the sickness would not be death. If the messengers returned to Mary and Martha and told them exactly what Jesus had said, they could have rested in hope that no matter what happened to Lazarus, he would live.

If we translate the phrase, “This sickness will not end in death” (HCSB; NIV); or “This sickness will not lead to death” (ESV; NET), we can see what it is saying when we realize that Jesus knew Lazarus was already dead. For Jesus to say the sickness would not end in death when Lazarus was already dead was a way of saying he would raise Lazarus from the dead.

Some commentators think that Lazarus did not die until after the messengers left Jesus and headed back to Bethany, and Jesus knew that by revelation that Lazarus had just died and stayed where he was for two more days. It seems more likely, both from when the messengers would have arrived where Jesus was, and what Jesus said, that Lazarus was already dead when the messengers arrived.

“but to the glory of God.” The sickness would result in God’s being glorified. That does not mean God made Lazarus sick; no verse says that. God does not make people sick just to make them well. As to the preposition huper, it can mean “to do or suffer anything” (Thayer). [For more on how God was glorified, see commentary on John 11:6].

“glorified.” The Greek word is the verb doxazō (#1392 δοξάζω pronounced dox-ad'-zo), and it refers to glory: i.e., holding in honor, show and acknowledge the dignity, power, and worth of someone. It is related to the noun “glory,” which is doxa (#1391 δόξα). In the Greek and Roman culture, the idea of “glory” also often contained the idea of power or might, and that is the case here. It is not just that raising Lazarus from the dead would show Christ’s dignity and worth, but that it would also reveal that he and God have the power to raise the dead after an extended period of time, which the disciples needed to be completely convinced of, because they had to believe that Jesus could come back from the dead after he had been in the grave three days and nights (see commentary on John 11:6, “stayed two more days.” For more on glory being associated with power, see commentary on Romans 6:4).

11:5. “loved.” The Greek verb is agapaō (#25 ἀγαπάω), and is very important here. Agapē love (agapē is the noun form), is a love that often runs against the feelings. God so loved that He gave His Son when He did not want to. Christ so loved he gave his life when he did not want to. We are told to love our enemies. In this case, Jesus knew he had
to follow the guidance he was being given by God even though his absence was very hard on Mary and Martha. Nevertheless, Jesus loved them with agapē love, and did the difficult, but loving, thing, following the revelation he got from the Father. Lazarus was already dead, and the people needed to be completely convinced that God could raise the dead even after three days (as to why four days were important, see commentary on John 11:6).

11:6. “so when.” The Greek phrase hōs oun that starts this verse should be translated as “so when” as many modern versions do (cp. BBE, HCSB, ESV, NET, NIV, RSV); or with a “therefore,” as “When, therefore,” or “Therefore, when” (cp. ASV, Darby, NASB, Rotherham, YLT). Although almost all versions end verse 5 with a period and start verse 6 as a new sentence, the text does not have to be punctuated that way. The Greek connective oun ties the two verses together. The point of verses 5 and 6 is so counterintuitive that it grabs our attention and requires study, reflection, and prayer. They say that it was because Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus that he stayed where he was for two more days. But how can that be? There are several reasons, but a major part of the record is that when he heard from the messengers that Lazarus was sick, he also knew by revelation that he had already died (see commentary on “stayed two more days” below).

“stayed two more days.” When we piece together what we know about the character of God and Christ, the geography of the area, the four-day time period involved, and the beliefs of the people at the time, we can see both why Jesus knew Lazarus was already dead when the messengers arrived and told him Lazarus was sick, and also why Jesus waited two extra days to raise him from the dead.

As to the character of Christ, that he walked in love and would never let a person die from sickness if it could be prevented, nothing needs to be said. If Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick and could have arrived in time to keep him from dying, he would have left immediately to help him. However, it seems most likely that sometime around the arrival of the messengers, shortly before they arrived or just as they arrived, God let Jesus know Lazarus was already dead. That kind of revelation is quite in character with the entire Gospel of John. The first day that Jesus began to gather disciples he demonstrated that he walked with God by renaming Simon and calling him “Peter” (John 1:42), and very shortly after that he told Nathaniel that he saw him under the fig tree (John 1:48). John 2:25 says Jesus knew what was in people, and many other verses in John highlight and confirm his walk by revelation (cp. John 4:17, 18; 5:19, 20; 6:6, 70; 7:16; 13:10, 11, 38). God telling Jesus that Lazarus had died explains why he did not immediately leave for Bethany. F. F. Bruce writes: “…Lazarus must have died shortly after the message was dispatched, and Jesus knew that he had died” (The Gospel & Epistles of John). Leon Morris concurs, and writes that the “therefore” (or “so when” as the REV translates it) that opens verse 6, “cannot mean that Jesus deliberately waited for Lazarus to die. Indeed, the death must have already taken place when the messengers arrived” (The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel according to John). J. Dongell writes: “Lazarus must have died almost immediately after the messenger left to find Jesus. The delay of Jesus, then, was not designed to permit Lazarus to die” (John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition). Newman and Nida write that “verses 17 and 39 suggest that Lazarus was already dead at the time Jesus received the message” (A Translators Handbook on the Gospel of John).
As to the geography and the timing of the four days, we do not know exactly where Jesus was staying. John had been baptizing at “Bethany” beyond the Jordan (John 1:28) and the exact location of that place was unknown. However, it is most likely close to the Jordan river across from Jericho (see commentary on John 1:28). Since the other Bethany, the town of Lazarus, was east of Jerusalem, it would not have been a full day’s journey to go from where Jesus was staying to where Lazarus was buried. Lazarus had been dead for four days when Jesus arrived. Leon Morris succinctly writes: “The four days are accounted for by allowing a day for the journey of the messengers, the two days that Jesus remained where He was, and a day for Jesus’ journey.” In the culture of Palestine, burials occurred the same day as the person died, and by the time Jesus arrived Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days (John 11:17).

A vital final thing we need to understand in order to understand the record is why Jesus would stay where he was for two more days. The answer to that question comes from the beliefs of the people. Rabbinic literature from after the time of the New Testament shows that the rabbis taught that the soul hung around the body for three days looking for an opportunity to re-enter it, but when decomposition set in on the fourth day, the soul left (cp. Leviticus Rabba (Rabbinical commentary) 18.1 (Leviticus 15:1)). Although that particular rabbinical commentary post-dates the New Testament, Jesus purposely staying away from Bethany for four days is good evidence that the belief was in existence at the time of Christ.

Even though Lazarus died close to the time of Jesus’ crucifixion, the death and resurrection of Christ was still unknown to the Apostles and disciples. Jesus had told them over and over about it, but they just could not grasp it. The cultural belief that the soul would not re-enter the body after 3 days would have made Jesus’ resurrection very hard for some people to believe. That Jesus raised Lazarus after four days would confirm to people that God could raise the dead even if they had been in the grave for four days.

Jesus’ powerful miracle of raising Lazarus showed that God could raise the dead even after four days, and helped people, even the Apostles, believe in the resurrection. This is clear from 11:15: “I am glad I was not there [to heal him] so that you may believe.” The raising of Lazarus did something besides get people to believe Jesus was the Messiah and believe in the resurrection. It was because of the miracle of raising Lazarus that the enemies of Jesus went in high gear in their plans to kill Jesus.

Jesus’ miracle in raising Lazarus after he had been dead was so great, and so undeniable, that many of the Jews believed in him (John 11:45). In contrast to those pure-hearted Jews, the religious leaders realized if they let Jesus go on doing miracles, “everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our Place and our nation” (John 11:48). Then Caiaphas prophesied that it was better for one man to die than for the nation of Israel to perish (John 11:50-52). The result of all this was that from the very day that Jesus raised Lazarus, “from that day on they made plans to kill him” (John 11:53). It was only a short time later, at the time of the Passover, that their plans were fulfilled, and Jesus was crucified.

It was Jesus’ delay to go to Lazarus that made the raising of Lazarus so amazing and undeniable, and started the intense religious fervor to arrest and kill Jesus. Jesus had said that Lazarus’ death was “to the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it,” and now we can see the fullness of what he meant. The death and resurrection opened the door for God to be truly glorified by giving His only Son and
providing for the salvation of mankind so that anyone who believed could have everlasting life.

11:9. “twelve hours in a day.” At the time of Christ, in both Jewish and Roman reckoning of time, the “day” was divided into 12 hours. Also, both the Jews and Romans divided the night into four “watches,” each being three hours long. (See commentary on Mark 6:48).

Jesus was obviously making a point in John 11:9 and 10 when he spoke about the hours of the day, but he did not explain it so there are many opinions about what he meant. We believe that here, like in many other places, Jesus is using something physical to make a spiritual point, actually more than one point. There are 12 hours in a day, and Jesus’ “day” was running out. He would soon die in Jerusalem. After Jesus’ day was over and he was gone, we would be left to “see in a mirror, darkly,” and would stumble (1 Cor. 13:12). Furthermore, Jesus knew that “night is coming, when no one will be able to work” (John 9:4). After the resurrection and ascension, people would not see clearly and stumble, and eventually the time of the Antichrist would come with its full darkness, when even the believers would be handed over to evil (Dan. 7:21; Rev. 13:7).

While it is “day” there is light, but the light is not “in him” (v. 10), it comes from outside him, from God. Jesus could go back to Judea even though the Jews were trying to kill him because he walked in the light, i.e., by the revelation God gave him. Thus it also seems clear that part of the meaning of what Christ said was that by walking by revelation a person could be safe even in situations that were normally very dangerous. This would turn out to be a good lesson for the disciples after Jesus’ ascension when they were being hunted by the authorities.

11:11. “fallen asleep.” The Greek verb is koímāō (#2837 κοιµάω), to fall asleep, to be asleep. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.

“to awaken him.” In the Greek, the hina phrase indicates purpose and is also the reason the verb is subjunctive mood. But Jesus was not going so he “may” awaken him, he was going “to awaken him,” so that is the better translation here.


11:15. “rejoice.” The Greek word is chairō (#5463 χαίρω), which usually means “rejoice.” Although “glad” is within the semantic range of meanings of chairō, it did not seem to carry the full meaning of what Jesus was feeling, and perhaps even seemed too smug. It was a difficult time, emotionally. Jesus knew he was very close to his death, and his friend had just died and the family he loved was obviously very hurt. Yet we can have joy and rejoicing in those times because of what we see lies ahead. He was not happy about the death of Lazarus, or the four days he would wait to raise him from the dead, but he rejoiced for the disciples and that what happened to Lazarus would help them to believe in his own resurrection.

“that you may believe.” Jesus’ raising Lazarus from the grave after four days was clear proof that God could raise the dead even if they had been dead a long time. The historical evidence supports the fact that the rabbis taught that the soul (or spirit; life force) of the body hung around the dead body for three days, but by the fourth day, when decomposition had definitely started, it left and would not return. Thus, culturally, many
people would likely have rejected Jesus’ resurrection solely on the basis that he had been dead for three days and nights. However, with Lazarus alive and among the disciples, that objection would melt away.

Although Jesus taught about his death and resurrection many times, the disciples just could not seem to grasp it until after the resurrection when Jesus opened their minds to the Scriptures. No doubt the fact that Jesus raised Lazarus helped the disciples believe in the resurrection, and also helped them witness about Jesus’ resurrection after he ascended to heaven. [For more information on the disciples understanding Christ’s suffering and death, see commentary on Luke 18:34].

11:16. “die with him.” Although Thomas generally has a bad reputation in Christian circles, verses like this one show he was a man of great devotion and courage. We do not know anything about the life of Thomas, but here he boldly declares that death with Jesus is better than life without him. So true; and such a wonderful spiritual lesson! Jesus taught that if we lose our life for his sake we will actually find our life.

Thomas was courageous, but his courage was based on misunderstanding. It seems clear that Thomas did not grasp that Jesus was the “Lamb of God” and had to die for the sins of the world (Heb. 2:17; 1 John 2:2), and he also was obviously ignorant of the fact that Jesus’ atoning death was something that Jesus alone could accomplish. No one else, by dying with Jesus, could help with the atonement.

11:17. “found.” The Greek word is heuriskō (ἓυρίσκω), and means to find; come upon; discover for oneself; find by searching, or accidentally, or by thought and reflection; to “see;” discover, understand, experience. Jesus knew Lazarus was dead four days, but now he sees that fact personally for himself.

11:18. “fifteen stadia.” About 1 ¾ miles (2.8 km). The Greek word is stadion (στάδιον), and it a stadia is about 600 feet (185 meters); or 1/8 of a Roman mile. Thus the 15 stadia is very close to 1¾ miles. People who lived in Palestine and went to the feasts likely were very familiar with the distance, but people outside of Palestine were not, and the distance is likely given in the text to show us how close to Jerusalem Jesus went, and therefore how dangerous the situation was for him and the Apostles.

The description, “fifteen stadia,” would have let everyone know the distance from Bethany to Jerusalem. Historically, the one stadion race was very popular in the Greco-Roman world, and was one of the events in the Panhellenic Games, of which the Olympic Games was one of the games. In fact from 776 to 724 BC, the stadion race was the only Olympic event. This stadion race, this 200 yard sprint, was so prestigious that the “Olympiad,” the span of four years, was named after the winner of the stadion race. The stadion unit of measurement got its name from the place where the race was held, which then came into Latin and English as a place where events were held: a stadium (the Latin and English are spelled the same way).

11:19. “many of the Jews.” This is one of the several indications that Lazarus and his sisters were a wealthy and influential family. It was Mary who poured the ointment on Jesus that was worth 200 denarii, or about a full year’s salary (John 11:2). It is not unlikely that some of the visitors were some of the “chief priests” that would soon try to kill Lazarus because of the witness he was to Jesus (John 12:10). These Jews were so willing to comfort the sisters concerning their dead brother, but they wanted him dead again when his living witness supported that Jesus was the Christ. This is the blindness
and nature of evil: it dismisses reality and does not mind even murder if it furthers its cause.

11:20. “Mary remained seated.” The records of Martha and Mary show that Martha is the more active and perhaps even the more aggressive one. She is often belittled because she served while Mary sat and listened to the Lord (Luke 10:38-42). But then we do not know how much private time they and their brother got to spend with Jesus, and how many people needed attending to when Jesus visited their home. In this record there is no indication that Jesus called for Martha; it seems to be her more aggressive nature that she would take the initiative to go see him. Perhaps Mary was affected more deeply by the death of her brother; she is the only one who is said to be crying (11:33). Perhaps Mary felt betrayed by circumstances. She, like Martha, believed that had Jesus been around when Lazarus was still sick that Jesus could have healed him and kept him from dying (11:21, 32). And Jesus had been around until just shortly before Lazarus got sick, but his confrontation with the Jews was so intense that they were seeking to arrest him (10:39), and so he had left and traveled beyond the Jordan, out of Judea (10:40). That kind of circumstance naturally leaves people with an “If only” mindset.

Martha’s faith shines clearly in the record as she declares that she knows her brother will be in the resurrection. By staying home Mary missed out on one of Jesus’ very powerful and oft-quoted statements: “I am the resurrection and the life.”

11:25. “life.” Here the word “life” refers to “life in the Age to Come, which is clear from the next verse, John 11:26.” See commentary on John 5:40.


11:26. “in the Age to come.” A translation of eis ton aiona, “to (and through) the Age.” The Greek word eis does not just mean to, but fully into, and in this case, by inference, through it. The preposition dia might have been used, but dia has the added meaning of through and passing out of (Bullinger, Companion Bible, Appendix #104.) No resurrected person dies in the middle of the Messianic Age. In the mind of Jesus’ audience, the Messianic Age that was to come was established on earth and lasted forever. The details of it coming to an end and an eternal kingdom following it were not revealed in the Old Testament (Cp. John Schoenheit, The Christian’s Hope).

11:27. “believe.” The Greek word pisteuō (#4100 πιστεύω), is in the perfect tense, active voice, which generally refers to something that started in the past and still is continuing. Martha’s believing that Jesus was the Christ seems to be a firm conclusion she had reached some time earlier and had not wavered in, thus Nyland (The Source New Testament) translates it “firmly believe.” On the other hand, it is possible that the perfect tense is being used for emphasis: “I do believe” or “I really believe.”

11:32. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Mary makes the same basic statement that Martha did, only the position of “my” in the Greek text is different. No doubt they had expressed the sentiment to each other many times, and both expressed it to Jesus (11:21, 32). But whereas Martha was more in control of her emotions, and enters into a dialogue with Jesus, Mary, upon seeing him, falls down at his feet crying.

11:33. “was deeply angered.” The Greek is embrimaomai (#1690 ἐμβριμάομαι), and it occurs 5 times in the New Testament. It has the overtone of anger or indignation, and can mean to sternly warn (Matt. 9:30; Mark 1:43) to harshly scold because of anger or indignation (Mark 14:5), or be moved with anger or indignation. Robertson (Word
Pictures in the New Testament) writes, “First aorist middle indicative of *embrimaomai*, old verb (from *en*, and *brimê*, strength) to snort with anger like a horse. It occurs in the LXX (Da 11:30) for violent displeasure. The notion of indignation is present in the other examples of the word in the New Testament (Mark 1:43; 14:5; Matt. 9:30). So it seems best to see that sense here and in verse 38. The presence of these Jews, the grief of Mary, Christ’s own concern, the problem of the raising of Lazarus—all greatly agitated the spirit of Jesus (locative case *tôi pneumati*). He struggled for self-control.” The New Living Testament translates this phrase, “a deep anger welled up within him,” which catches the sense very well. Most modern versions say something such as Jesus was “deeply moved.” However, to our modern ears this seems like a touching sympathy, not an anger and indignation about what the Devil had been able to do in the situation, causing such pain and hopelessness. When faced with the pain of the sisters and even some of the crowd, and the realization that they thought that Jesus could have saved Lazarus if he were just sick but could do no more once he died, a deep anger and indignation arose within Jesus. Often that is what happens to men and women of God who are faced with not only the effect of the Devil’s work (destruction and death) but also the fact that the people are confused and deceived and thus faithless and hopeless. A deep resolve born of righteous anger wells up, and the sword of the Lord is bared to do its work as the believer steps forth to do the will of God.

“was troubled” (*etaraxen heauton*). First aorist active indicative of *tarassô*, old verb to disturb, to agitate, with the reflexive pronoun, “he agitated himself” (not passive voice, not middle). “His sympathy with the weeping sister and the wailing crowd caused this deep emotion” (Dods). Some indignation at the loud wailing would only add to the agitation of Jesus.

11:35. “burst into tears.” The Greek word is *dakruô* (#1145 δακρύω pronounced dack-roo’-ô). The verb literally means “to shed tears,” and thus means to cry or weep, and this is the only time it is used in the New Testament. The cognate noun, *dakruon*, which occurs ten times in the New Testament, is a “tear,” and the plural noun can refer to “tears” or “weeping.” *Dakruô* usually means to weep or cry quietly without loud wailing, and it means that here in John 11:35, and is in stark contrast to *klaîô* (#2799 κλαίω pronounced kly’-ô), which means to cry, weep, or mourn, usually with loud and open crying or mourning (John 11:31, 33). *Klaîô* occurs some 40 times in the New Testament. Here in John 11:35 *dakruô* is in the aorist tense, active voice, and as such most likely means “burst into tears.” (cp. Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John; also, C. K. Barrett; H. Meyer; Sanders). C. William’s translation renders it: “Jesus burst into tears.” In contrast, when Jesus got over the Mount of Olives and could see Jerusalem he “burst into sobs,” broke into audible crying. In Luke the Greek word is *klaîô*, while John 11:35 uses *dakruô*, but both verbs are in the aorist tense active voice, and refer to a sudden outburst of emotion. In Luke Jesus bursts into audible sobs, here he bursts into tears. Here he holds back his voice but experiences the deep emotion from the circumstances around him: the death of his friend, the pain of Mary and Martha, the misunderstanding of his Apostles, the ignorance and duplicity of the Jews.

Verses like this show us the true humanity of Jesus—that he was fully human and the Son of God, not God the Son. If he were God in the flesh he would have been better prepared for the situation and not, it seems clear, overcome with emotion. Indeed, Trinitarians have wrestled with this verse. Most point out that this verse shows Jesus’ true
humanity, but that glosses over the fact that he was also supposedly God. God would not have been so overcome by emotion. For that to happen Jesus’ humanity would have had to have overridden his godhood, but how could that happen? So this verse has caused problems. Hippolytus of Rome (170-235) wrote that Jesus wept “to give us an example.” Peter Chrysologus (c. 380 – c. 450), a bishop and doctor in the Church, wrote that Jesus did not weep out of human weakness, but “because he was welcoming him [Lazarus] back.” Potamius of Lisbon, a bishop in the mid-4th century AD, wrote that one reason Jesus wept was to “moderate the sisters’ outpouring of grief.” Augustine (354-430) said that Jesus wept to teach us to weep. Basil of Seleucia (d. c. 460) taught that Jesus wept to set “a law with his tears...He defined the bounds of grief.” (All examples from Joel Elowsky, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).

All of these explanations fundamentally deny that Jesus had true human emotions and was overwhelmed by them. But having strong emotions is not a sin, and not even a sign of weakness. Indeed, quite the opposite. Jesus’ strong emotional reaction in the situation shows how deeply he was both in touch with how he felt (he did not have a head-heart disassociation problem), and that he had very deep emotions. No wonder Isaiah foretold that Jesus would be “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3 ESV). Thus, in his sobbing and weeping, Jesus again sets a standard that we strive to emulate: having very deep feelings, but not losing control of ourselves in the midst of those feelings.

11:36. “was a friend to him.” The Greek is φιλέω (#5368 φιλέω). It is hard to translate the verb φιλέω in this context and keep the English as a verb. Jesus had a special attachment to Lazarus. See commentary on John 5:20 and 11:3, on “is a friend to.” For a more complete understanding of φιλέω, see commentary on John 21:15.

11:38. “deeply angered.” See verse 33. The anger that Jesus initially felt when he saw the pain and weeping of Mary and the Jews subsided (as emotions do) as they all walked to Lazarus’ tomb. However, upon arriving at the tomb, the anger was rekindled.

11:42. “so they believe that you sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

11:48. “our Place.” The word “place” was a designation of the Temple (see commentary on Matthew 24:15; topos.)

11:50. “People.” This is a good example of the use of the word “People” as meaning the Jewish nation, “the Jews,” hence the capital “P.” See commentary on Matthew 2:4.

11:51. “Now he did not say this of himself.” Before the Day of Pentecost God could place His gift of holy spirit upon people so that they would accomplish His work. This is a good example. Caiaphas, though not a godly man, was still High Priest and God placed holy spirit upon him at least so that he could give an accurate prophecy about Jesus, which then became a prime motivator for them to seek his death (see v. 53). This is an example of how God works in history to bring about His purposes without the need of perfect foreknowledge. God, by His power, can influence things He wants accomplished.

11:53. “plans.” The middle voice of the verb indicates they worked together (cp. NASB).

11:54. “Ephraim.” A city close to the Arabah desert, about 13 miles (20 km) NNE of Jerusalem. From here Jesus went north through Samaria, into Galilee, across the Jordan.
River, traveled south through Perea, crossed the Jordan River again and came to Jericho, and then traveled west to Jerusalem. The Gospel of John omits this entire final itinerary of Jesus. See commentary on Luke 17:11.

11:56. “were seeking.” zeteō (#2212 ζητέω), “to seek.” The verb is in the imperfect tense, active mood, so the Jews were seeking Jesus. Caïphas had given a prophecy that one man should die for the nation instead of the nation being destroyed, and so the Jews were now zealously seeking to kill Jesus.

“Surely he will not come to the feast?” The form of the question assumes strongly that Jesus will “absolutely not” (the Greek uses two negatives for emphasis: ou mê) dare to come this time (Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament). The translation in many modern versions loses the fact that the question expects a “no” answer. This shows that the people knew their leaders were trying to arrest and kill Jesus, and so they assumed that he would know that too, and not show up at Passover.

Chapter 12

12:1. “six days before Passover.” As Lenski points out in his commentary on this verse, when the Greeks counted, they counted backward from the termination, and the Passover fell on the 14th of Nissan (that was the day the lamb was killed at about 3 PM; the Feast of Unleavened Bread started the next day, the 15th, which was at sunset). That made six days before the Passover the 8th of Nissan, which was a Saturday.

This chronology poses a problem for those people who believe what tradition teaches, that Jesus was crucified on Friday, because it would mean that the simple and straightforward reading of the text would be that Jesus walked from Jericho to Bethany on the Sabbath, a distance of some 15 miles (24 km), far greater than the standard “Sabbath day’s journey,” (just over ½ mile or .8 km) allowed by the law the religious leaders enforced. This leads to some very inventive solutions.

A common solution is that Jesus walked almost to Bethany on Friday (within ½ mile or .8 km), and then walked into Bethany on the Sabbath. At face value, however, this is absurd. For one thing, there are no known good resting places on the downhill slope of the Mount of Olives that close to Jerusalem. The “Jericho Road” had an inn on it (cp. the parable of the Good Samaritan; Luke 10:34), but it would have been much further down the slope toward Jericho. But the real problem with that solution is that no one who has walked uphill for some 15 miles (24 km) would stop within a few minutes of their destination and friends and food. There would simply be no reason for such a halt.

Lenski, Hendriksen, and other commentators say that the Passover Lamb was killed on Thursday the 14th, so that day was “Passover,” and thus the Last Supper that Jesus ate with his disciples was the Passover. Then Jesus’ death was Friday, Nisan 15. In that scenario, six days before “Passover” (Thursday) was the previous Friday, and thus Jesus was free to travel on that day. Many commentators have a problem with that construction of events, and rightly so, because Jesus could not have been the “real” Passover Lamb if he was not killed when the Passover Lamb was being killed in the Temple.

It is suggested by some commentators that Jesus simply broke the Sabbath and acted in a similar way to when his disciples picked grain on the Sabbath. But this was very different. First, there was no law about eating raw grain on the Sabbath. You could not
light a fire and cook, but that was not what the disciples were doing. They were eating the raw standing grain just the same as they would have taken a drink from a flowing brook.

Second, this time Jesus was accompanied by hundreds, perhaps thousands, of followers, and they would not have broken the Sabbath and would have doubted that Jesus was the Messiah if he had done so.

A more reasonable solution, but an unlikely one, is that the sun set just as Jesus was entering the Bethany area, which means he would have walked the last \( \frac{1}{2} \) mile to Bethany in the dusk on the Sabbath. The problem with that solution is its improbability. Jesus had left Jericho many miles and many hours earlier, and, as anyone who hikes long distances knows, it is very hard to judge any arrival time with much accuracy. Jesus and the people following him would have known that the next day was the Sabbath and allowed plenty of time for the journey, which could be made in one long day. The thought that Jesus and the people following him would have cut their timing so close and may have had to stop traveling and be stuck for the Sabbath day in the open only a mile or so from Bethany and Jerusalem is improbable in the extreme. People knew they could not travel on the Sabbath and made sure not to get stranded in a difficult place. Furthermore, if Jesus arrived on the Sabbath to Bethany, which was a small village on the east slope of the Mount of Olives, it is likely that a good portion of the people with him would have needed to go to Jerusalem to get food and lodging. But to do that those people would have to travel more than a Sabbath day’s journey, because they had already walked part of a Sabbath day’s journey to reach Bethany, and so they could not go on to reach Jerusalem without breaking the law.

The “problem” caused by John 12:1 is not a problem at all. Jesus was crucified on Wednesday the 14\textsuperscript{th} of Nissan, and his arrival in Bethany was six days earlier, Thursday, the 8\textsuperscript{th} of Nissan. [For more information on the last week of Jesus’ life, see commentary on John 18:13; 19:14; and Luke 23:50].

“came to Bethany.” He was traveling up from Jericho. This is clear from reading the record in John and comparing it to the other Gospels. [For more information of Jesus’ travels in the last weeks of his life, see commentary on Luke 17:11].

“out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among the dead.”

12:2. “So they made him a supper.” This event is out of chronological order, in John coming before Jesus enters Jerusalem (John 12:12), and in Matthew and Mark after he did. There is no problem with that, because the chronology is not being emphasized here, but rather that the people would have it on their heart to honor Jesus, and thus the supper is mentioned at the beginning of his last time in Jerusalem.

“Martha was serving.” The anointing occurred in the house of Simon the Leper (Matt. 26:6; Mark 14:3), which is why John specifically says Martha was serving. If the supper occurred at the house of Mary and Martha that would never be stated because it would be obvious and expected.

“Lazarus was reclining with him.” Thus Lazarus is mentioned as an honored guest. This would never be mentioned if the supper was at Lazarus’ house.

12:3 “pound.” A Roman pound was 12 ounces, three-quarters of our English pound. “Spikenard” is a plant native to northern India and was a favorite perfume in the ancient world. The prefix “spike” refers to the shape of the plant. The best nard was imported from India in sealed alabaster boxes, which were only opened on special
occasions. The Roman historian Pliny commented on the expensive nature of Indian nard (Pliny; *Natural History*, 12. 24-26 [41-46]). For “perfume of pure nard” see Lenski.

“anointed the feet.” This record of Mary pouring the oil on Jesus occurs in Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; and John 12:1-8. The anointing occurred in the house of Simon the Leper (Matt. 26:6; Mark 14:3), which is why John specifically says Martha was serving. If the supper occurred at the house of Mary and Martha that would never be stated because it would be obvious and expected.

At first glance there seems to be a contradiction between Matthew, Mark, and John, because Matthew and Mark say the ointment was poured on Jesus’ head, while John 12:3 says Mary poured the ointment on Jesus’ feet. The key is to realize that a flask of oil worth a year’s salary would be quite large, and covered both his head and feet. That is why Jesus said that the woman “poured this perfume on my body” (Matt. 26:12).

12:6. “money box.” The Greek word, glossokoman is from glossa, “tongue” and komeo, “to keep, to preserve.” It technically referred to a small box or container in which reeds for wind instruments were kept, but, as with all boxes, eventually all kinds of things are kept there. “Money box” is probably better than “money bag” since the reeds would never be kept in a bag.

12:7. “It was that she kept this until now for the day of my burial.” The similar records in Matthew 26:12 and Mark 14:8 are clearer, and from them we build the full meaning of this record. Lenski does a wonderful job. “…it was that…” see Robertson’s *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. We added until now for clarity’s sake. Versions such as the NASB, “…Let her alone, in order that she may keep it for the day of My burial…,” make no sense—she had just poured out the oil, how could she now keep it? Or, “Leave her alone. It was intended that she keep this for the day of my burial.” In other words, she had intended to keep this for Jesus’ burial anyway, but had poured it out now.

12:9. “the common people of the Jews” This is the partitive use of the preposition ek (#1537 ἐκ) and the genitive case. The partitive usage indicates a part of some greater whole; in this case, it is a part of the whole group of Jews that have gathered in a crowd.

“out from among the dead.” See commentary on Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among the dead.”

12:10. “that they might put Lazarus to death…” This is religion at its worst. The religious leaders were willing to kill an innocent man to protect your power and doctrine. The Devil’s way is to steal, kill and destroy, and you know his followers by their fruit.


“Hosanna.” The people who were shouting praises to Jesus as he entered Jerusalem were for the most part not the same group as the group that shouted, “Crucify him” only a few days later. See commentary on Luke 23:21 and 27.


“Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδοῦ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

12:17. “meanwhile.” Cp. HCSB. The Greek word is oun (#3767 οὖν), it is understood to be used here as a continuation of narrative (BDAG, def. 2), which the translation “meanwhile” captures beautifully here.

“crowd.” This is the crowd (the multitude of people) who followed Jesus from Jericho, where Jesus had performed miracles such as healing blind Bartimaeus and his
blind companion (Matt. 10:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43). It is different from 
the crowd in verse 18, who were the people who came out of Jerusalem to see Jesus when 
you heard he was approaching and went out to see and welcome him (John 12:12, 13). 
(There were two crowds that merged into one huge multitude as Jesus reached the top of 
the Mount of Olives).

“out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among the dead.”

12:18. “the crowd went and met him…” A different crowd than the crowd specifically 
mentioned in verse 17 (see commentary on John 12:17).

12:19. “You see that you are gaining nothing. Look!, the world has gone after him.” 
The religious leaders had been looking for Jesus to arrest him. They can find him now 
easily enough! But they dare not to take him.


12:25. “is overly attached to.” The Greek is phileō (#5368 φιλέω). Although most 
versions say “love his life,” in doing so we confuse agapē love (“love” in the REV) and 
phileō love. Phileō love has an attachment, and it is the attachment between good friends. 
However, we would not say, “If anyone is a friend of his life…..” We could say, “is 
attached to his life,” but that would be confusing because there is an appropriate 
attachment to life that we must all have or we would commit suicide during difficult 
times. For a more complete understanding of phileō, see the note on John 21:15.

“life” (first 2x). The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), 
often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the 
physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, 
and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions 
translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. This is one of the many verses that 
shows that psuchē, soul, is not immortal. [For a more complete explanation of psuchē, 
“soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

“life in the Age to come.” In this phrase, “life” is zōē (#2222 ζωή; pronounced zō-ā’), 
life, animal life that animates the body. This verse contrasts two words that are used for 
“life.” psuchē, soul, is used more broadly, while zōē is used more specifically of the 
“life” in man and animals. This verse could be translated: “Whoever is overly attached to 
his soul loses it, and whoever hates his soul in this world will keep it, resulting in life in 
the Age to come. “Life in the Age to come” is the everlasting life that begins with the 
new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to 
Come”].

12:27. “troubled.” The Greek word is tarassō (#5015 ταράσσω), and it has a broad 
range of meaning, including, to trouble, agitate, disturb, make restless, stir up, be in fear 
or dread. This record in John occurs in the last few days of Jesus’ life, and Jesus was 
agitated and troubled in his soul. Man’s redemption was on the line, and his task was 
neither easy or fun. There were many details that had to happen exactly on time and as 
prophesied. The night of his arrest he was even more deeply troubled; see commentary on 
Matthew 26:38.

12:31. “ruler.” The Greek word is archon (#758 ἀρχων), which is from archē, “first,” 
and it means the one who is first, thus the “ruler, commander, chief,” etc. The Slanderer 
(Devil) is indeed the “ruler of this world.” Although most Christians believe that God is 
the ruler of the world, all we have to do is look around us at life to realize this world is 
not being ruled by God. God gave the world to Adam and Eve to steward (Gen. 1:28). In
the Fall, the Devil somehow took the control of the world from Adam and Eve. It immediately began to show the effects of the Devil’s rulership both in the physical aspects of the world (“the ground is cursed” “it will produce thorns and thistles;” Gen. 1:17, 18), and in his effect over people (Cain killed his brother Abel and lied about it; Gen. 4:8, 9). The Devil told Jesus he had been given authority over the world (Luke 4:6). Furthermore, it is because the Devil is the ruler of this world and has authority over it that he could offer that authority to Jesus, and Jesus did not deny the Devil’s claim (Luke 4:6). [For more on the power the Devil exercises as the “ruler” and “god” of this world, see commentary on 2 Cor. 4:4 and 1 John 5:19. For more names and characteristics of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

“of this world.” The Greek word for “world” is kosmos (#2889 κόσμος), and it has a wide range of meanings in Greek, but here it just has a standard meaning of “world,” the inhabited earth.

“Now the ruler of this world will be cast out.” The Adversary had been able to go into heaven, into the presence of God (Job 1) when he wanted, and thus he “accuses them before our God day and night” (Rev. 12:10). However, before Armageddon, the Adversary will be cast out of heaven by Michael and his army (Rev. 12:7-10). The ruler of the world will first be cast out of heaven (Revelation 12:8 and 9) and then out of the world as we know it when he is chained in the Abyss (Rev. 20:1-3). Christ was anticipating that event not many years after his death. He did not know the Sacred Secret.

12:34. “We have heard from the law that the Christ will remain forever.” In this verse, the people are using the word “law” in its broader sense of the entire Old Testament, not just the five books of Moses. The people correctly understood that when the Messiah finally set up his Kingdom it would last forever. What they did not see was that would happen the second time the Messiah came. The first time he would be killed, resurrected, then ascend to heaven. There is no verse that specifically says that the Messiah would live forever and not die. However, that doctrine was being taught, based on all the prophecies that his kingdom would never end, such as Psalm 110:4 (“You are a priest forever”), Isaiah 9:7; Ezekiel 37:25; Daniel 2:44; 7:14. There were Jewish teachings that the Messiah would die, so what the crowd is voicing here was not the only Jewish teaching, but was probably the predominant one, and the one that had to be overcome for the people to understand what happened to Jesus.

12:38. Quoted from Isaiah 53:1.

“with the result.” The Greek is a hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood result clause, see Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.” For commentary on this passage see entry on Matthew 13:13. To fully understand this passage, we must see how Matthew’s record portrays the human side of the events, John’s the spiritual side, and Mark and Luke’s records combine the two into one.

Their decision of unbelief resulted in the word of Isaiah being fulfilled. The decision to believe or disbelieve was the free choice of those present. Hence, the verse should not be translated as a purpose clause: “they did not believe in him, in order that the word which Isaiah the prophet spoke might be fulfilled…” (NAB). Those who were unbelieving did not intend on fulfilling the passage in Isaiah, neither did God overstep their freewill and control their belief with the purpose of fulfilling the word. Rather, this is a result clause, indicating that these Jews’ unbelief, their own free decision of unbelief,
resulted in this passage’s fulfillment. See also John 15:25 entry on “but let the word…be fulfilled” for a similar passage employing a command clause.

12:39. “for this reason.” The reason refers to what was spoken in verse 37: they still did not believe in him. It was because of this persistent unbelief that they were hardened. See commentary below, and on Matthew 13:13.

“they were not able to believe.” The people were “not able to believe” because they had allowed their hearts to become hardened to the possibility that Jesus could be the Messiah. They had let their interpretation of the Law blind them to the truth being revealed through Jesus’ teaching and actions. For example, they decided that healing on the Sabbath was wrong, but God never said it was, and Jesus proved that it was not (Matt. 9:12-14; Luke 13:14-17). So when Jesus healed on the Sabbath, instead of being open to the possibility they were wrong, and adjusting their doctrine, they arrogantly held to their doctrine and concluded Jesus was a sinner (John 9:24). Eventually their hearts were so hard and blind that they were not able to believe based on the signs that Jesus did. When a person’s heart becomes that hard, it takes much love and prayer to change it.

12:40. Quoted from Isaiah 6:10.

“he has blinded…hardened.” Quoted from Isaiah 6:10. We need to realize this was a Semitic way of saying that God permitted the people to be blinded, and permitted their hearts to be hardened. This is the idiom of permission, just the same as Exodus 4:21. (Bullinger; *Figures of Speech*; “idiom”; see commentary on Romans 9:18). “Active verbs were used by the Hebrews to express, not the doing of the thing, but the permission of the thing which the agent is said to do” (p. 823. Cp. *Don’t Blame God*, chapter five).

Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible translates Exodus 4:21 as, “…but I will let his heart wax bold [hard], and he will not suffer [allow] the people to go.” Then his marginal note reads, “…the translation…is thoroughly justifiable on the two grounds (1) of the known character of God, and (2) the well-attested latitude of the Semitic tongues, which are accustomed to speak of occasion as cause.” God has given mankind freedom of will, and when we make up our minds to do something, God respects the free will we have and allows us to make bad choices. That is why He so often in His word reminds us, even commands us, to make good choices. These people who were blinded and hardened had made a series of bad choices in their lives, and even held to their error when they could have repented and changed. However, not everyone was so hardened. Only two verses later (12:42) we read about leaders of the Jews who were not hardened and who believed on Jesus.

12:42. “even many of the rulers believed in him.” This verse shows the great power of fear and of wanting success in this life. The versions are divided as to the wording of the verse. Some versions read as if the verse is saying “many people, including some of the rulers, believed in him” (NAB, NJB, NRSV), while other versions read like the verse is saying “many of the rulers believed in him” (HCSB, NET, YLT). The natural reading of the Greek text is that many of the rulers believed. However, that reading seems difficult to believe because we wonder, “If many of the rulers believed, why do we not see more evidence of it? Where is the support from these leaders that Jesus needed?” The answer to those questions is in the verse itself. These rulers loved their earthly life and positions of authority, and knew that if they openly confessed what they believed then they would lose their position in the synagogue and with it the glory of men they received every week. It is verses such as this that show us the Word of God is living and real, and as
relevant today as when it was written, for it is clearly true that many people in authority do not speak up about what they really believe because of fear of losing their earthly possessions or positions. Jesus Christ often tried to help people deal with earthly concerns, and told us to not be afraid of those who could only kill the body, but to fear God (Matt. 10:28). To those to whom much has been given, much will be required (Luke 12:48).

12:44. “Jesus had cried out and said.” The Greek sentence starts with the word de, which is often the signal of a new subject and left untranslated, as we have here (cp. CJB, KJV, NLT). John 12:36 said Jesus left the feast and was not in public, so he cannot now be speaking in public. Verses 12:44-50 are a continuation, and in a sense a summary of what he had spoken publicly. In that light, it is not correct to translate the de as “then,” as many versions do, for this is something that Jesus had said earlier, not a continuation of his teaching when at the feast. The verbs “cried out” and “said” are in the aorist tense in Greek, and thus in this context indicate something that had already occurred. We could and should ask, “Why would God separate this part of what Jesus said from the body of his teaching, and place it alone by itself?” The answer seems to be that this summary is the “chewy caramel center,” of what he said, a very important and central point to his teaching.

“but in him who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

12:45. “him who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

12:46. “…a light.” Not just “light” as some translations have, although the Greek could be read that way. Jesus was “the light, and “a light,” because other prophets were light too (John 5:35).

12:49. “speak.” The English does not do justice to what is being communicated here. The difference between “say” and “speak” is that “say” in the Greek refers to the communication, the message, but “speak” can, in the range of the word, refer to the utterance itself. Thus, Jesus got even the tone of what he said from God (Cp. Lenski).

“for I did not speak on my own.” This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his father, God. [For more information on Jesus not speaking on his own, see commentary on John 8:28].

“the father who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. [For more information and in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57].

12:50. “His commandment is life.” The “commandment” is not in and of itself life, as if a person could have everlasting life by just knowing the commandments. This is the figure of speech Metonymy (metonymy of the effect), whereby the commandment is substituted by metonymy for believing and obeying the commandment, which is what produces the effect of having everlasting life (cp. Bullinger, Figures of Speech). A similar example in common English is the saying, “knowledge is power.” Knowledge is not
power unless the knowledge is recognized for what it is and then properly applied. So just as “knowing and obeying” the commandment results in everlasting life, “recognizing and properly applying knowledge results in power.

Jesus had been saying that he was speaking on the authority of God, and teaching about believing and obeying what he was saying (12:44-47). The metonymy emphasizes the “commandment,” which is from God, instead of the believing and obeying, which is works that people do.

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [For more information on the translation “life in the Age to come,” see Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].

“the things that I speak, I speak just as the Father has said to me.” This verse shows that Jesus received what he taught from his father, God. See commentary on John 8:28.

Chapter 13

13:2. “the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

13:5. “began to wash the disciples’ feet.” This was much easier to do in Jesus’ world than it would be in the modern Western culture, for the people eating were reclining and their feet were very accessible.


“let the scripture be fulfilled.” Judas was not fatalistically damned to fulfill this passage (see also commentary on John 17:12, “resulting in the scripture being fulfilled”). Rather than a purpose clause, “so that the scripture might be fulfilled,” the phrase should be understood as a command clause. [For more on command clauses, see entries on John 9:3, “let the works of God be revealed in him,” and John 15:25, “but let the word… be fulfilled”]. The HCSB translates this phrase as a command, but uses the word “must.” See comments on John 15:25 for why “let” is a better translation of the command clause. See also Nigel Turner, Grammatical Insights into the New Testament, p. 147-48 as cited in Boyd, God at War, p. 379.

13:19. “will believe.” The verb “believe” is in the subjunctive mood, but that comes from the hina ("so that") at the start of the phrase that requires a subjunctive. Jesus was not telling the apostles things ahead of time just so they “may” believe,” but so that they will believe.

13:20. “him who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.
13:24. “nods” The Greek is clear, and means to signal with a nod of the head. “…to give a nod; to signify by a nod…followed by an infinitive of what one wishes to be done,” John 13:24; Acts 24:10. (From Homer down; the Septuagint Prov. 4:25) (Thayer). Peter was not close enough to John to whisper, and if he spoke it loudly, Jesus would have heard also. The intimate connection between Peter and John shows clearly here. Peter simply nods his head and John knows what he should do.

13:26. “piece.” The word “morsel,” used in many versions, in today’s English communicates a very good tasting bite of something. The Greek does not necessarily mean that the piece tasted good, just that it was a small piece. So we used “piece.”

13:27. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

Luke 22:3 tells us the Adversary entered in Judas earlier, and thus Judas had already gone to the priests to betray Jesus, which had started the process of betrayal. That was why Jesus says, “What you are doing…” In the Greek text, the verb “do” is a “conative present” (Robertson, Grammar, p. 880; cp. Lenski), thus it means “are doing.” Furthermore, the words usually translated “do quickly” should be translated as, “do more quickly.” Lenski writes, “The adverb tachion [“quickly”] is comparative and does not mean “quickly” (our versions) but “more quickly..,” Robertson writes, “Sometimes the comparative form is used absolutely…that is because the context makes the point perfectly clear” (Robertson, Grammar, p. 664). Robertson goes on to say that Jesus’ statement to Judas may have well been the factor that caused Judas to act as quickly as he did, after all, it is clear from Scripture that Judas had been exposed in front of the other apostles: “Jesus testified and said, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray me. It is he to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it.’ So when he had dipped the piece, he gives it to Judas” (John 12:21-26 abridged).

Jesus knew that he had to be the Passover lamb that year, which meant that Judas did have to move quickly. We do not know, but it well may be that Judas and the religious leaders might have preferred to arrest Jesus after Passover. After all, Jesus had touched the lives of many people all over Israel, and many of those people would be in Jerusalem for Passover. The possibility of a riot could have made an arrest at Passover less desirable than simply waiting a week until all the crowds were gone. But now that option was not available. Jesus had exposed Judas in front of the other apostles. Even though it is likely that the other apostles did not understand what Jesus meant when he spoke of being betrayed, Judas did, and the evil in his heart convicted him. He left the room immediately and arranged for Jesus to be arrested that very night.

13:31. “now is the Son of Man glorified.” Jesus was not yet literally glorified when this was spoken, yet in the Greek, the verb “glorified” doxazō (δοξάζω) is in the aorist tense, which would be well represented in English as “has been glorified.” This is the idiom of the prophetic perfect, when something that was absolutely going to happen in the future was spoken of as if it had already happened to emphasize the fact that the event was surely going to happen.

Robertson (Grammar of the Greek New Testament, p. 847) points out that we know the two aorist “glorify” verbs in verse 31 refer to a future event because the verbs...
are in the future tense in verse 32. We also know it is a prophetic perfect because the actual glorification did not occur until the resurrection, but Jesus’ arrest and the process of his death leading to the resurrection started that night.

The prophetic perfect is a very common idiom, but translating it can be very difficult because if we translate it as a future event, true to facts but not representing the certainty of the original text, we lose what the actual text is saying and the certainty being communicated by the past tense, but the meaning is clear. Hence the NLT translation: “Jesus said, ‘The time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory, and God will be glorified because of him.’” However, if we translate the verb as a past tense we risk confusing and reader and leading them to the wrong conclusion. [For more on the prophetic perfect, see commentary on Ephesians 2:6].

13:32. “immediately.” This is a hyperbole, an exaggeration (cp. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, “hyperbole”). It would be very soon.

13:34. “you also are to love one another.” The Greek is a hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood command clause. For an explanation of this construction, see John 9:3 entry, “let the works of God be revealed in him.”

13:37. “life.” The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. This is one of the many verses that shows that psuchē, soul, is not immortal. [For a more complete explanation of psuchē, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].


“the rooster will absolutely not crow before you have denied me three times.” Jesus can make this statement, knowing that God would back him up. God backed up Joshua when the sun stood still (Josh. 10:14), and He backed up Samuel when he called upon Yahweh (1 Sam. 12:17). Our relationship with God and Jesus is one of fellow-laborers. We can make requests of God, and He can answer them (we should be praying, asking, all the time). Jesus could make this statement, knowing that God would honor it. It is not hard for God to make a rooster crow, or keep a rooster from crowing.

Chapter 14

14:1. “Continue to trust in God and continue to trust in me.” This occurs in the shadow of Judas’ betrayal, Peter’s denial, and the events of Christ’s last night, when he will not look like the Christ at all, but rather appear to be conquered. So the Lord is not simply commending belief in God to disciples who already believe in God, but telling them of the necessity to continue to trust God and his messiah considering what is about to happen. This use of the present tense is known as the “iterative” present (cp. Wallace, Exegetical Syntax, pp. 520-21).

14:2. “are many places to live.” The word translated “mansions” (KJV), or “rooms” (NIV) is monē (#3438 μονή, pronounced moe-nay’), and it is translated “dwelling places” in the NASB. It refers here to a place to live. In God’s “house” (i.e., kingdom) are many places to live. The fact that Jesus says, “are” many places to live causes some
commentators to assert that the places already exist, and people are living in them in heaven. From the scope of Scripture we can see that is not the case. Things in heaven are often spoken of by the Jews as if they physically exist when they exist in the mind of God and will come into concretion in the future. So, for example, Jesus taught us to store up our treasure in heaven as if there were already storehouses there where things could be stored (Matt. 6:20). But there is nothing like that in heaven and we cannot put things there. Similarly in Matthew 5:12 Jesus spoke of people’s reward as being “in heaven,” when he meant that God kept a record of it and would bestow it on the believer at the resurrection. Similarly, God was keeping track of the believers and would have a place for each of them to live in the Kingdom. Thus one of the blessings of the Messianic Kingdom on earth will be that “Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree” (Micah 4:4 NIV84, cp. Zech. 3:10).

“I go to prepare a place for you.” This statement has been misunderstood due to the traditional teaching that when people die, their soul goes to heaven and lives with God and Jesus forever. Scripture teaches that Jesus will come to earth and set up a Kingdom that lasts 1000 years; then there is a final war; then a White Throne Judgment; then the New Jerusalem, a gigantic city with streets of gold, descends from heaven and lands on earth, [For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Matthew 5:5. For more on the final war and the New Jerusalem see Revelation 20-22].

The statement “I go to prepare a place for you” is very broad. We should not define our understanding of Christ’s reign on earth or the future New Jerusalem in terms of this one statement, but rather understand this statement in terms of what we know about the coming Kingdom. We do not know much about what Jesus’ preparation for the future earth includes. Jesus said, “I go to prepare a place for you,” at the Last Supper, and the indication is that although Christ said he did not know when his Second Coming would be, he did think it was going to be very quickly, while that generation was still alive (Matt. 24:34). He was thinking there was lots of preparation to do very quickly.

No doubt Jesus knew there was a lot to be done before God’s kingdom could come on earth. He had to fully understand his role as king and Lord over God creation. Also, there was much to do when Jesus set up his kingdom that had to be prepared for. Satan had to be defeated (Rev. 19:11-20:3), the people of earth judged (Matt. 25:31-46), assignments had to be given to resurrected believers who would have jobs in the Millennial Kingdom, the New Temple and New Jerusalem had to be built as per Ezekiel’s prophecy, and much more. Jesus knew that when he went away he would have to prepare to receive believers.

We do not know how much Jesus had to learn, or how much information God would “divinely implant” into his mind, but Jesus knew that once he ascended to heaven he would not just be “sitting around” enjoying himself. He would be working on things concerning his return and preparing for his kingdom on earth.

14:3. “I will come again.” Christ will come back to earth in the event known as the Second Coming. The “Second Coming” is not the same event as the Rapture of Christians, which is described in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. At his Second Coming, Jesus will come down from heaven with his armies and conquer the earth, an event described in Revelation 19:11-21. Christ’s conquest of the earth was foretold in scriptures such as Isaiah 63:1-6 and Zechariah 14:3-10, and scriptures such as Daniel 2:35, 44-46 speak of Christ’s kingdom filling the earth.

The Old Testament does not show clearly that Christ’s “coming” would be in two distinct stages: his first coming when he was crucified, and his Second Coming when he comes from heaven and conquers the earth. The information is there, but it is unclear and much more clearly seen in hindsight through the lens of the New Testament than when it was read by the people living before Christ. The New Testament, of course, is very clear about the first and second comings of Christ. Nevertheless, even though they are somewhat veiled, Old Testament passages that speak of the Second Coming of Christ include Isaiah 63:1-6, Daniel 2:34, 35, 44; Zechariah 14:3-6, and there are many more that speak of Christ ruling the earth (see commentary Matt. 16:27).

The Greek text emphasizes the word “again” by moving it to the front of the sentence: “Again I will come and will receive you to myself.” Christ came to earth once, and he will come again as conqueror and king.

“and will receive you to myself.” There has been mistranslation and misunderstanding of this phrase due to the traditional belief that when a saved person dies his soul goes immediately to heaven and is with Jesus. Actually, the verse is simple. Jesus said that it would be when he came back that he would receive believers to himself. Jesus’ statement applies to two different classes of believers: those who are dead when Christ comes back and those who are still alive. Christians are in a different category entirely, because Christians experience an event known as the Rapture, which occurs before the Second Coming. At the Rapture, both living and dead Christians will be taken into the air to be with Christ and then will return to earth with him at his Second Coming [For more information on the Rapture of Christians, see commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:17].

We will first discuss Jesus’s statement, I “will receive you to myself,” in terms of those believers who are alive on earth at the Second Coming. The Bible is clear that the Great Tribulation and Armageddon will not kill everyone on earth. Many people will still be alive, and so when Jesus comes to earth he will gather all the nations before him and judge them. Those people who are judged unworthy will be thrown into the lake of fire, while those people who are judged worthy will enter into Christ’s Kingdom on earth (Matthew 25:31-46). Thus, at Christ’s Second Coming, believers who lived through the Great Tribulation will be “received” by Christ and will enter into his kingdom.

The believers who are dead at the time of the Second Coming will be raised from the dead and received by Christ into his kingdom on earth. The dead believers who Christ will raise will be those believers who died before the Day of Pentecost or who died after the Rapture but before the Second Coming (in other words, Christ will raise every dead believer from Adam to his Second Coming with the exception of the Christian Church, because Christians will have been raised earlier, at the Rapture). At the Second Coming, when Christ comes back to earth, he will call the dead believers out of the ground and receive them to himself.

This verse settles the argument about whether or not Old Testament believers are in the Rapture. They are not. They are, like Ezekiel 37:12-14 says, raised from the ground and return to Israel. This is further substantiated by Revelation 11:18. The time to give
rewards to the believers is when they are raised from the dead, which happens immediately after the Second Coming.

The Bible does not teach that people are alive after they die, they are truly dead and awaiting being raised from the dead [for more information on this, see Appendix 4, “The Dead Are Dead”]. Jesus was speaking before the Day of Pentecost, and the Old Testament taught that believers would be dead until they were resurrected (cp. Ezek. 37:12-14), and Jesus taught that the resurrection would occur when the dead heard his voice (John 5:28, 29), which we learn from John 14:3 is when he comes again.

The word “receive” in John 14:3 is the verb *paralambanō* (#3880 παραλαμβάνω), and it is in the future tense, middle voice. Thayer’s Greek-English lexicon speaks specifically about John 14:3 and says, “middle [voice] with πρός ἐμαυτόν [to myself], [means] to my companionship, where I myself dwell.” Friberg’s Analytical Lexicon agrees, and also references John 14:3 and says that in John 14:3 *paralambanō* means “receive to oneself,” and the BDAG Greek-English lexicons also references John 14:3 and has “I will take you to myself.” When Jesus raises the dead he has already come from heaven to earth, and thus when he calls and wakes the dead, he “receives” them to himself and into his kingdom. That is why Ezekiel 37:12-14 says that when the dead get up they will go to the land of Israel. Jesus is there, ruling from the newly rebuilt city of Jerusalem (the boundaries of Israel including the size of Jerusalem are described in Ezek. 47 and 48).

In John 14:3 Jesus spoke to the Apostles and told them he “will come back and will receive you [“you all,” the “you” is plural] to myself so that where I am you will be also.” What Jesus was saying to the Apostles was in essence: “I will come back to earth at my Second Coming, and receive all the believers to me so that where I am, on the wonderful new earth, they will be too.”

14:6. “the life.” Here the word “life” refers to “life in the Age to Come.” See commentary on John 5:40.

“except through me.” This phrase uses the Greek preposition *dia* with a genitive object, and thus is correctly translated “through.” Here Jesus is focusing on his role as the mediator between God and mankind. In the biblical world it was customary that people did not get to see an important person without going through some kind of mediator. So, for example, when some Greeks wanted to see Jesus, they went to Phillip, one of the apostles (John 12:21). The centurion who wanted his servant healed sent a delegation of Jews to Jesus (Luke 7:3-5). Here Jesus correctly teaches that now that the Son has come, if a person is going to get close to God, he or she must go through His Son.

14:10. “I am in union with the Father, and the Father in union with me.” See commentary on John 10:38 “the Father is in union with me, and I am in union with the Father.”

14:11. “Keep on believing…keep believing.” The Greek is *pisteuō* (#4100 πιστεύω) in the imperative present active. Robertson notes that this stresses, especially in this verb, the continuance of the faith (*Grammar*). Jesus was not asking for short lived belief, but continued belief in what he was saying and teaching. It is important to note that Jesus says “or else keep believing me for the very works’ sake.” In other words, if you cannot believe in me (what I am saying) on its own, believe what I am saying based on the works that I do. The works are a witness to the teaching, and vice versa. Many people today want to “just do good works,” if that were enough. But that does not point to right
doctrine, only to the kind heart of a good person. We must, like Jesus, let our good works testify to what we are saying.

“I am in union with the Father, and the Father in union with me.” See commentary on John 10:38 “the Father is in union with me, and I am in union with the Father.”

14:12. “continues to believe.” The Greek uses the present participle in the active voice. R. C. H. Lenski (The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel) correctly writes: “The substantivized present participle characterizes the person as one who continues in this faith.”

“in me” This does not mean just that Jesus existed. In the biblical culture, to believe in someone meant that you believed, and thus acted upon, what the person said. So, for example, Jesus said to pray. If a person never prays, then he does not believe “in me,” even if he thinks Jesus existed as a person.

“he will do also.” The Greek is poieō (ποιέω) in the indicative future, so there is no question or argument: the one who is believing in Jesus will do what he did.

“because I go to the Father.” Jesus would not be on earth, so if good works are going to be done, believers must do them. Furthermore, Jesus knew that the gift of holy spirit would be poured out (Joel 2). Jesus did not know about the Christian Church at that time (the Sacred Secret), and that holy spirit would be poured out as it was on the day of Pentecost, but he did know that holy spirit would be poured out after he was raised.

14:14. “If you…. John 14:14 is in the original text. Although the last words of verse 13 and all of verse 14 are omitted in a scattering of manuscripts, some of them ancient, scholars have concluded from the totality of the manuscript evidence that the omission was due to the fact that the Greek word poiēsō occurred in the middle of verse 13 and the end of 14. The lines in between the two uses of poiēsō were skipped by some scribes when they were copying the text. The copyist’s eye skipped from the first poiēsō to the second one. In textual studies that is something scholars see regularly, and they have named it “haplography.” Books on the text of the Bible have many examples of haplography occurring in the manuscripts, and thankfully due to the over 5,700 Greek manuscripts we currently have, by comparing them, scholars can usually spot the erroneous manuscripts and the original text can be reconstructed.

“ask me.” The manuscript evidence supports the word “me” being in the original text. Modern textual scholars have concluded that some of the scribes copying the Greek text either thought that the wording, “ask me anything in my name” seemed strange, or they wanted to avoid what they thought was a contradiction to John 16:23, so they omitted the word “me” from the manuscripts they were copying (but in a couple of manuscripts scribes changed “me” to “the Father”). This explains why “me” is not in the King James Version—the manuscripts used in making the King James did not have the “me.” However, the weight of the manuscript evidence supports the word “me” being original, which is why almost all modern versions include it.

Very strong evidence that the word “me” is in the original text is that we can see from Acts and the Epistles that the early Christians did indeed ask Jesus for things, which is what the phrase “call upon the name of the Lord Jesus” refers to (1 Cor. 1:2). [For more information on John 14:14 not contradicting John 16:23 see commentary on John 16:23. For more information on talking to and praying to Jesus as well as a further discussion of
the manuscript evidence that “me” is original, see Appendix 15: “Can We Pray to Jesus?”.

14:17. “it...it...it...it.” The gift of holy spirit is an “it,” not a “he.” To understand why some versions differ from others in the translation of the pronouns associated with holy spirit, we must understand how pronouns are used in languages such as Greek. Unlike English, but like many languages, including Spanish, French, German, Latin, and Hebrew, the Greek language assigns a gender to all nouns, and the gender of any associated pronoun must match the gender of the noun. This gender assignment happened in ancient antiquity, and often there seems to be no reason why a particular noun has a particular gender assigned to it. The gender of nouns never changes.

In French, for example, a table is feminine, la table, while a desk is masculine, le bureau. Thus a strictly literal translation of a French sentence with nouns and matching pronouns might be, “I like the table, she is just right for the room, but I do not like the desk, he is too big.” In correctly translating from French to English, however, we would never translate the English as, “the table, she,” or “the desk, he.” Not only is it improper English, it misses the point. Even the French people do not think of tables and desks as being masculine or feminine. The gender of the nouns is simply a part of the language that has come down to them through the ages.

And just as we would not say, “the desk, he,” we would never insist that a table or desk was somehow a person just because it had a masculine or feminine pronoun associated with it. Furthermore, good English translators recognize that even though a noun is assigned a gender in another language and the pronoun follows the noun, their job is to bring the meaning of the original into English, not introduce confusion as they translate. Hence, someone translating from French to English would use the English designation “it” for the table and the desk, in spite of the fact that in the original language the table and desk have a masculine or feminine gender.

What is true in the examples from the French language is true in any language that assigns a gender to nouns and then uses pronouns with that same gender. For example, the Greek word for “lamp” is luchnos, a masculine noun, and therefore proper grammar dictates that any pronoun associated with it is masculine. Thus, if the Greek text of Matthew 5:15 were translated literally, it would read, “Nor do they light a lamp and place him under the bushel.” However, every version we checked said, “it,” as proper English dictates, and not “him,” which would have been literal. The Greek word for wine is oinos, a masculine noun, so it takes a masculine pronoun. Christ taught that no one puts new wine in old wineskins, because the wineskins would burst and the wine, “he will be poured out.” English versions, correctly, say “it” will be poured out.

The same grammatical rule that the pronoun must agree with the noun is followed when the noun is feminine. According to the literal Greek text, Christ told his disciples that when they entered a “city” (polin; a feminine noun) or “village” (kome; a feminine noun), they should “find out who in her is worthy” (Matt.10:11; literally translated). The English versions correctly read, “it” instead of “her.” Similarly, the Greek word for “fig tree” is sukē, a feminine noun. When Jesus was entering Jerusalem, he saw a fig tree, but when he came to “her” he found nothing but leaves (Mark 11:13). Again, all the English versions read “it,” not “her.” When translating from another language into English, we have to use the English language properly. Students of Greek, Hebrew, Spanish, French, German, etc., quickly discover that one of the difficult things about learning the language
is memorizing the gender of each noun—something we do not have in the English language.

Once we clearly understand the gender of a pronoun is determined by the gender of the noun, we can see why one cannot build a doctrine on the gender of a noun and it’s agreeing pronoun. Only confusion would result from that kind of erroneous exegesis. For example, the noun *pneuma* (spirit) is neuter in gender and thus any pronoun associated with it is neuter and naturally translated “it.” However, because the holy spirit helps us in many ways, it is called the *parakletos*, (John 14:16, etc., “Helper;” or in some versions “Comforter” or “Counselor”), which is a masculine noun and takes a masculine pronoun.

Since *parakletos* is masculine, and spirit (*pneuma*) is neuter, are we to believe the gender of holy spirit changes somehow depending on what it is called? When it is “spirit” it is neuter and when it is “the helper” it is masculine? Of course not, that would be ridiculous. Worse, since “spirit” in Greek is neuter, but “spirit” in Hebrew is feminine, are we to believe the sex of the holy spirit changed after the time of Jesus when the believers started to speak and write in Greek? Of course not. Again, the gender of the noun is assigned in the language, and is not the “real” gender of the noun in question, which usually has no gender.

Another good example of how confusing things would become if someone tried to build their theology from the gender of pronouns involves nouns used to describe the Word of God. Sometimes the Greek word *logos* is used to refer to the Word of God (Luke 5:1), and *logos* is a masculine noun. Sometimes the Greek word *rhema* is used of the Word of God (Matt. 4:4), and *rhema* is a neuter noun. Are we to believe that, first, the Word of God even has gender, and second, that it somehow changes gender? Of course not. The gender of the noun was assigned in antiquity as a linguistic necessity, it is not designed to refer to some kind of actual sexual orientation.

The point is this: no translator should ever use the gender of the nouns or pronouns in a language to build a theology. Only error could result from that kind of exegesis. The way to properly translate the Scripture from a language that assigns gender to nouns is to study the subject matter and understand the subject being discussed, and then translate accordingly. Does *pneuma hagion* have a gender? We know people come in two genders, masculine and feminine, so references to people should be either “he,” or “she.” Animals also have a gender. Rocks do not, and should be “it” (by the way, in Greek, the noun “rock” is feminine, while in Hebrew it is masculine). In the case of *pneuma hagion*, when it is used as a name for God, and refers to God, it is proper to use the pronoun “he,” or other personal pronouns such as “who.” (There has been much discussion in recent years about the gender of God and if He is male or female, but this is not the place for a discussion about that. Although we believe that God has no actual gender, in Scripture He presents Himself as masculine. He presented himself as a man to Abraham (Gen. 18:1 and 2), and to many others (cp. Exod. 24:10; Dan. 7:9).

When it is referring to God’s gift, the gift of holy spirit, it is proper to use pronouns such as “it,” “which,” and “that,” because the gift of holy spirit is not a person. Trinitarians, of course, disagree with that conclusion. They view the “Holy Spirit” as the third person of the Trinity, so even though *pneuma*, spirit, is a neuter noun, they use masculine personal pronouns with it. If the Trinitarians were correct, then the fact that they translate the Greek neuter pronoun as the English masculine pronoun is the right
thing to do. A good example is the NIV translation of John 14:17, which we have produced, showing in brackets the actual gender of the noun and pronoun.

John 14:17 (NIV): “the Spirit [neuter noun] of truth. The world cannot accept him [autos, neuter pronoun, not masculine], because it neither sees him [autos, neuter pronoun, not masculine] nor knows him [autos, neuter pronoun, not masculine]. But you know him [autos, neuter pronoun, not masculine], for he [pronoun not in Greek text] lives with you and will be in you.”

Almost every English version does what the NIV does, and uses the masculine personal pronouns “him” and “he,” even though the Greek pronouns are neuter. This shows that Trinitarian scholars do not use the gender of the pronoun, but the subject being discussed, to determine how the English should read, which is what every translator should do. However, it reveals an inconsistency in one of their standard arguments for the existence of the Trinity. Many Trinitarians say that because masculine pronouns are sometimes used when the subject is the “Holy Spirit,” it must be masculine and therefore the third person of the Trinity. But if that argument is valid, then it would be just as valid to say that because the Greek text has neuter pronouns referring to spirit (indeed, especially since the noun “spirit” itself is neuter) then “holy spirit” must be a thing, not a person. In reality, as we have seen, we must never build our theology from the gender of pronouns.

A case in point is the Greek word parakletos, which is masculine, and which is usually referred to as the “Helper,” “Comforter,” or “Counselor,” depending on the English version being used. Greek grammar demands the use of masculine pronouns, such as ekeinos, to describe the “Helper,” because of parakletos, which is masculine (John 14:26), but Trinitarians have said that the use of ekeinos is evidence that “the Holy Spirit” is masculine (cp. A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament; note on John 14:17). But the Trinitarians cannot have it both ways. If the gender of the pronoun is evidence for the actual gender of the noun, then the “helper” is masculine, but the “holy spirit” is neuter—certainly not a person.

Once the above information is understood, it becomes clear why some versions of the Bible use personal pronouns such as “who” or “whom” when referring to pneuma hagion, while versions such as the REV uses “it” and “that.” If the translators believe pneuma hagion refers to the third person of the Trinity, they will use masculine pronouns and personal pronouns. Thus, their versions read “the Counselor...he” in the Gospel of John, and “he” “who” or “whom” in other places in the New Testament. However, if pneuma hagion refers to the gift of God, which we believe it does, then pronouns such as “it,” “which,” and “that,” are the proper English pronouns to use. Since no one can conclude from the use of pronouns whether or not “spirit” refers to a person or a thing, the only way to find that out is by studying it through the whole Bible. After we discover what “holy spirit” is, then we will know how to translate the pronouns associated with it. (This entry has focused on noun-pronoun agreement. For the integration of pronouns into the translation of verbs, see commentary on John 16:13).

14:18. “orphans.” The Greek word is orphanos (#3737 ὀρφανός), and it means to be without parents, an orphan. Our English word “orphan” comes directly from the Greek orphanos. Someone could be an orphanos because the parents were dead or permanently gone, or because they were simply not functioning as parents. It was sometimes used on a
more limited scale to mean without a father, because the father was the primary support and protection of the family. By extension, it was also used for someone who had lost a “father.” To the Jews, a trusted teacher and mentor was a “father,” and so the rabbis applied the word * orphanos* to those disciples who had lost their teacher (cp. Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John*). In that light, for Jesus to say, “I will not leave you as orphans” was very meaningful, because it communicated to the disciples that Jesus would not abandon his role of teacher and mentor, but they could expect that continued teacher/mentor relationship.

Jesus’ use of “orphan” in his teaching at the Last Supper was especially meaningful because orphans were often taken advantage of in society and needed an “advocate,” someone to support, guide, and protect them. In that light, it is a wonderful truth that it was at the Last Supper that Jesus introduced the coming holy spirit as “the *paraklētos*” (#3875 παράκλητος), and one of the primary meanings of *paraklētos* is “Advocate” (which the KJV calls the “Comforter,” the ESV and REV call the “Helper,” and the NET and NIV2011 call the “Advocate”). Although there had been a few teachings that mentioned the holy spirit before the Last Supper (cp. Luke 3:16; 11:12; 12:12), Jesus clearly referred to the *paraklētos* as “the spirit of truth” (14:17) and “the holy spirit” (14:26). It is also noteworthy that only at the Last Supper, just before Jesus would leave his disciples as “orphans,” that Jesus called the holy spirit “the *paraklētos*” (John 14:16, 26; 15:26, and 16:7; its only other use *paraklētos* refers to Jesus himself; cp. 1 John 2:1). The gift of holy spirit is the way that Jesus Christ will help and advocate for his followers. That is why Jesus said “it will not speak on its own, but whatever it hears it will speak” (John 16:13). Like the gift of holy spirit in the Old Testament that God put upon people that better allowed Him to communicate directly with them, the gift of holy spirit, the Helper, would allow God and Jesus to communicate more efficaciously with believers. [For more information on God putting holy spirit on people in the Old Testament, see Appendix 6: “Usages of Spirit.” For more information on how God and Jesus communicate with us via the gift of holy spirit, see the commentary on “revelation” in Galatians 1:12].

“I am coming to you.” The Greek is in the present tense, although in this case it refers to a future action, which is why most versions says, “I will come to you.” The present tense indicated that the disciples did not have to wait long until Jesus came, and indeed, they did not. This “coming” does not refer to the Second Coming, but to the fact that after his resurrection, and even after his ascension, Jesus would be “with” his disciples (cp. Matt. 28:20).

14:19. “will see... will see.” The Greek text has the verb for “see” in the present tense, so literally it reads, “Yet a little while and the world sees me no more, but you see me.” This is a clear example of the figure of speech *heterosis* of tense (Cp. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*). In the Greek the present tense is used in place of the future.

When Jesus spoke of his disciples seeing him, he was not primarily speaking of the disciples seeing him during the forty days after his resurrection and before his ascension. Some theologians teach that the primary meaning of Jesus’ statement refers to the apostles being able to see Jesus after his resurrection and before his ascension. We do not think that is the case for a number of reasons. For one thing the verse says that the world will not see Jesus, but during the forty days after his resurrection the world was
able to see him. But after his ascension his disciples see him (cp. Stephen, Ananias, Paul, and John), but the world does not see him.

Also, the word “see” does not necessarily mean to see with the physical eye, although many disciples have actually seen Jesus, but it means to see him via what he does and via our relationship with him. For example, Jesus often communicates with us directly via the gift of holy spirit. The promise that true disciples would “see” Jesus was more than just a way of saying we would “know about” him or recognize that he was at work in the world, although those things are included too.

When Jesus said that the disciples would see him, he also said he would not leave them as orphans but would come to them. But if they were only “orphans” for the three days he was dead, and then only not orphans for forty more days, and have now been orphans again for the last 2000 years, then Jesus’ statement that he would not leave us as orphans is hollow. We are not orphans because even though Jesus is not with us physically, he is still genuinely with us.

Jesus made a number of statements at the Last Supper that paralleled this one about “seeing” Jesus. These included: he said that he would not leave the disciples as orphans, but would come to them (John 14:18), the disciples would be in union with Jesus and the Father (John 14:20), he would show himself to them (John 14:21), he and the Father would make their home in them (John 14:23; monē means “home,” “residence,” “dwelling place”), he said that he and the disciples would be “friends” (John 15:14, 15), and they could ask him for what they needed (John 14:14). Jesus knew at the Last Supper that in only a couple hours he would be taken from the disciples and after that his relationship with them would change dramatically as he would be the risen, then ascended, Lord. He did not want them to think that after his ascension they would be without his help and guidance, so he told them they would “see” him.


14:20. “in union with.” See commentary on John 10:38 “the Father is in union with me, and I am in union with the Father.”

14:22. “how is it that.” An alternate translation could be, “what happened that?” (Cp. NASB; NET; NAB; NJB).

14:24. “the Father’s who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

14:26. “And.” The Greek word de (#1161 δὲ) can express a small contrast, but can also just express a change of subject. In this case, “but” is too strong a contrast. Some English versions leave the de untranslated and just start the English sentence with the subject, the Helper (cp. CEB), Others translate it “And” (cp. Young’s Literal Translation; Lenski). Jesus was speaking with his disciples while he was still alive, and his point was that after he was personally gone from his disciples, the Helper would teach them what it heard.

“the holy spirit.” There is no definite article. This holy spirit is the gift of God, poured out on the Day of Pentecost. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”]

14:29. “believe.” The verb “believe” is in the subjunctive mood, thus many versions have “may” believe, but the Greek conjunction hina (#2443 ἵνα) that started the phrase is the reason the verb is subjunctive, and therefore we must get the sense of the verb from
the context. In this case, Jesus’ purpose was to tell the disciples what would happen before it happened so that they “will” believe, not just so they “may” believe.” Versions that use “will” include (CEB; CJB; GWN; NIV; NLT; and The Source New Testament.) It was not that the disciples were not believing, but just as they had not understood what Jesus had told them about his death because it was so different than what they were taught, now they were about to expand what they believed and take it to new levels. **14:31. “Get up, let us go from here.”** At this point the disciples started getting ready to leave the Upper Room and the Last Supper. However, Jesus continued teaching and praying, and the disciples did not leave until 18:1.

**Chapter 15**

15:2. “takes it away.” Some argue that “to take away” here means “to lift up.” Although that could be the case grammatically, it does not fit contextually. Verse 6 makes it clear that if a person does not bear fruit, he is cast into the fire. This parable parallels the parable of the servants in the talents. If a servant does not bear fruit with his talents and buries it in the ground, he is wicked and lazy, and is thrown out into the darkness.

15:4. “live.” For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

In *union with.* See commentary on John 10:38 “the Father is in union with me, and I am in *union with* the Father.”

15:5. “lives.” For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

15:6. “lives.” For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

15:7. “live.” For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

In *union with.* See commentary on John 10:38 “the Father is in union with me, and I am in *union with* the Father.”

Want.” The Greek word is *thelō* (#2309 θέλω) and means want or desire.


15:10. “live.” For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.


15:14. “friends.” John 15:14 and 15 mark an important shift in the relation between Jesus and those who closely follow him and obey him. Jesus now says he will not call his close disciples “servants,” but friends, denoting an intimate and affectionate relationship. Jesus had referred to his disciples as friends earlier, in Luke 12:4, but that was in the context of his protecting and blessing them, and teaching them not to fear the world. He was not making the much more personal and intimate statement that he was making at the Last Supper, at most only a couple hours before his arrest.

To understand the importance of what Jesus says here at the Last Supper, it is important to understand the word “friend” and what it really implies. Since so much has been spoken of in the Christian world about *agapē* love, we will discuss that also. In American culture the word “friend” has lost some of its true meaning and value. Today we call people “friends” when we have only met them a few times. Biblically, a “friend” was someone you knew well and really trusted. It is exemplified by the word “companion,” which comes from the Latin, “com” (with) and panis (bread). A friend, a companion, was someone you would trust in your house and eat with. When Jesus calls
us friends, he is referring to a deep and intimate relationship. In the Bible that deep relationship is represented by the word *philos*.

Greek has four different words for love, and the Greek word that refers to the God’s love for us is *agapē* (the verb form is *agapaō*, Strong’s number 25, ἀγαπάω, the noun form is *agapē*, Strong’s number 26, ἀγάπη). *Agapē* love is the very nature of God, for God is love (1 John 4:7-12, 16). The big key to understanding *agapē* is to realize that it can be known from the action it prompts. People today are accustomed to thinking of love as a feeling, but that is essentially not the case with *agapē* love. *Agapē* is love because of what it does, not because of how it feels (cp. the list of actions prompted by *agapē* in 1 Corinthians 13).

God so “loved” (*agapē*) that He gave His Son. It did not feel good to God to do that, but it was the loving thing to do. Christ so loved (*agapē*) that he gave his life. *Agapē* love is not simply an impulse generated from feelings, rather it is an exercise of the will, a deliberate choice. This is why God can command us to “love” (*agapē*) our enemies (Matt. 5:44). He does not command us to “have a good feeling” for our enemies, but to act in a loving way toward them (cp. the loving actions in Exod. 23:1-5). That is not to say the *agapē* love cannot have feelings attached to it, and the ideal situation occurs when the loving thing to do also is what we want to do, such that we combine the feeling of love with loving action.

The Greek word *phileō*, which is translated as “love” in many English Bibles, is different from *agapaō* love. *Phileō* means “to have a special interest in someone or something, frequently with focus on close association; have affection for, like, consider someone a friend” (William Arndt and F. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*.) *Phileō* (#5368 φιλέω), is the verb form and *philos* (#5384 φιλός), is the noun form and refers to a “friend.”

It would be helpful if *phileō* were never translated “love,” because it refers to a strong liking or a strong friendship. Of course, *phileō* gets translated “love” because in modern culture we say we “love” things that we strongly like: “I love ice cream” or “I love my car.” The word *phileō* implies a strong emotional connection, and thus is used of the deep friendship, and it is also used of the way people “really like” things. Thus, we can *agapē* our enemies because we can be kind to them whether we feel like it or not, but we cannot *phileō* our enemies; we cannot be true friends with them.

In Christian circles it is very common to hear people compare *agapē* and *phileō* and disparage *phileō* as if it were a “lesser” kind of love. Nothing could be further from the truth. *Phileō* refers to that deep friendship relationship and the wonderful friendly feeling that everyone craves: we all want friends. Lenski writes about friendship, and says that the word *philoi*, friends, “denotes an affectionate and intimate relation” (note on John 15:14). Although *agapē* can have that deep friendly feeling, it can also be “cold love,” and manifest itself as godly acts done without a true “loving” feeling. Both *agapē* and *phileō* are very important. If we are going to win the people of the world, we must be able to “love” them even in the most unlovable circumstances, and that takes *agapē*. *Agapē* was the reason that Paul went to city after city to teach the Word, even though he was defamed, beaten, and jailed. He did not like those experiences, but he knew that given the specific ministry Christ gave him, it was how he was to obey God. In contrast, what we really crave in our hearts is the most intimate friendship relationship, and that is what *phileō* offers.
The difference between *agapē* and *phileō* becomes very important in John 21. Jesus was asking Peter if he “loved” Jesus (*agapē*) because Jesus wanted Peter to be committed to following Jesus even though it would often be neither easy nor likeable. Peter, on the other hand, used *phileō* because he wanted to see if his friendship with Jesus was still intact: was Jesus still an affectionate and intimate friend to him even though Peter had publicly denied him? Jesus wanted commitment no matter what the circumstances, Peter wanted close friendship with Jesus—and the Word tries to communicate their desires by the specific vocabulary it uses for their verbal exchange.

Here in John 15, Jesus now tells the apostles that they are his “friends” (*philos*), if we do what he commanded us. In fact, he shows his apostles what he means, and proves to them that they are indeed his friends by telling them that he has told them what he heard from his Father—intimate communication that he would only tell his friends about. Jesus’ invitation to be his friend is not only here in the Gospel of John, it is in the book of Revelation. Jesus says, “Look!, I am standing at the door and knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will eat with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20). Anyone in the biblical culture would immediately understand that for Jesus to come in to a home and eat would mean there was a deep friendship between Jesus and the person.

What Jesus said at the Last Supper, very shortly before his arrest, has huge implications for Christians, because he was telling his disciples things that would define their roles and relationship after his resurrection and ascension. Jesus has now opened the door for us to be “friends” with him. And nothing could be of greater worth. No wonder Paul said that he counted all his worldly credentials as dung in comparison to “knowing” Jesus, that is, having a firsthand, experiential relationship, or “friendship,” with Christ (Phil. 3:8-10, and see the commentary on those verses).

Having a genuine friendship relationship with Jesus Christ is part of the very fabric of Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper. Jesus spoke of his relationship with his disciples in a number of different ways, including: he said that he and the disciples would be “friends” (John 15:14, 15), they would “see” him (cp. John 14:19), they would be in union with Jesus and the Father (John 14:20), he would show himself to them (John 14:21), he and the Father would make their home in them (John 14:23), and they could ask him for what they needed (John 14:14). Jesus knew what his disciples did not know: that in a few hours he would be arrested then crucified, and after that his relationship with them would be on a different level. Even with Jesus gone, his disciples had to be confident that he would be in close contact with them even though he was in heaven and they were on earth. That is why he took the time to communicate in many different ways that he and his disciples would be friends—ones who have an intimate and affectionate relationship. [For more on the difference between *agapē* and *phileō*, and information on all four Greek words for “love,” see commentary on John 21:15].

15:17. “These things I command you, so that you will love one another.” The grammar of the verse, and the context, favors this translation over something simpler, such as “This I command you: love one another.” “These things” comes from the Greek *tauta*, a plural pronoun, and the conjunction *hina* that starts the second phrase is most naturally “so that,” or “in order that.” It is not clear how far back in Jesus’ teaching he was referring to when he said “these things.” It is clear, however, that in the context,
Christ had been teaching and directing the disciples concerning love and his love for them. His discourse included commands, as well as general information. Now he tells them that he has said these things “so that” they will love one another. This is a wonderful demonstration of the principle in 1 John 4:19, that we love because he first loved us. Jesus clearly told the disciples of his love for them, and told them to remain “in” his love, i.e., connected to him and the blessings that would flow to them through him. Thus here, many years before 1 John was written, Jesus was telling his disciples about his love for them and commanding them to remain in him so that they would love one another.

15:19. “befriend you.” The Greek is phileō (#5368 φιλέω). Although most versions say “love,” doing so confuses agapē love (“love” in the REV) with phileō love. Phileō love has an attachment, and it is the attachment between good friends. The world “befriends” those who are of the world. For a more complete understanding of phileō, see the note on John 21:15.

15:21. “the one who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

15:22. “they would not have had sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.” This is a good example of how important it is to get the scope of Scripture and not “prooftext” to make a point. Jesus is not speaking of sin in general, as if the religious leaders would have had no sin at all unless Jesus had spoken to them. Rather he is speaking in the context of his life, and particularly being the Last Supper, his death, and saying that the sin of not believing and not obeying Jesus would now be reckoned to them, because they heard him, but turned away.


“but let the word…be fulfilled.” We feel this is a command clause rather than a purpose clause (see John 9:3 entry, “let the works of God be revealed in him”) or a result clause (cp. Matt. 1:22), although it could be a result clause. In the Greek there is no phrase “they have done this” which must be supplied for it to read either as a purpose clause: e.g., “But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law” (NASB), or as a result clause, “with the result that….”

We do not believe this could be a purpose clause. Why would these men hate with the purpose of fulfilling Old Testament prophecy? They wouldn’t. On the other hand, if it is God who instigates the purpose behind their hatred of the Messiah, then God would be making them hate just so a prophecy would be fulfilled, which goes against God’s character and nature. Although it could be a result clause, “This happened with the result that the word was fulfilled,” it does not seem as likely that Jesus would say that to his disciples, although he could have.

To us the reading that makes the most sense in the context is that Christ was making a simple statement in reaction to the men’s hatred; “let the word that is written in their law be fulfilled, ‘they have hated me without a cause.’”

Like our translation, the ESV renders the phrase as a 3rd person command but uses the word “must”: “The word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled.” This is a possible rendering of the command, just as using the word “let” and saying “let the word be fulfilled,” is possible. However, we believe that Jesus was not telling his disciples
about what “must” happen, but pointing out what was happening. In that sense, this verse compares to the translation of *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood in Ephesians 5:33, which is also translated by “let”: “Let the wife see that she respects her husband” (ESV) and “the wife must respect her husband” (NIV). We feel the “let” translation is better because in English the word “must” could be misunderstood to be implying some metaphysical necessity for fulfillment, which is not being communicated by the Greek grammar of the command clause. See also entry on John 13:18, “let the scripture be fulfilled.”

15:27. “testify.” The verb “to testify” is in a form that can be either indicative (you will testify,” picking up “will” from the context), or imperative (“you must testify,” picking up “must” from the imperative form of the verb). The key to which is in the sentence itself. The word “because” dictates the imperative. Anyone could testify of Christ, whether they had been around since the beginning of his ministry or not. However, these apostles had been given much, and now much was required. “Because” they had been with Jesus since the beginning, they must now testify of him (or suffer severe consequences). This verse is also good evidence that the helper, holy spirit, will be poured out during the tribulation.

Chapter 16

16:4. “will remember.” The verb “remember” is in the subjunctive mood, thus many versions have “may” remember, but the Greek conjunction *hina* (#2443 ἵνα) earlier in the sentence is the reason the verb is subjunctive, and therefore we must get the sense of the verb from the context. In this case, Jesus’ purpose was to tell the disciples what would happen before it happened so that they “will” remember, not just so they “may” remember.” Versions that use “will” include (CEB; CJB; NET; NIV; NLT; and The Source New Testament).

16:5. “to the one who sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

16:7. “I will send it to you.” The Greek pronoun translated “it” is αὐτὸν, the masculine singular pronoun that is associated with “helper,” which is the Greek noun *paraklētos* (#3875 παράκλητος). We translate it “it” because the “Helper,” the gift of holy spirit, is not a person but a thing, the gift of God. In inflected languages like Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Spanish, French, etc., the gender of the pronoun has to agree with the gender of the noun, so we do not learn the gender from the pronoun itself, but from what person, place or thing the noun is. See commentary on “it” in John 14:17.

16:8. “it.” In Greek, the pronoun *ekëinos* (#1565 ἕκτος) is masculine because it is governed by the Greek noun *paraklētos* (#3875 παράκλητος), which is masculine. However, the “Helper” is a word describing the gift of holy spirit (John 14:17), which is not a “he” but an “it.” See commentary on John 16:7 and John 14:17.

16:11. “has been judged.” This is the prophetic perfect, when something in the future is so certain it is spoken of in the past tense (see commentary on “seated,” in Ephesians 2:6). Lenski writes, “Jesus speaks of the devil’s final judgment as having already been
effected because his own death and resurrection, which pronounced the final judgment on
the devil, are already at hand, are as certain as though they had already been completed.”
(See Schoenheit, Graeser & Lynn, The Christian’s Hope, Appendix E.)

16:13. “it.” In Greek, the pronoun ekeinos (#1565 ἐκεῖνος) is masculine because it is
governed by the Greek noun paraklētos (#3875 παράκλητος), which is masculine.
However, the “Helper” is a word describing the gift of holy spirit (John 14:17), which is
not a “he” but an “it.” See commentary on John 14:17.

“it will guide...it will not speak...it hears, it will speak...it will declare.” Greek
verbs have no gender, and therefore any gender associated with any given verb has to be
assigned from the context and the subject being discussed. Usually this is not confusing
to translators because the subject is understood. However, sometimes the context and
subject matter of the verse is debated. For example, when a verb refers to something the
“holy spirit” will do, then Trinitarians, who assert that the “Holy Spirit” is a person,
assign a masculine pronoun to the verb. In contrast, Biblical Unitarians, who see the
“holy spirit” as a gift from God or the power of God, assign a neuter pronoun to the verb.
Since almost all English translations of the Bible are done by Trinitarians, they almost all
have masculine pronouns associated with verbs relating to holy spirit. This makes the
average person reading the English Bible believe that “the Bible” says the holy spirit is a
person. However, the masculine personal pronoun was placed in the text because of the
theology of the translator, and not because the Greek text demanded it.

A verse where the different theology of Biblical Unitarians and Trinitarians
greatly influences their translation is John 16:13. The NIV translation reads:
But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He
will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will
tell you what is yet to come.

Although the word “he” appears in the NIV translation six times, it is only in the
Greek text one time, and that one time it is a translation of the pronoun ekeinos (#1565 ἐκεῖνος), which is masculine because it is governed by, and thus has to match the gender of,
the Greek noun paraklētos (#3875 παράκλητος), which is masculine. The other times
that “he” occurs in the NIV text are an assumption on the part of the translators. They
assert that the “Holy Spirit” is a person and is masculine, and therefore a masculine
pronoun would automatically be assigned to any verb associated with it. For example, the
NIV translates the Greek verb hodegeō, as “he will guide,” even though it is simply a
third person singular verb, and, as we said, Greek verbs have no gender. But since the verb hodegeō has no gender, it could just as easily be translated “it will guide” or “she
will guide,” whichever is best supported by the context.

When we understand that any gender associated with verbs has to be assigned
from the subject being discussed and the context, then proper translation work demands
that we scrutinize the context to see whether the subject being referred to is a “he,” “she”
or “it.” In the case of John 16:13, we believe that the context is God’s gift of holy spirit,
which is not a person, and that the verse should be properly translated, “it will guide.”

Another example regarding “spirit” is in the Gospel of John. In this verse, Jesus is
talking with his disciples about the spirit of truth, and he says, “but you know Him
because He abides with you, and will be in you.” (John 14:17b, NASB). The words “he
abides” are an interpretation of the Greek, which is simply, “abides” in the third person
singular, and thus could be “he abides,” “she abides,” or “it abides.” In this case, because
Jesus is speaking of God’s gift of holy spirit, which is a “thing” and not a person, it is proper to say, “it abides.”

The fact that Greek verbs do not have a gender, so any assigned to it is the interpretation of the translators, comes up in many areas besides holy spirit. For example, Luke 11:24 speaks of demons, and some versions say that when an unclean spirit comes out of a man, “he goes” through arid places. But are we sure the demon is a “he?” The Greek verb is genderless, and can be masculine, feminine, or neuter. Thus there are some versions that say “he” (cp. KJV; RSV) and some versions that say “it” (cp. NASB; NRSV), but because of mainstream theology, none say “she,” although bibliically that is a possibility. Although we usually think of angels and demons as masculine, there are both female good spirits (Zech. 5:9) and female evil spirits. The Hebrew word “Lilith” (Isa. 34:14) is the name of a female demon. “Lilith” gets translated many ways in the English versions, including “night monster” (ASV, NASB, Amplified), “night hag” (RSV), “night spectre” (Rotherham) and by her name, “Lilith” (NAB; Tanakh; The Message). Some translators apparently miss the point that Isaiah is referring to a demon at all, and have “screech owl” (KJV) or “night creature” (NIV). Lilith is “a malevolent supernatural being” (Bromiley, International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, “Lilith,” or “Night Hag”). Unless the context tells us the gender of a demon, using “it” in Luke 11:24 is our best choice because it allows for either male or female gender.

God’s holy spirit is a most amazing and valuable gift, and it behooves us as Christians, especially those who translate the Bible, to understand it. Bible students who are not familiar with the original languages can do only this when the Greek and Hebrew texts are properly translated. If the translation is not accurate, then we do not have the Word of God, we have the words of men. Translating Scripture is one of the most important and spiritual of all responsibilities, because millions of people who do not read the original languages trust the translation to accurately represent the original. When it comes to the subject of God’s gift of holy spirit, countless Christians have been misled or confused by the improper use of the pronoun “he,” or other personal pronouns. When the pronouns associated with pneuma, spirit, are translated correctly, it is much easier to see the love and mercy of God expressed to us by His giving to us the wonderful gift of holy spirit. (This entry has dealt with pronouns as they are assigned to verbs. For the agreement of Greek nouns and pronouns, see the commentary on John 14:17).

16:14. “it.” In Greek, the pronoun ekeinos (#1565 ἐκεῖνος) is masculine because it is governed by the Greek noun parakletos (#3875 παράκλητος), which is masculine. However, the “Helper” is a word describing the gift of holy spirit (John 14:17), which is not a “he” but an “it.” See commentary on 16:7 and John 14:17.

“it will take from what is mine, and will declare it to you.” This is describing a function of the gift of holy spirit; Christ proclaims that it will deliver messages to his disciples by means of taking them from him and declaring the messages to his disciples. The words “from what is mine” in the Greek is ek tou emou, “out from the thing of me.” It is the partitive use of the preposition ek (#1537 ἐκ), where the spirit takes a part of the things (messages) of Christ, and then heralds, anaggellō (#312 ἀναγγέλλω), it to the disciples. By using the phrasing, “what is mine,” Jesus naturally raises the question, “Do not these messages ultimately come from God, and not you, so why do you say, ‘what is mine?’” Jesus anticipates this concern and explains in verse fifteen: “All that belongs to
the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you” (NIV).

16:21. “sorrow.” The word means sorrow, grief, or pain. Here “sorrow” is dictated by verse 22. Christ is comparing the childbirth to what was about to happen to him.

“The woman” is Israel. In conjunction with “in that day” v. 23, it indicates the woman, Israel, in the tribulation. See Companion Bible verse.

“man.” The noun ἀνθρώπος is in the masculine singular, but the reason for the translation “man” is that it was the custom in Israel that when a baby boy was born there was music, shouting, and great celebration, but when a baby girl was born there was none. This was due to a number of factors. Boys added to the family, while girls were thought to take from it. When a boy was married, his wife came to live with his family, he did not go to hers, and the grandchildren, of course then, stayed within the man’s family circle. In days when travel was by foot or donkey-cart, if a man and woman lived even what to us would be a short distance apart, the families rarely saw each other. Also, when the girl got married, her family paid the dowry to the man’s family, not, as in the European tradition, the man’s family paying to the woman’s family. So the woman’s family did not just lose the girl herself, they also gave up wealth.

Also, men helped defend the family, which, in the turbulent times of the ancient world was no small help if the family was to survive. All of this contributed to the cultural excitement at the birth of a boy. Of course, after some initial sadness that the baby was a girl, the baby would be warmly accepted into the family. (See, Mackie, Manners and Customs).

16:23. “in that day you will not ask me anything.” This phrase is a wonderful example why we have to pay close attention to translation and the context if we are going to properly understand and interpret the Word of God. At first glance, this verse seems to be a clear contradiction of John 14:14, where Jesus said, “If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” Are we, or are we not, to ask Jesus for things?

A major part of resolving the apparent contradiction lies in the Greek words themselves. In John 14:14, Jesus is clearly speaking of being able to do the works that he had done so the Father would be glorified. And in that context the word “ask” is aiteō (#154 αἰτέω, pronounced eye-te'-ō), which means “ask” but very forcefully so. The BDAG Greek-English lexicon defines it as “ask for, with claim on receipt of an answer; …demand.” The Friberg Lexicon has “ask, request, demand.” In contrast, here in John 16:23 the Greek word “ask” is ἐρωτάω (#2065 ἐρωτάω, pronounced err-ō-tah'-ō) and it means “to put a query to someone, ask, ask a question” (BDAG); “ask, seeking for information; question (Friberg’s Lexicon).

In John 14:14, Jesus is speaking of his being gone after his ascension. This is very clear from reading John 13-16. In John 13:33 Jesus told the Apostles he was going away to a place they could not follow, and he continued teaching them he was going away right up through chapter 16 (cp. John 14:1-4, 18, 19, 28; 16:5-10, 16). After Jesus ascends to heaven, having been given all authority in heaven and on earth, we are to ask him for things. In John 14:14, Jesus told his disciples to ask him for things so they could do the works that he had done (14:12). If we just read John 14:12-14 we can easily see that. In 14:12 Jesus told the disciples that if they continued to believe in him they would do the works that he did, and even greater works. Then in 14:13 he told them that he would do those works (i.e., Christ would accomplish those works) so that the Father would be
glorified. Then, continuing that thought he told his disciples that if they “asked” (asked expecting an answer; demanded) of him in his name, he would do it. [For more information on this point, see commentary on John 14:14].

In looking at John 16:23, we must remember that John 14:14 and 16:23 were both spoken at the Last Supper, perhaps only a very short while apart. The disciples were not confused by the “apparent contradiction,” and we should not be either. The disciples had been asking Jesus many questions, and there was a lot they did not understand. So, for example, they asked, “Where are you going” (13:36); “Why am I not able to follow you now” (13:37); “How are we able to know the way” (14:5); “Show us the Father” (14:8); “How is it you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world” (14:22); “What is this that he is saying, ‘A little while?’” (16:17, 18).

Jesus knew the disciples had lots of questions, and carefully navigated his way through them throughout the Last Supper, answering some while not answering others. As he got to the end of the Last Supper, he told his disciples, “In that day you will not ask me anything,” (perhaps Charles William’s translation is clearer: “At that time you will ask me no more questions”). The disciples would not have to ask questions because, for one thing, Jesus said, “I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech, but will tell you plainly of the Father” (16:25), plus, after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, they would understand all the things they had questions about—something that is quite plain in Acts, as we see the once-ignorant and dumbfounded apostles become bold proclaimers of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

16:24. “keep asking.” The verb for “ask” in this verse is in the active voice and present tense, and is what is known as a broadband present, or continuous present (Cp. Wallace, Greek Grammar, pg. 519-25). This form indicates a continual action that takes place over a long time, rather than a one-time-event. Williams translates the phrase, “But now you must keep on asking.” We are not to just ask once for the things we seek from God, but to repeatedly ask, as the widow asked the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8). Wallace explains the present tense in Matthew 7:7 this way: “The force of the present imperatives is ‘ask repeatedly, over and over again…seek repeatedly…knock continuously, over and over again” (Wallace, Exegetical Syntax, 521). (Cp. Matt. 7:7, Luke 11:9, and commentary on 1 John 3:22.)

16:27. “treats you as friends…befriended me.” The two Greek verbs are both forms of phileō (#5368 φιλέω). Although most versions say “loves…loved,” doing so confuses agapē love (“love” in the REV) with phileō love. Phileō love has an attachment, and it is the attachment between good friends. For a more complete understanding of phileō, see the note on John 21:15.

16:30. “question you.” The Greek verb erōtaō (#2065 ἐρωτάω), translated elsewhere “to ask,” can mean to ask a question, or to ask a request. In this context Christ has no need for anyone to ask him questions, because he is speaking plainly, i.e., not in parables.

16:31. “Do you now believe?” Grammatically, in both Aramaic and Greek, this sentence can either be a statement or a question. Translated as a statement it would be something like, “You believe now” (cp. CJB; GWN; NIV 1984). Translated as a question it would be something like, “Do you now believe?” (HCSB; ESV; KJV; NASB; NET; NIV 2011). It is the context that determines whether Jesus made a statement or asked a question, and in this case the context is clear that he asked a question.
Starting in John 14:1, Jesus had been trying to tell his Apostles that he must go away to the Father. These are the same Apostles who could not grasp that he was going to die, no matter how often or clearly he told them. Since they did not know about his death, they certainly could not understand that he was going to ascend to heaven and be with the Father. It seems that Jesus told them so that they might understand at least part of what he was saying, but especially so that after his ascension they would remember that he had told them about it.

Evidence that the Apostles did not understand what Jesus was telling them is throughout the account. After Jesus said he was going to prepare a place for them, Thomas said, “Lord, we do not know where you are going” (14:5). A little later in the conversation Philip spoke up and said, “Show us the Father and that will be enough for us” (14:8). Other statements revealing that the Apostles did not understand what Jesus was talking about are in 14:22 and 16:17 and 18, culminating in them saying to each other: “We do not understand what he is saying” (16:18). At that point Jesus tried one last time to tell them he was going to the Father, but he put the emphasis of his comments on the subject of asking and receiving, God’s love, and his coming from God (John 16:19-28). At that point the Apostles said they understood, but what they understood was not that Jesus was going away to be with God, but rather that “you [Jesus] came from God” (16:30).

Jesus was no doubt pleased that his Apostles understood that he came from God, but was not fooled into thinking they understood about his ascension into heaven. Therefore, it was natural for him to challenge their confidence and try to keep them exploring what his words meant, which he did by asking the question, “Do you now believe?” We know from the Gospel records that Jesus was correct and the Apostles still did not believe Jesus would die, be raised from the dead, or ascend into heaven. Since at this Last Supper the Apostles did not know what Jesus meant when he told them he was going to the Father, it is certain that a few days earlier when they had asked him for signs of his “coming,” they did not mean his coming back to earth from heaven. They were referring to his “coming” (see commentary on Matthew 24:3).

16:32. “Take notice!” The Greek word is idou (ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“each one for himself.” The Greek word eis in the phrase is the “eis of advantage,” with the sense being, each one for his own advantage. The Greek phrase does not include the word “home,” as many English versions have, and “home” is not accurate, unless it was taken as “the place they were staying.” Most of the apostles had their homes in the Galilee, yet they stayed around Jerusalem. However, they were so afraid that it is not likely that they went to where they were commonly known to be staying, but rather would have found a temporary place to be secluded and protected. Jesus said that the disciples would be “scattered,” and that is no doubt what happened when Jesus was arrested. The disciples “fled” (Matt. 26:56; Mark 14:50), but not as a group. In the panic of the moment, it was each man for himself. Although the Gospels do not track exactly where the disciples went, Peter and another disciple followed Jesus to the house of the High Priest. No doubt over the next days the disciples assembled again, and were together when Jesus came to them (John 20:19). The Complete Jewish Bible has, “each one looking out for himself,” which sums up the meaning very well.
16:33. “I have overcome the world.” This is the prophetic perfect idiom, when something that will happen in the future is spoken of has already being accomplished (see commentary on “seated,” in Ephesians 2:6).

Chapter 17

17:2. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.]

17:3. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.

“that they know you.” Not “that they may know you.” (See Lenski; Robertson, Grammar, p. 992).

“and him whom you sent.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

17:5. “And now, Father, glorify me together with yourself with the glory that I had with you before the world was.” God had planned to glorify His Son, and now that the time of Jesus’ death was drawing near, Jesus prayed that God would bring His plan to fruition.

This verse has been used to prove that Jesus is God because of the phrase, “that I had with you before the world was.” There is no question that Jesus “existed” before the world began. But did he exist literally as a person or in God’s foreknowledge, “in the mind of God?” Both Christ and those called to be in the Body of Christ, the Church, existed in God’s foreknowledge before being alive. Christ was the “logos,” the “plan” of God from the beginning, and he became flesh only when he was conceived. It is Trinitarian bias that causes people to read an actual physical existence into this verse rather than a figurative existence in the mind of God. When 2 Timothy says that each Christian was given grace “before the beginning of time,” no one tries to prove that we were actually alive with God back then. Everyone acknowledges that we were “in the mind of God,” i.e., in God’s foreknowledge. The same is true of Jesus Christ. His glory was “with the Father” before the world began, and in John 17:5 he prayed that it will come into manifestation.

Jesus was praying that the glory the Old Testament foretold he would have, and which had been in the mind of God the Father since before the world began, would come into concretion. Trinitarians, however, teach that Jesus was praying about glory he had with God many years before his birth, and they assert that this proves he had access to the mind and memory of his “God nature.” However, if, as a man, Jesus “remembered” being in glory with the Father before the world began, then he would have known he was God in every sense. He would not have thought of himself as a “man” at all. If he knew he was God, he would not and could not have been “tempted in every way just as we are” because nothing he encountered would have been a “real” temptation to him. He would have had no fear and no thought of failure. There is no real sense in which Scripture
could actually say he was “made like his brothers in every way” (Heb. 4:17) because he would not have been like us at all. Furthermore, Scripture says that Jesus “grew” in knowledge and wisdom. That would not really be true if Christ had access to a God-nature with infinite knowledge and wisdom.

We believe that John 17:5 is a great example of a verse that demonstrates the need for clear thinking concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. The verse can clearly be interpreted in a way that is honest and biblically sound, and shows that Christ was a man, but was in the foreknowledge of God as God’s plan for the salvation of mankind. It can also be used the way Trinitarians use it: to prove the Trinity. However, when it is used that way it reveals a Christ that we as Christians cannot truly identify with. We do not have a God-nature to help us when we are tempted or are in trouble or lack knowledge or wisdom. The Bible says that Christ can “sympathize with our weakness” because he was “tempted in every way, just as we are” (Heb. 4:15). The thrust of that verse is very straightforward. Because Christ was just like we are, and was tempted in every way that we are, he can sympathize with us. However, if he was not “just as we are,” then he would not be able to sympathize with us. We assert that making Christ a God-man makes it impossible to really identify with him.

We can tell that Jesus was speaking of being in God’s foreknowledge from the immediate context. Just two verses earlier, in John 17:3, Jesus said that the Father was “the only true God.” Jesus could not have prayed that while at the same time thinking he was God too. The proper interpretation of John 17 is simple and biblical. Jesus knew he was the promised Messiah and Son of God, and God had spoken of his glory many centuries earlier. Now, on the eve of his arrest, he prayed to his Father, the “only true God,” and asked for God’s plan to come to pass.

It also should be noted that Trinitarians have quoted Isaiah 42:8 which says that God will not give His glory to another, to show that Jesus must be God since Jesus had glory from God. The argument is fallacious for a number of reason. First, the context of Isaiah 42 is idols, and that God will not share His glory with idols. The verse, taken in context, is not saying God will never share any glory with those who obey Him, because He clearly does give glory to those who obey him (cp. 1 Cor. 2:7). Furthermore, John 17:22 says that Jesus gave the glory he got from His Father to his disciples. But if Jesus was God, then he did not get glory “from” his Father, he would have had it all along, and furthermore, if “God” will not give His glory to another, then Jesus would never have given it to his disciples. God glorified His Son, who in turn gives glory to his disciples.

Jesus’ prayer in John 17 sets a wonderful example for us as Christians. He poured out his heart to his Father, “the only true God” (John 17:3), and prayed that the prophecies of the Old Testament about him would be fulfilled. [For more information on John 17:5, see The Racovian Catechism, written in Polish in 1605; in Latin 1609; in English 1818; reprinted by Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, pp. 144-146. Also, Don Snedeker, Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals, pp. 424, 425].

17:12. “son of destruction.” This is a literal translation of the Greek, huios tēs apōleias, composed of the word for “son” (#5207 hios) and “destruction” (#684 apōleia) in the genitive case. It is the genitive of character—he is described as a son characterized by destruction, in this case, his destructive behavior. Judas’ character came first, then the consequences of his character; first he was a son of destruction, then accordingly he went to destruction. In other words, this title does not describe how he was first to be destroyed.
and was thus a “son of destruction” but that he was a son of destruction and thus to be destroyed (Cp. Lenski). Many versions add “the one doomed” (NIV) or “the one destined” (NRSV; NET; NJB), but these words are not in the Greek text.

It was a common Semitic idiom to refer to an aspect of one’s character by referring to him as the “son of” some quality. Thus we have “son of eighty years” means someone eighty years old (Exod. 7:7); “son of stripes” is someone deserving to be beaten (Deut. 25:2); “sons of rebellion” (Num. 17:10); “sons of the army” are soldiers (2 Chron. 25:13); “sons of the pledges” are hostages (2 Kings 14:14); “sons of death” are those who are worthy of death or are going to die (Psalm 79:11); “son of Gehenna” (Matt. 23:15); “son of destruction” (2 Thess. 2:3); “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36); “son of the devil” (Acts 13:10); this custom even applies to animals: “son of the herd” (Gen. 18:7), and objects: “sons of the flame” for sparks (Job 5:7). The exact meaning of the idiom “son of X” has to be determined from the context, as the examples above show.

“resulting in the Scripture being fulfilled.” This phrase should not be translated as a purpose clause, as most translations do: “so that the scripture would be fulfilled.” This would have the consequence of making Judas intentionally lost for the purpose of fulfilling a prophecy about him. But the text in no way requires such a reading. In the Greek it is a hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood clause, which could be read to indicate a purpose or simply the result with no intention. Here it would be a result clause; Judas of his own free will was lost, resulting in the scripture being fulfilled, his being lost was not for the purpose of filling scripture. For explanation of purpose and result clauses, see Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in...what was spoken being fulfilled.” For more on Judas see entry on John 13:18, “let the scripture be fulfilled.”

17:15. “Wicked One.” The Greek is poneros (#4190 πονηρός), which the BDAG Greek-English Lexicon describes as, “pertaining to being morally or socially worthless; therefore, ‘wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, and degenerate.’” Poneros is an adjective, but it is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun; for more on substantives, see the commentary on Matthew 5:37).

The Slanderer is the fount and foundation of wickedness. It was in him that wickedness was first found, when he was lifted up with pride and decided to rebel against God. Ever since that time he has been true to his name, “the Wicked One,” and has been doing and causing wickedness wherever he can, which, since he is “the god of this age,” is a considerable amount of wickedness. [For more names of the Slanderer (the Devil) and their meanings, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

17:17. “by the truth.” The Greek reads, “in the truth” (en tē alētheia; ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ). Although the translation “by the truth” is not bad, and the Greek word en (“in”) can mean “by,” the Greek is not just communicating that a person is made holy “by” the truth, as if the truth were a hammer pounding in a nail. Rather, en (“in”) indicates that the person is “in relation” to the truth, “in connection” with the truth, “in union” with the truth. It is as we are “in” the truth, in a relationship with it, submerged in it, if you will, that people truly become holy in the sight of God. And this use of holy is not just “holy enough to be saved,” but truly “holy,” truly like God. We believers should make it our goal to so immerse ourselves in the Word of God and the things of God that we become holy and like God in every aspect of our lives.

17:18. “Just as you sent me.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For
in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

**17:19. “by the truth.”** The Greek reads, “in the truth,” or more literally, “in truth,” but the phrase makes more sense with the definite article, which it has in verse 17. Although the definite article “the” is not in the text in this verse, it does not have to be. In Greek, a preposition can make the noun it modifies definite without there being a definite article in the phrase. Whether the noun is definite or indefinite can usually be determined from the context, at which point it can be translated in the best way to fit the receptor language (Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*; Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996; p. 247). For an explanation of the phrase “in the truth,” see commentary on 17:17.

**17:21. “in me and I in you.”** See John 10:38 commentary “the Father is united with me, and I am united with the Father.”

“**believe that you sent me.**” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

**17:23. “that you sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

**17:25. “these knew that you sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

### Chapter 18

**18:1. “he went out.”** Jesus and his disciples had gotten ready to leave the Last Supper in 14:31, but Jesus had continued to teach (chapters 15 and 16), and then pray (chapter 17). Now he goes out of the Upper Room, and out of the walled city of Jerusalem, and heads east across the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane.

**18:3. “Roman cohort.”** Not necessarily the traditional 1/10 of a legion, or 600 men. At this time period, the word was sometimes used of a representative number of a cohort. Thus it could have been part of the cohort, but they were Roman soldiers, not just the guard of the High Priest. They were under the command of their “chiliarch”—translated as “military commander”—see verse 12. They would have come from the Antonia fortress. To get the Roman soldiers, the priests would have gone to Pilate, or even just to the chiliarch himself in Antonia under pretense of stopping a fomenting revolution. Some commentators think the entire group is Jewish, but this is not likely for a number of reasons. First, the vocabulary, especially chiliarch, is specific to the Roman army. Second, the cohort and the Temple police are mentioned as separate groups. If they were all Temple police, saying it once would have been enough. Third, the Temple police had already been sent to arrest Jesus once, and failed (John 7:45). The priests would take no chance this time, especially after they paid all that money to Judas to set the arrest up.
After the mobs had proclaimed him the Messiah (a great crowd yelled “Hosanna” (Save!), and called him the King of Israel; John 12:12 and 13), it would not have been difficult to persuade the Romans to arrest Jesus to keep a riot from occurring.

“Temple police.” The Greek word huperetai originally referred to the “under-rowers” in a galley, then it was generalized to mean any servant or underling under a superior. Thus it has a broad usage, and one that may or may not be demeaning, depending on the context. It applies to servants in different capacities: prison guard (Matt. 5:25), minister of Christ (Luke 1:2; 1 Cor. 4:1); Synagogue attendant (Luke 4:20), etc. Here it applies to a police force of sorts that was dedicated to keeping the peace in the Temple, so “Temple” is supplied from the context, and put in italics. See Vincent, Word Studies; Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament; Lenski, Commentary.

18:9. “so that the word that he spoke was fulfilled.” The Greek is a hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood purpose-result clause (see Matt. 2:15 entry, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled”). Jesus said “let the men go” with the intention of fulfilling his words in John 17:12, and it also resulted in them being fulfilled.

18:11. “Am I not to drink…” The strong ou me in the Greek has been left as a simple “not.”

“drink the cup.” “Drinking the cup” was a common idiom meaning to experience, whether that experience was good (cp. Ps. 16:5; 23:5; 116:13; Jer. 16:7) or bad (cp. Ps. 11:6; 75:8; Isa. 51:17; Jer. 25:15). See commentary on Matthew 20:21.

18:12. “commander.” The Greek word chiliarchos (#5506 χιλιαρχος) designates a specific rank, namely, a “chiliarch,” which is the rank of a commander of a cohort; it is equivalent to a Roman tribune. We might say, the platoon and the sergeant. Thus the Romans not only sent soldiers, but the commander came along also.

18:13. “And they led him to Annas.” The events of the last week of Jesus Christ’s life are spread throughout all Four Gospels, and different Gospels give different details, which is why we have to be familiar with all four Gospel records to properly reconstruct what happened that week. Every Gospel is written from a different point of view: Matthew portrays Jesus as a king, Mark as a servant, Luke as a man, and John portrays Jesus as the Son of God [for more on these four viewpoints, see commentary on Mark 1:1].

In the case of Jesus’ arrest, only the Gospel of John records Jesus being taken to Annas, and makes it clear that he was taken to Annas first. Annas had been the High Priest from 6-15 AD, which meant Annas had been the High Priest when Jesus was in the Temple at twelve years old (Luke 2:41-52). At that time in the history of Israel, the High Priest was placed in office, or removed, by the Roman governor. Quirinius installed Annas, and Valerius Gratus deposed him, replacing him with Ismael son of Phabi. However, Annas’ power, wealth, and political adroitness were such that five of his sons, then his son-in-law Caiaphas, then a grandson, were all High Priests. Thus there is little doubt that Annas was the power behind the High Priest’s office, and so Jesus was first taken to Annas before he was taken to Caiaphas.

It makes sense that the Gospel of John would record Jesus being taken to Annas, because he did not have an official position, but no doubt had set the tone for the High Priesthood for many years, and in the epic struggle between good and evil and between religion and truth, it would make sense that the Son of God would stand before the “real” spiritual authority in Israel and be rejected by him before being taken to the “official”
authorities. From Annas, Jesus was taken to Caiaphas, the “official” High Priest (John 18:24).

“first.” The events of the last week of Jesus’ life are the pivotal events of history. It was late Monday night when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:2-12). After that, the following events take place, culminating in Jesus’ death.

1. Late Monday night: After his arrest, Jesus was taken “first” to Annas, who would have been at his own home (John 18:13-23).
2. Very late Monday night or early Tuesday morning: Jesus was taken to Caiaphas, the High Priest, who had called together many of the chief priests and Jewish leadership (Matt. 27:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:54-65; John 18:24-27).
3. Tuesday sunrise: Jesus was taken to a dawn meeting of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews, and this meeting would have been in a chamber inside the Temple (Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71).
4. Tuesday morning: The Sanhedrin took Jesus to Pilate early in the morning (John 18:28). This early meeting was not unusual because Roman government conducted business early, and usually quit in the early afternoon. Pilate would have been in the Western Palace, which had been the Palace of Herod the Great (Mark 15:1; Luke 23:1-6; John 18:28-38).
6. Tuesday, close to noon: Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate. This second trial before Pilate occurred about 12 noon (John 19:14). Matthew, Mark, and John do not clearly show that Jesus’ trial before Pilate was in two parts, an early morning part (Mark 15:1; John 18:28) and a later part about 12 noon. They show the two trials as one record (actually, it seems that Matthew leaves the early trial out completely, and just focuses on the second trial before Pilate). From the record in Luke, we can see that Barabbas was offered as part of Pilate’s second trial (Luke 23:18), which is helpful in determining the chronology of the other Gospels. Also, Luke notes that at the start of the second trial, Pilate had to call together the chief priests again (Luke 23:13), which makes sense because they would have left his palace and gone about their duties when Pilate sent Jesus to Herod.
7. Tuesday afternoon, night, and Wednesday morning: After Jesus’ second trial before Pilate, Pilate handed him over to his soldiers. They took him to the Praetorium, gathered the entire Roman cohort, and then beat and tortured him through the afternoon and night (Matt. 27:26-31; Mark 15:16-20; Luke and John omit Jesus’ overnight torture by the whole Roman cohort of soldiers).
8. Wednesday morning: Jesus is led out to be crucified about 9 AM (Mark 15:25), and about 12 noon a darkness came over the land that lasted until 3 PM, when Jesus died (Matt. 27:31-45; Mark 15:20-33; Luke 23:26-44; John 19:17-29)

Jesus died Wednesday afternoon and was raised from the dead three days and three nights later, on Saturday at sunset. [For information on the events and chronology of Jesus’ death and resurrection and his being in the tomb from Wednesday night to Saturday night, see commentary on Luke 23:50].

18:14. “Caiaphas who advised.” This was back in John 11:50.
18:17. “slave-girl.” In this context, slave-girl is the most likely translation of *paidiskē* (#3814 παιδίσκη, the feminine of *paidiskos*, a young boy or slave; a diminutive of παῖς. Cp. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*). She could have been a “servant-girl” or a “slave-girl,” but given the wealth and social status of the High Priest’s family, it is more probable that this woman was a slave-girl. The Greek word was used of a young girl, a servant girl, or a young female slave.

18:18. “servants and the Temple guard.” The Greek words are both general. *Douloi* is slaves or servants, and *huperetai* is also servants or underlings. So what are the specifics of these words? The context would indicate the servants and the Temple guards.

18:21. “Why do you ask me?” Jesus was correct and following the Law by saying this. He knew he was on trial, and the prosecution is supposed to produce witnesses, not try to get self-incrimination. This was one of the many inconsistencies or illegalities with the trial of Jesus. That is also why, after one of the police struck him in the face for supposed impertinence, Jesus said, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong, but if rightly, why do you strike me?”

18:24. “Annas sent him, still tied up, to Caiaphas the high priest.” It is likely that the two of them lived in the same palace-like complex or adjoining homes, with only a courtyard dividing them. It was common for relatives to share a living space, or live close together, and there is no indication that Peter moved from one courtyard to another in the trial of Jesus. Peter was only able to get into the High Priest’s courtyard because of a connection that one of the disciples had with the High Priest (John 18:16), and Peter never again had to ask to gain entrance to another courtyard. After his arrest in Gethsemane, Jesus was taken to Annas first, then sent to Caiaphas. From there he was taken to a dawn meeting of the whole Sanhedrin (Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71). Caiaphas was the son-in-law to Annas, and the designated High Priest at that time. The trial of Jesus (indeed, the whole conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders), reveals the extent to which tradition often takes precedent over truth, and how some religious people will go to great lengths to protect their traditions, even at the expense of people’s lives. It was against Jewish Law to conduct a capital trial at night. According to law, any capital trial had to be held during the full light of day, but in this case Caiaphas tired Jesus at night. His “reason” was likely that a full daylight trial of Jesus in Passover season would attract large crowds of his followers, and the uproar might require Roman troops and lead to more Roman control and restrictions, which the Jewish ruling council did not want.

18:28. “the Praetorium.” “Praetorium” was a term used for wherever the governor or the current military commander was staying, so the word itself does not tell us where it was. In this case, it was most likely the Western Place, which had been the residence of Herod the Great.

Scholars are divided over whether Jesus was tried at the Western Palace, or at the Antonia Fortress (the traditional start of the Via Dolorosa). Alfred Edersheim writes: “Although it is impossible to speak with certainty, the balance of probability is entirely in favor of the view that, when Pilate was in Jerusalem with his wife, he occupied the truly royal abode of Herod, not the fortified barracks of Antonia…the inference is obvious that Pilate, especially as he was accompanied by his wife, stayed there [the Western Palace] also” (*Life and Times*, Book 5, p. 566). The Antonia was not at all lavish, and it is hard to believe that Pilate would subject his wife to staying there when Herod’s Palace was
another residence of his in the same city barely a half mile away. We must keep in mind that Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread was over a week long, and Pilate likely came from Caesarea to Jerusalem for at least a couple weeks.

Many people believe that the Praetorium was in the Antonia Fortress. One reason, though usually unspoken, is that it is the traditional location, and many people believe that there had to be a good reason for the tradition to get started, which actually there does not. In fact, if tradition is the test, the fact that the Antonia Fortress is the traditional location would witness against its being the actual site. The traditional site of the Transfiguration, the Ecce Homo arch, the stops on the Via Dolorosa, the Pool of Siloam, and much more have all been disproven. The tradition of the current pathway of the Via Dolorosa starting at Antonia started during Medieval time. When Christian pilgrims began coming to the Holy Land in the fourth century, the site of the Praetorium of Pilate had been forgotten. The earliest pilgrims of this period located it below the Jewish Quarter in the Tyropoeon Valley just east of the temple area. Later the pilgrimage site was moved to the Church of Holy Sion on “Mount Zion,” which is actually not far south of where Herod’s palace had actually stood. Then the “traditional site” was reassigned a third time, this time to the site on which now stands Convent of the Sisters of Zion in Jerusalem.

Another reason the Antonia is sometimes favored is that it is said that the governor had to stay close to the troops so he could be firmly in command in case of trouble. But the Western Palace is only about 600 yards (less than 600 meters) from the Temple, so Pilate’s staying there would not be a problem.

Modern historical and archaeological evidence is favoring the Western Palace as the Praetorium where Jesus was taken to Pilate. John 19:13 mentions “the Pavement” (Greek: lithostrotos; #3038 λιθόστρωτος). There is a supposed “lithostrotos” under the Convent of the Sisters of Zion in Jerusalem, but this has been conclusively dated as being constructed after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. For one thing, the pavement covers the “Struthion Pool,” which Josephus, speaking about it before 70 AD, said was open to the air. Thus any pavement covering it post-dates the Jewish revolt of 70 AD. In contrast, the huge paved area in the Western Palace dates to the time of Christ, and is so huge it is genuinely worthy of getting the name, “the Pavement.”

Philo of Alexandria, in his Delegation to Gains, says Pilate’s residence during the feasts was in “Herod’s palace,” and Josephus makes the point that the governor Florus also stayed at the Palace, and says it had a bema (place of judgment) in front of it and a
place where criminals could be whipped (War: 2:301ff). The evidence leans strongly that Jesus was tried in Herod’s Palace on the Western side of Jerusalem.

18:29. “Pilate.” Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea from 26 to 36 AD. [For more on Pilate, see commentary on Matt. 27:2].

“What accusation are you bringing against this man?” This was a standard opening of a trial, and no doubt Pilate had spoken the same words many times before. 18:32. “with the result that.” In the Greek a hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood result clause. See Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.”

“clearly indicating by what manner of death he was about to die.” Jesus had spoken of being lifted up from the earth, which meant he would be crucified. See John 12:32, 33; and 3:14 and 8:28.

18:34. “Do you say this of yourself.” The disciples did not expect Jesus to be killed and then raised from the dead. That is simply not what most first-century Jews believed about the Messiah, so they did not understand what Jesus was speaking of when he spoke of being raised from the dead (cp. Matt. 16:22; Mark 9:10; John 20:9).

18:36. “My kingdom is not of this world.” What Jesus means is that his kingdom and “this world” (not “the world,” but “this world”) have little in common. “This world” is a fallen world, under the control of the Devil (John 14:30; 1 John 5:19). Jesus’ enemies were “of this world” (John 8:23), and were children of the Devil (John 8:44). The wisdom of “this world” is foolishness with God (1 Cor. 3:19). Thankfully, the present shape of “this world” is passing away, and one day will be gone altogether (1 Cor. 7:31; Rev. 21:4, 5). Jesus’ kingdom was going to be established on earth by the power of God when he came from heaven (Rev. 19), and his authority was going to come from God, not from “this world’s” system of things.

We must be careful when reading “My kingdom is not of this world” that we do not think it is saying, “My kingdom will not be on earth,” because Jesus will set up his Millennial Kingdom on earth [For more on Christ’s earthly kingdom, see Appendix 3: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”].

“in fact.” This is the logical, not the temporal, use of the Greek word nun (#3568 νῦν). It can be confusing to translate this as “now,” because people might take it to mean “not now, but later,” but that is not its meaning here. Jesus was not telling Pilate that he would later have a kingdom. He had just told Pilate he did have a kingdom but it was not of this world. Now he was saying that in different words: The fact is that my kingdom is not from here. He was not a rival to Pilate or Rome.

18:37. “You rightly say.” See Matthew 27:11 note on “It is as you say.” In verse 36 and 37 Pilate discovers that, although Jesus is claiming to be some kind of king over something with which he is unfamiliar, the Jews’ blanket accusation that Jesus was making himself a king in a sense that would be threatening to Caesar was false. Thus he reports in verse 38 that he finds no cause for death in Jesus.

Chapter 19

19:4. “to let you know.” The verb “know” is ginōskō (#1097 γινώσκω), and it is in the subjunctive mood, which is why many translations have “that you may know.” However, the Greek conjunction hina (#2443 ἡν), which is a word introducing a purpose, earlier in
the sentence, is the reason the verb is subjunctive, and therefore in these cases we must get the sense of the verb from the context. In this case, there is no reason to use the awkward translation, “so that you may know,” when the meaning is simply “to let you know” (cp. HCSB; NIV; also see CJB and NJB).

19:5. “See!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

19:6. “reason for a charge.” The Greek is aitia (#156 αἰτία), and means that which is responsible for a condition, cause, reason; the actual state of affairs, case, circumstance, relationship; a basis for legal action, charge, ground for complaint; accusation (BDAG). In this verse, Pilate was telling the Jews he found no reason for a charge against Jesus.

19:14. “sixth hour.” This is about our 12 noon. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For more information on the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].

There has been much discussion about the chronology used in the book of John, but there is no genuine reason to believe that John used a different standard of chronology and timekeeping than all the Gospels. The reason some theologians have questioned the timekeeping in John is to try to explain how the Gospel of John can say that Jesus was still with Pilate about noon, the 6th hour, (John 19:14) when other Gospels have him being crucified at the third hour (our 9 AM; Mark 15:25), then darkness coming over the land at the sixth hour (our noon; Luke 23:44), then Jesus dying around the ninth hour (our 3 PM; Matt. 27:46-50; Mark 15:24-37). Obviously, if Jesus was still with Pilate at noon, and then he was handed over to the soldiers who tortured him, he could not have been crucified at 9 AM, and in fact it would have even been difficult to get him crucified by about 3 PM, when Matthew and Mark say he died.

The answer to the “problem” created by trying to make Jesus’ crucifixion on Friday is that Jesus was not arrested Thursday night and crucified Friday morning, as most Christians suppose. The primary reason that historically people have believed the crucifixion had to be Friday is that it occurred the day before the Sabbath. But Passover Day was a Sabbath, a special Sabbath according to the Law of Moses (see commentary on John 19:31). The accurate chronology is:

- Jesus was arrested Monday night and taken to Annas (John 18:12-14)
- There was a night trial at Caiaphas’ house at which Jesus was condemned to death for blasphemy (Matt. 26:59-67; Mark 14:55-65).
- After the night trial, Jesus was taken at daybreak to a trial before the whole Sanhedrin and was condemned by them (Matt. 27:1; Luke 22:66-70).
- After the daybreak trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus was taken before Pontus Pilate (Matt. 27:2; Mark 15:1; Luke 23:1-6; John 18:28).
- Pilate sent Jesus to the tetrarch Herod Antipas to be tried by him (Luke 23:7-12).
- Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate, so Jesus was before Pilate about noon (John 19:14). Most of the Gospels do not have Jesus going back and forth between Pilate and Herod, but blend Jesus’ two trials before Pilate into one record.
- Pilate hands Jesus over to the soldiers who torture him through the night (Matt. 27:26-31; Mark 15:16-20; John 19:16).
- Jesus is crucified around 9 AM Wednesday morning (Mark 15:25).
• Darkness comes over the land from 12 noon to 3 PM (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44).
• Jesus dies sometime around 3 PM (Matt. 27:46-50; Mark 15:34-37; Luke 23:44-46).

The only way to make the traditional chronology work is to say that the “sixth hour” in John 19:14 somehow does not refer to noon, but much earlier. But how could that be? The Gospel of John clearly uses the standard Roman and Jewish hours, as we can see from John 1:39, 4:6, and 4:52. It is sometimes taught said that the Romans reckoned their hours from midnight, and that was technically true or their civil day, but, as R. C. H. Lenski points out, “for ordinary purposes they [the Romans], too, reckoned twelve hours from sunrise to sunset” (The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel, commentary on John 1:39).

John would not use a “special” chronology just in this one verse. R. C. H. Lenski, who believes in the traditional Friday crucifixion, is honest enough to say, “No solution [to the John 19:14 problem] has yet been found.” The solution to the problem is actually simple. Jesus was before Pilate at 12 noon, but on Tuesday. Then, after the trial, Pilate turned Jesus over to the soldiers who tortured him through the night, and he was crucified on Wednesday morning, Passover Day, 28 AD. He arose from the dead three days and three nights after he was buried, so he got up on Saturday evening just before sunset (Matt. 12:40 says Jesus was 3 days and 3 nights in the heart of the earth). Then Jesus first appeared to his disciples on Sunday morning, just as Scripture says (the Bible never says Jesus got up Sunday morning. That is an assumption. It says he appeared to his disciples on Sunday morning). [For more information on the events from Jesus’ arrest to his death, see commentary on Luke 18:13. For information on the events and chronology of Jesus’ death and resurrection and his being in the tomb from Wednesday night to Saturday night, see commentary on Luke 23:50].

19:15. “crucify him.” This is not the same crowd that had said, “Hosanna,” and “Son of David” some days earlier. See commentary on Luke 23:21.

19:17. “cross.” The Greek word is stauros (#4716 σταυρός; pronounced stau-ros’). The “cross” that Jesus was executed on has been a subject of scholarly debate for many years. The problem is that stauros can mean several things, including a cross, a single stake, or even just the horizontal cross-piece that was attached to something that was fixed in place such as an upright stake or even a tree. Similarly, the verb stauroō (#4717 σταυροῦμαι pronounced stau-ro’-ô) often translated as “crucify,” has a number of meanings, such as “drive a stake” or “crucify” (i.e., execute on a stauros), but as with stauros, the Greek word itself does not describe the shape of the execution device.

In spite of the ambiguity of stauros and stauroō, the Bible does give us some help with how Jesus died. John 19:17 says that Jesus started out carrying his own cross, that most likely indicates he was carrying a cross-piece of some kind that would then be attached to an upright stake that was already in place. At some point along the way to Calvary, Jesus could no longer carry his stauros, and it was transferred to a man called Simon of Cyrene who carried it after Jesus (Matt. 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26). It is possible that the stauros Jesus carried was a large upright stake that he was then crucified on. However, this is not as likely as him carrying just the cross-piece, because if he carried a large single stake the Romans would have had to have gone out much earlier and dug a hole for that upright stake to fit in securely, which would have been quite difficult. The rocky ground would have made trying to dig a hole right at that time very
unlikely. Nevertheless, scholars such as E. W. Bullinger think Jesus was crucified on a single upright stake.

The Greek text also says Jesus was crucified on a “tree” (Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; 1 Pet. 2:24). The Greek word is *xulon* (#3586 ξύλον pronounced zoo-lon) and it means a tree, log, a piece of timber or wood, or something made from wood such as a beam or cross or club (Mark 14:48), or even the stocks that Paul’s feet were placed in (Acts 16:24). The use of *xulon* to describe the way Jesus died has caused some scholars, such as Earnest Martin, to say that Jesus carried his cross-piece, but when he got to the place of crucifixion, it was nailed to a living tree. However, the word *xulon*, like the word *stauros*, has so many different meanings that we cannot tell from it the exact shape of the “cross” Jesus was crucified on.

From a practical point of view, it is unlikely that Jesus was crucified on a single upright stake that was dropped into a hole that had already been dug. It is also unlikely that Jesus was nailed to a piece of wood that then had to be nailed to a living tree. That would have required a lot of manpower and at least a few living trees, because others were crucified with Christ. It is much more likely that the Romans already had upright stakes in the ground waiting for Jesus and the others who were crucified with him that day, and that they nailed the men to horizontal cross-pieces that were then hoisted into place and secured. If that is the case, then the crosses on which Jesus and the other men were crucified were quite “standard” in shape, looking like a regular tee: “†”. The fact is, however, that we cannot be sure of the exact shape of the cross on which Jesus was crucified.

19:20. “the Place of the city.” The word “place” was a designation of the Temple, see commentary on *topos* at Matthew 24:15.

19:24. Quoted from Psalm 22:18. “so that.” In the Greek a *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood purpose-result, or simply result clause. See Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in...what was spoken being fulfilled.” God could have worked in these men—in a way that did not inhibit their free will—to want to draw lots, or it could just be a result clause. The rendering “so that,” is an ambiguous translation in that it could be read as either purpose or result.

“Now this is what the soldiers did.” The context demands that this phrase goes with verse 24, not verse 25. Parting with the ASV, NASB, and NRSV, we followed the verse pattern of the Nestle-Aland Greek text. Although the Greek, *oi men sun* that opens the phrase can be causal, i.e., “so...,” it can also simply be a mark of continuation of the dialogue, in this case sort of a summation of the action of the soldiers. The soldiers did act by their free-will. It is not as if God forced the soldiers to act in a manner that fulfilled the prophecy. Between God’s foreknowledge and Him working behind the scenes in history, the prophecy is fulfilled without curtailing anyone’s freedom of will.

19:26. “Woman.” The Greek is *gunē* (#1135 γυνή; goo-nay’), a woman of any age, a wife. It was a blessing that Jesus referred to Mary as “woman” and not “mother.” Calling Mary “mother” would have only heightened the horrible emotional pain she was already feeling, but more than that, it would have taken her focus in the wrong direction. Jesus, although her biological son, was her Lord, and she his disciple. She needed to begin to think of Jesus’ crucifixion as the will of God and the obedience of her Lord, and as God’s provision of restoration for the whole world.
19:27. “your mother!” As part of his last acts before his death, Jesus took care of his family, which was an important duty, especially since he was the oldest son. Thus he shows by example what the Bible says clearly: “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8). It is fair to ask, why Jesus would have told John to take his mother Mary home with him. Although the Bible does not tell us directly, we can deduce that Jesus’ father, Joseph, had died. It also seems certain that Jesus’ brothers still did not believe in him (see commentary on John 7:5).

The Bible does not say directly that Joseph died, but that is the logical conclusion from the scope of Scripture. It seems unlikely that Joseph, who had been a good husband and father, had abandoned the family. Yet he is obviously not around when Jesus told John to take Mary home. We know that in Nazareth, Jesus’ hometown, Joseph took care to raise his boys in a traditional way. He was considered “the carpenter” (or perhaps more accurately, “the builder”), and he had raised Jesus to be a carpenter too. We know this because in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is called a carpenter (Mark 6:3).

By the time Jesus started his ministry, however, there is a complete absence of Joseph. When the family thought Jesus had gone insane, Mary and his brothers came to get him without Joseph (Matt. 12:47; Luke 8:19). As his ministry progressed, his brothers are mentioned, but not his father. In fact, when the Scripture says that “his brothers” did not believe in him, it seems unlikely that the opinion of his father Joseph would have been omitted if he had still been around. The most conclusive evidence that Joseph was dead, however, was that Jesus told John to take Mary home. That would have been unthinkable if Joseph were alive.

The other reasons Jesus would have asked John to take care of Mary is that Jesus’ own brothers were continuing to reject him (see commentary on John 5:7). Scripture says that Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are, and the disbelief of his brothers would have certainly been a source of pain to Jesus. All of us want the love and support of our family members, but in the case of faith in Jesus, his brothers having faith in him meant more than just family unity, it meant their salvation. There is no scriptural evidence that any of Jesus’ brothers believed he was the Messiah until after his resurrection, and that may have been part of the reason that Jesus went to Galilee after his resurrection. Thankfully, at least some of Jesus brothers came to believe in him after his resurrection. In fact, his brother James rose to lead the Church in Jerusalem after the Apostle James was killed by Herod Agrippa (cp. Acts 12:2, 17; 15:13), and he wrote the Epistle of James. Also, his brother Judas rose to prominence and wrote the Epistle of Jude.

19:28. “in order to.” The Scripture that was fulfilled was Psalm 69:21: “for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.” In the Greek a hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood purpose clause. See Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.” By this time Jesus’ mouth would have been utterly dry, not having had any water for over 24 hours. As scripture says of the suffering Messiah, “my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death” (Psalm 22:15, NRSV). Now seeing that all things were completed, he had only to die. But in a last act of grace towards those standing near, he desired to quote Psalm 22 to the onlookers, that they may see he is clearly fulfilling scripture. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,” quotes Jesus (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34), but some of those
standing by misheard “Eli, Eli” to be a call for “Elias,” due to the difficulty Jesus would have had in speaking. Therefore, Jesus says, “I am thirsty,” not as a statement of fact, but “in order to fulfill the scriptures,” and also for the purpose of wetting his mouth to allow for annunciation. Having received the sour wine and feeling the unconsciousness of death creeping on, Jesus exclaims, “It is finished” (John 19:30), which the other gospels only record as a “loud cry” (Matt. 27:50; Mark. 15:37). Luke 23:46 gives the further information that during this time he also said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (from Psalm 31:5).

19:30. “It is finished.” This phrase is the translation of the one Greek word teleō (#5055 τελέω; pronounced “tel-eh'-ŏ”). It means “to complete an activity, thus, to finish, to close; to carry out an obligation, thus to accomplish, perform, fulfill; to pay what is due” (BDAG). Interestingly, it has been found in the papyri on tax receipts where it was used as “paid in full,” just as we put “paid in full” on paid receipts today. Thus, this statement is pregnant with meaning. It did mean, “It is finished,” because every obligation and prophecy of the Law, every requirement that was necessary for the salvation of mankind, was finished when Jesus ended his life. It also meant, “Paid in full,” because Jesus was the payment, the sin offering, for mankind’s sin (Rom. 3:25; 2 Cor. 5:21).

19:31. “the high day.” The Jews did not want the bodies to remain on the crosses on that special Sabbath that started the Feast of Unleavened Bread, so they wanted to have the legs of the criminals broken. Then the criminals would not be able to support their weight on their legs and would quickly asphyxiate.

The Passover lamb was always killed on the 14th of Nisan (Nisan is the first month of the Jewish year), and the sunset after the Passover lamb was killed started the 15th of Nisan. The 15th of Nisan was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and it was always a Sabbath, no matter on which day of the week it occurred (Lev. 15:7). The Law of Moses decreed that the 15th of Nisan was a special Sabbath, which is why Luke 23:54 says the “Sabbath” was beginning, even though the day that was beginning was a Thursday. We need to be clear on the fact that the “Sabbath” here in John 19:31 and in Luke 23:54 is not the weekly Sabbath, Saturday, but Thursday, the 15th of Nisan (see commentary on Luke 23:54). This point is made clear here in John 19:31, which tells us specifically that this Sabbath was a “high day,” meaning a special Sabbath, not the regular weekly Sabbath.

Most Christians do not realize that when the Bible says Jesus was crucified the day before the “Sabbath,” it does not mean the regular weekly Sabbath, but rather the Sabbath that starts with sunset after the Passover sacrifice. Sunset on the 14th of Nisan, the day the Passover sacrifice is killed, starts the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the 15th of Nisan, and that day is always a special Sabbath, a high day.

The Jews had no love for Jesus, and stories about him got confused as time went on. Yet apparently they retained the historic memory of him dying the day the Passover Lamb was killed, just before the Feast of Unleavened Bread started. Thus they write in the Babylonian Talmud: “On the eve of Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, ‘He is going forth to be stoned because he has practised sorcery and enticed Israel to apostacy. Any one who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.’ But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover!” (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a (uncensored version) [Soncino Translation]).
“so that.” In the Greek a hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood purpose-result, or simply result clause. See Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in...what was spoken being fulfilled.” God could have brought it about that none of messiah’s bones were broken, or it could just be a result clause. The rendering “so that,” is an ambiguous translation in that it could be read as either purpose or result.  
19:38. “Joseph...asked Pilate’s permission so that he could take away the body of Jesus.” Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body of Jesus. See commentary on Matthew 27:58.  
19:39. “But Nicodemus also came.” The Greek has the particle de (#1161 δέ; pronounced deh), often translated “but,” at the beginning of the sentence. However, the de in the Greek text has been basically ignored by translators due to the tradition that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus worked together to bury Jesus, even though they did not (see commentary on John 19:40). The most common use of the de is to either mark a contrast or mark the start of a new subject. In this verse, it could be translated as a contrast, as in the REV, or it could be seen to start a new subject, but we do not have a good English word that does that (Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible uses “Moreover”). Many English versions show the change in subject by not translating the de at all, but we did not feel that was strong enough in this context. We should read John like, “Joseph took down the body of Jesus, but Nicodemus came with spices to bury him.” Although it is true that grammatically there are times when the de can be translated “and,” that would be misleading in this case because it would connect Joseph and Nicodemus too closely.  
Translations of John 19:39 such as the NIV’s “he [Joseph] was accompanied by Nicodemus,” are in error. They are not what the Greek text says, and thus are not translations, but interpretations, and erroneous ones at that.  
“about seventy-five pounds.” The Greek is 100 litra (#3046 λίτρα), and a litra is a Roman pound of 12 ounces, while the American pound is 16 ounces. Thus 100 Roman pounds is 75 American pounds. Quite a few English versions read, “100 pounds,” which is confusing to English readers who only think in terms of American pounds.  
This is a huge amount of spices. It is likely that Jesus’ body did not even weigh much more than twice that amount. It has been suggested by many scholars that this large amount was actually fitting for a royal burial, and thus although Jesus’ birth was in less than royal circumstances, it seems his burial, in the tomb of a rich man and with a royal amount of spices, was a royal burial. Had the women watching the burial seen Nicodemus, they would not have gone and bought spices themselves, and we can bet that even though they did buy spices, they did not buy nearly 75 pounds worth, which would have cost a lot of money.  
19:40. “they.” Joseph of Arimathea got the body of Jesus down from the cross, wrapped it in clean linen cloth, put it in a tomb, rolled the stone over the door of the tomb, and left, and the women watched him (Matt. 27:58-61). After Joseph of Arimathea left the tomb, Nicodemus and his servants arrived. Nicodemus and his servants are likely the “they” in John 19:40.  
We know that Nicodemus and Joseph did not work together because Joseph closed the tomb and left while the women were still watching him (Matt. 27:60, 61). But if the women had seen Joseph and Nicodemus work together to bury Jesus, which is what
the traditional teaching says, then the women would have seen that Jesus had been properly buried, even royally buried, with 75 pounds of spices (see REV commentary on John 19:39). The fact that the women left the tomb after Joseph did, and still thought they needed to buy spices is conclusive evidence that Joseph and the women had left the area before Nicodemus arrived with the spices.

Nicodemus needed to have servants with him for a number of reasons. For one thing, to help him carry the spices, which weighed about 75 pounds (John 19:39). Also, he would have needed help rolling away the stone from the door of the tomb. Also, it was likely that as a member of the Sanhedrin and a wealthy man, he would have traveled with a bodyguard anyway, especially when it was close to dark, and very especially when he was carrying what certainly was thousands of dollars’ worth of valuable spices.

Nicodemus brought the traditional burial spices with him, and re-wrapped Jesus’ body with them. It is likely that Nicodemus’ work was completed after dark, which was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was always counted as a Sabbath, no matter what day of the week it fell on. Nevertheless, he would have had some light even without torches because it was the 14th day of the Jewish lunar month, so there was a full moon. Nicodemus touched Jesus’ dead body, making himself unclean for the Passover meal, and this showed how much he loved Jesus.

One reason that tradition teaches that Joseph and Nicodemus worked together is that it seems unlikely that the only two followers of Jesus on the Sanhedrin would not have collaborated together on the burial of Jesus. Even if Joseph and Nicodemus knew about each other, it is possible that they did not find out about each other until the trial of Jesus, when they were asked to vote for his death. It does seem that they both had been very quiet about being followers of Jesus, so much so that it seems that none of the other members of the Sanhedrin knew they were disciples.

It occurs occasionally in the Gospels that even though there are two or more people involved in doing something, some Gospels mention only one of the people while others mention both people. So, for example, when it comes to the men who lived in the tombs who Jesus healed, Matthew mentions both men (Matt. 8:28), while Mark and Luke mention only one of the two men (Mark 5:2; Luke 8:27). However, that kind of scenario does not work for Joseph and Nicodemus, because had they worked together they would have closed the tomb and left together, but the women saw Joseph close the tomb and leave, and the body of Jesus had not yet been properly buried with spices, according to the Jewish custom.

It is possible that Joseph and Nicodemus conferred about the burial of Jesus, but disagreed about how it was to be done. It is more likely, however, that they were supposed to meet at the tomb and work together but Nicodemus got delayed, so Joseph wrapped the body, put it in the tomb and left just before the Sabbath started. Nicodemus, arriving later, realized what happened and went ahead with the royal burial of Jesus. If that is the case, the “they” in John 19:40 could refer to both Joseph and Nicodemus, even though they did not work on the burial of Jesus at the same time. What is clear from the Gospel records is that the women saw Joseph close the tomb and leave without properly burying Jesus, and were not there when Nicodemus came with the spices, which is why they went and bought spices for his burial.

19:42. “because the tomb was nearby.” This phrase starts out with the Greek word hoti (#3754 ὅτι), which is a conjunction that in this context means “because, since, for.” This
little phrase in John is a huge key to properly understanding Jesus’ burial. Matthew 27:57-60 informs us that the tomb belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, who was wealthy, while Mark 15:43 informs us that Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council of Israel, so he was indeed a wealthy and powerful man. Although he was from Arimathea, his position on the Sanhedrin would have been a reason for him to move to Jerusalem. That is no doubt why he had a tomb already cut out and prepared, surely for him and his family.

Although the exact location of Arimathea is uncertain, it is most likely the modern town of Rentis, about 20 miles (32 km) NW of Jerusalem, and even if Joseph had a family tomb there, it is understandable that he would have wanted a family tomb in Jerusalem that would have been fitting both to his wealth and social status. Also, since at that time people were buried the same day they died, and Arimathea was at least a day’s journey, that would have been another reason Joseph would have wanted a tomb in Jerusalem, and why he would have had it prepared long before any of his family died. Death often came suddenly and unexpectedly in biblical times.

Joseph’s tomb just happened to be nearby the place where Jesus was crucified, and since he was a disciple of Jesus he willingly allowed his tomb to be used for Jesus’ body, including using his position and influence to get the body from the Romans. By the time Pilate’s permission could be obtained to claim Jesus’ dead body, it was very near sunset, which started the Passover, so there was no time to move the body far.

It has sometimes been taught that Joseph prepared the tomb for Jesus, but that would not be the case. Joseph would have no idea where Jesus was going to be crucified (and most likely, like the Apostles, did not even understand that he would be crucified), and this verse tells us that Jesus was buried there “because” it was near to the crucifixion site.

“So they laid Jesus there.” John 19:41 and 42 are a summary describing the burial place of Jesus. The “they” in verse 42 is simply referring to the fact that Jesus was placed in the tomb by people. It does not have to mean that Joseph and Nicodemus worked together. “They” placed him in the tomb: Joseph brought his body there, wrapped it, and shut the tomb door. Nicodemus and his servants opened the tomb, wrapped the body of Jesus with spices, and rolled the stone back over the door (see commentary on John 19:40). [For more information on Jesus being crucified and buried on Wednesday and being three days and three nights in the grave, see commentary on Matthew 12:40].

Chapter 20

20:1. “on the first day of the week.” John chapter 19 ended with Jesus being buried, which was Wednesday close to sunset. John chapter 20 starts on Sunday morning before Sunrise, so there has been more than three days and nights between John 19:42 and 20:1.

“Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb early.” Mary had seen the tomb just before sunset the night before (see commentary on Matt. 28:1). Now she came alone to the tomb “early, while it was still dark.” The Greek for “when it was still dark” indicates that the darkness was ending and the daylight was coming on. Biblically, the dimness of just before sunrise was still “dark.” We in the Western world tend to think of “dark” as
“black-dark,” but in the biblical world before artificial lights, “dark” meant when it was not yet clearly bright out yet. The haze before sunrise was “dark” to them.

The trip from Bethany, which was on the east side of the Mount of Olives and apparently where Peter and the others were staying, to the tomb area, which we believe was on the west side of the Mount of Olives, is quite short, probably no longer than a 20 minute walk. Even if the tomb is in the vicinity of Gordon’s Calvary (a traditional Protestant site of the tomb) or at the location of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (the traditional Catholic and Orthodox site of the tomb), the walk would have only taken perhaps a half hour.

It is likely that the other women, who had the spices, were going to meet Mary at the tomb, and arrived at the tomb only a little while later, shortly after sunrise, carrying the spices they had prepared on Friday (see commentary on Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; cp. Matt. 28:5; see commentary on Matt. 27:58). It is also possible, however, that Mary was going early to see if the guard was gone or would let them properly bury Jesus, and return to tell them not to go if they could not get to the body of Jesus. Once Mary saw the open tomb, she completely forgot about the spices and preparing Jesus’ body, and ran off to tell Peter and John that Jesus’ body was missing. The Bible never actually says Mary looked in and saw Jesus’ body was missing, but it seems likely that she did, because she told the disciples it was gone. Mary’s going to tell Peter and John meant that by the time the other women arrived at the tomb, Mary Magdalene had already been startled by the empty tomb and left the area.

20:2. “was a friend.” The Greek is φιλέω (#5368 φιλέω). It is hard to translate the verb φιλέω in this context and keep the English as a verb. If we say, “loved,” as most versions do, we lose the meaning of φιλέω here, and confuse it with ἀγαπέ love. We could say that Jesus was “friendly” or the disciple whom Jesus was “fond of,” but these seem too weak. We meet “friendly” people all the time, but they are not “friends.” It seems that changing the verb “befriended” to the phrase, “was a friend,” is the best way to handle this. For a more complete understanding of φιλέω, see the note on John 21:15.

“They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb.” This seemed totally ridiculous to Peter and the other disciple. For one thing, the tomb had been guarded by Roman soldiers. Secondly, who would take Jesus’ body? Not the Romans, they thought he was a common criminal. Not the religious leaders. They had the tomb guarded so no one would take the body and claim Jesus was resurrected. The Jews wanted there to be a body in the tomb to prove he was not the Messiah. Not the disciples. They were not expecting a resurrection themselves, and were more honest than to try to perpetrate some false plot about Jesus being raised. Besides, if Peter and the other disciple (almost certainly John) were not in on such a plot, it was bound to fail anyway. At this point, neither Peter nor the other disciple believed Mary’s report, but they went to check it out. When they saw the empty tomb with their own eyes, they believed Mary was telling the truth about the body being gone (see commentary on John 20:8).

Although the text does not say that Mary entered the tomb, we have to assume that she did. It was dark out and she would not have been able to testify that Jesus’ body had been taken unless she actually saw that it had been taken.

20:3. “So Peter went out, and the other disciple…to the tomb.” Although it does not say so in this verse, we know that Mary Magdalene also went back to the tomb, although she would have walked or slowly ran behind. She may have even arrived at the tomb very
shortly after Peter and the other disciple left, which could have been possible because they were running while Mary was more likely walking. In the biblical culture it was customary for women to follow behind the men, so Peter and John would not have waited for her.

The presence of the angels in the tomb did not startle Mary, so she must have thought they got there after Peter and the other disciple left, or, if she arrived at the tomb while Peter and the other disciple were still there, she likely thought that they did not say anything to her about them being there because they were focused on the missing body of Jesus.

20:5. “stooping down and looking in.” The Greek word is parakuptō (παρακύπτω), and it means to stoop down or towards something in order to look at it, or to look at something with the head bowed forward or with the body bent over. It is also used metaphorically for looking at or into something carefully or intently (cp. Thayer, Freiberg, Bullinger). There is a metaphorical use of the verb in which it is used for a rapid or cursory glance, and some commentators have taken that to be the sense in which Peter, Mary, and the other disciple looked into the tomb, as if they quickly glanced into it. However, that does not fit the situation. When Jesus’ followers looked into the tomb, they were studying it intently, barely believing what they saw, or rather, did not see.

“and looking in, he sees the linen cloths.” There are three times when people who are outside the tomb are said to be able to see where Jesus lay: here, John 20:11 and 12, and Luke 24:12. We believe that the tomb was a standard wealthy person’s tomb, since Joseph of Arimathea was wealthy. That meant it would have had a “weeping chamber” before the room or rooms that had the benches on which to lay the dead. In Joseph’s tomb, the set up was such that a person could stand outside the tomb and see through the weeping chamber to the place where Jesus’ body would have been placed.

20:7. “handkerchief.” The Greek word is soudarion (σουδάριον), a widely used Latin loan-word. The Latin word is sudarium, from the Latin root sudor, “sweat” (Thayer). As well as being used as a loan-word in Greek, the Romans also introduced it into Palestine where it was picked up and used by the Jews, even appearing in the Mishnah and Talmud (Smith’s Bible Dictionary; “handkerchief;” BDAG). A soudarion, as the name implies, was usually our equivalent to a handkerchief or sweat cloth, and was used for wiping sweat from the body and cleaning the nose. Due to the heat in Palestine, a word that uniquely described a piece of cloth to wipe sweat from the body was readily assimilated into the culture. Besides being used for wiping sweat, it was also useful for wrapping things (Luke 19:20 records a man hiding money in one, but the rabbinical writings show that practice was considered unsafe; ISBE “napkin”). Furthermore, because it was a face cloth, it was used to cover the face of a dead body, something apparent from the record of Lazarus (John 11:44), and Jesus (John 20:7).

The facecloth was folded, or rolled up (the Greek word can mean either), apart from the rest of the grave wrappings, but the Bible does not explain why. Two plausible theories have been set forth: the first is that it shows the orderliness of the situation, that things were not done haphazardly or in haste, but that, just as with the rest of God’s creation, things are done in an orderly way. The second is that it was folded as further proof that the body was not stolen. If thieves had indeed stolen the body, they likely would have stolen the small face cloth too, but even if they did not want to steal it too, they certainly would not have taken the time to fold it up and set it aside.
In recent years a teaching has arisen in Christianity that the “napkin” (KJV) covering the face of Jesus’ dead body was folded by itself as an indication that Jesus Christ would come back. The teaching goes like this: in biblical times if a master was eating at the table and got up to leave, if he was done eating, he would just throw the napkin down in a heap and the servants knew he was completely finished. If, however, the master folded the napkin and left, the servants knew not to clear the table, because he was coming back. So, it is concluded, Jesus carefully folded the napkin to show us he was coming back. There are a number of problems with this teaching. The first and foremost is that there is absolutely no evidence from ancient times that it is true. There is no ancient evidence that there was any such custom associated with eating, in fact, what we know about ancient meals contradicts this new teaching. People in the East ate with their hands, and after eating they cleansed them by washing in water, not by using a “napkin” (cp. James Freeman, Manners and Customs of the Bible, #329). Second, the word “napkin” is used in the KJV, and from that people get the idea of our table napkin. But as we have seen, the people of the East did not use “table napkins,” and the Greek word used in the verse does not mean “table napkin.” This whole new teaching is presented as if it happened in today’s culture. Even a wealthy man in the ancient Near East would not sit in a chair at a table, use silverware, and wipe his hands with a napkin. He would sit or recline on the floor or a low pillow and eat primarily with his right hand. When he was ready to leave the table for any reason, a servant would clean his hands by washing them in water.

This new “urban legend” about Jesus shows what can happen when a word in the Bible is mistranslated in such a way that the meaning chosen in English (in this case, “napkin”), does not accurately represent the meaning of the word in the biblical culture. 20:8. “and he saw, and he believed.” Peter and the other disciple both “saw,” and both “believed.” If we read John 20:8 without paying attention, and especially without seeing the Greek text, it can seem like the other disciple was the one who saw and believed. However, the double use of kai (and, also) in the Greek text makes it clear that both Peter and the other disciple saw and believed. The other disciple arrived at the tomb first, but did not go in, and hence could not see where the body would have been laying. Peter arrived and went right in, and saw that Mary had been telling the truth: Jesus’ body was gone. Then the other disciple went in, “and he saw and he believed,” or “he also saw and he also believed.” The two of them both believed that the body was actually gone.

“believed.” Believed what? Many people say Peter and the other disciple believed in the resurrection, but that cannot be the case. For one thing, the next verse says they did not know about the resurrection. Although Jesus had tried to tell them he would be killed and raised, there is not one time the Bible indicates they understood what he meant, and they even argued among themselves as to what he was saying (cp. Matt. 9:22; Mark 9:10; Luke 18:34). It was only after the resurrection they understood the death and resurrection of the Messiah (Luke 24:45). In fact, when Jesus did show himself to them when they were behind locked doors, they were frightened and thought they were seeing some kind of spirit (Luke 24:37).

After the crucifixion the tomb was closed, sealed and guarded. So when Mary said Jesus’ body had been stolen, they did not believe her at first (see commentary on John 20:2). Nevertheless, when they went to the tomb themselves, they “saw” it was empty and they “believed” what Mary had said, that the body had been taken. The next
verse confirms this by saying that they did not know the scripture that he would rise from the dead. Peter and John went back home, but Mary remained at the tomb crying, more evidence they did not believe in the resurrection. If she believed Jesus was resurrected, she would have been rejoicing. Even after the whole group of women said they saw Jesus, Peter still did not believe in the resurrection (Luke 24:12).

Also, although they saw the grave clothes with the spices were in the tomb, that would have only been more confusing to them, not conclusive. We must remember that neither the women nor Peter and John knew Nicodemus had come and wrapped Jesus with spices. The women (and hence the disciples), thought Jesus was buried in a simple linen cloth by Joseph of Arimathea. Thus, the wrappings and spices would have been just one more thing that did not make sense, so the disciples went home and Mary just stayed and wept.

**20:9. “did not yet know.”** The disciples did not expect Jesus to be killed and then raised from the dead, so they did not expect an empty tomb. (See commentary on Luke 18:34).

**“out from among the dead.”** See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among those who are dead.”

**20:11. “crying.”** Mary was crying because she believed someone had taken the body of Jesus (see commentary on verse 8, and the reason she gave to the angels as to why she was crying, verse 13).

**“stooped down and looked.”** The Greek word is *parakuptō* (#3879 παρακύπτω), and it means to stoop towards something in order to look at it (see commentary on John 20:5). The Bible never says that Mary actually went into the tomb. In contrast, the Bible clearly says the other women who came with the spices shortly after sunrise did enter the tomb (Mark 16:5; Luke 24:3).

**20:12. “[Mary] sees two angels in white, sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying.”** After seeing the empty tomb, Peter and John went back to where they had been staying, but Mary Magdalene stood outside the sepulcher weeping. As she was crying, she stooped down and “looked” into the sepulcher (she did not go in). Mary had a completely different experience at the tomb than the group of women who arrived at the tomb after she had left. Mary only looked into the tomb, but the group of women went into the tomb. Mary looked in and saw two angels sitting, one at the head and one at the feet of where the body of Jesus had been. When the group of women entered the tomb, they saw only one angel sitting (Mark 16:5; Luke 24:3, 4a), but while they were in the tomb with that angel, two other angels suddenly appeared and stood by them (Luke 24:4b).

The angels asked Mary Magdalene why she was crying, they did not tell her Jesus was raised from the dead. It was as Mary started to walk away from the tomb that she met Jesus. In contrast, the angels in the tomb told the group of women that Jesus had been raised from the dead (Matt. 28:6; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6), but then those women also met the Lord personally as they were going to tell the disciples what the angels said (Matt. 28:9, 10).

The presence of the angels in the tomb did not startle Mary, so she must have thought they got there after Peter and the other disciple left, or, if she arrived at the tomb while Peter and the other disciple were still there, she likely thought that they did not say anything to her about them being there because they were focused on the missing body of Jesus. (See commentary on John 20:3).
“in white.” Many clothes in the biblical world were white, such as linen garments and clothes made of white wool, so the white garments were not out of the ordinary and did not indicate to Mary the men she was talking to were angels. The white garments were appropriate to signify the righteousness and purity of the risen Lord, and it also helped Mary to see the men in the dark tomb, which would have been especially dark before the sun was up.

20:13. “Woman, why are you crying?” The greeting, “Woman,” is colder today than it was in biblical times, when it was a proper and respectful way to address a woman, particularly one with whom you were not on familiar terms. The angels only asked Mary why she was crying, they did not tell her Jesus had risen from the dead. This is different from the experience the other women had when they came to the tomb. Angels told the other women that Jesus was not there because he had risen from the dead (Matt. 28:6; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6). After the angels spoke to Mary she turned from the tomb and saw the Lord, but did not recognize him at first.

20:17. “Do not touch me.” John 20:17 is a difficult verse, and to understand it we must pay attention to everything in the verse, the context, and the scope of Scripture. To start our commentary, we should look at the word translated “touch.” The word “touch” is haptomai (#680 ἁπτομαι), and in the Greek text it is in the imperative mood, present tense, middle voice. Haptomai means “touch,” or “grasp,” and in this verse can legitimately be translated in one of two broad categories. One is, “Do not touch me,” (NET; i.e., Mary has not yet touched Jesus and he is stopping her from touching him). The other is, “Stop clinging to me” (NSAB; i.e., Mary has already taken hold of the Lord and he is asking her to stop). Although some commentators assert that the present tense indicates that Mary was already touching him, that is not correct. Bultman writes: “The present imperative does not necessarily imply that she [Mary] has already touched him, but is need only presuppose that she is trying to do it, and is in the process of doing it” (The Gospel of John: A Commentary).

Many scholars say that Mary was already clinging to Jesus based on the fact that haptomai usually refers to a firm grasp and not just a light touch. They say that if Mary had not yet touched Jesus, then he would not have used haptomai, but would have used another word for touch that referred to a lighter touch. However, that is not a good argument for why haptomai was used in the verse. Jesus stopped Mary from doing what she intended to do, and given the circumstances and her relief at seeing Jesus alive, she would not have “lightly touched” him, she would have grabbed him and held him. So it was appropriate for Jesus to stop Mary by saying, “Do not grasp me.”

In the final analysis, because haptomai can be translated either as “Do not touch me,” or “Stop touching me,” we must decide how to translate it from understanding the context and what the verse is talking about. In other words, when we discover what Jesus is talking about when he says he is going up to the Father, then we will see how to translate haptomai. Jesus then explains why he does not want Mary to touch him when he says that it is because he has not yet “gone up” to the Father (see explanation below).

“For I have not yet gone up to my Father.” Jesus told Mary, “Do not touch me, for I have not yet gone up to my Father.” The Greek word gar, translated “for,” is vital to understanding this verse. The normal reading of gar is that it gives the reason that Mary cannot touch Jesus. In today’s modern English we might use “because” instead of “for,” and say, “Don’t touch me because I have not yet gone up to the Father.” This is a very
simple sentence. It gives the reason that Mary cannot touch (or hold on to) Jesus, which is “because” he had not yet gone up to his Father. If we find out what Jesus’ going up to the Father is, we will understand the verse and also understand whether to translate _haptomai_ as “Do not touch me” or “Do not hold on to me.”

Almost every commentator seriously misunderstands this verse because they assume that “going up to the Father” refers to Jesus’ ascension into heaven. This problem is made worse by the fact that most English versions of the Bible translate the common Greek word _anabainō_, which means “to go up” or “to come up,” as “ascended.” This makes it seem like the verse is referring to Jesus’ ascension into heaven, which it does not.

If Jesus told Mary not to touch him because he had not yet ascended into heaven, then why did he allow or invite others to touch him before he ascended? The same morning he told Mary not to touch him, he allowed the other women to touch him and hold on to his feet (Matt. 28:9). Then later that same day Jesus appeared to his disciples when they were behind locked doors and told them, “Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me, and see” (Luke 24:39). The word translated “handle” is _psēlaphaō_ (#5584 Ψηλαφάω; pronounced tsay-lä-fä’ō), and it means to handle, to touch and feel. Thus, the same day Jesus told Mary not to touch him, he allowed the other women to not only touch him but to hold on to him, and he also invited all the disciples to handle him to be sure it was him. Then, eight days later, he told Thomas to touch him (John 20:26, 27).

Rudolf Bultman is a commentator who saw the problem about Mary touching Jesus, and wrote: “If the wording were pressed, it would follow that when he had gone to the Father he would subsequently present himself to his followers for fellowship and physical contact…. “(The Gospel of John: A Commentary). Bultman is correct. If Jesus says the reason not to touch him is that he had not gone to the Father, then once he had “gone up” to the Father, people could touch him. Of course that is exactly what happened. Once Jesus had “gone up” to his Father, which, as we will see, he did when he went “up” to the Temple and then presented himself to the Father there, he allowed people to touch him.

D. A. Carson, thinking the “ascension” was Jesus’ ascension into heaven, saw the problem and wrote: “And why should being ascended make a difference? …the implication is that the disciples are permitted to touch Jesus after the ascension but not before—exactly the reverse of what might have been expected” (The Gospel According to John). Carson is correct that the implication of the verse, indeed, we would say the very meaning of the Greek text, is that people cannot touch Jesus before he “goes up,” but can touch him after he “goes up.” From that evidence alone, we can see that Jesus’ “going up” is not his ascension into heaven. As Carson has seen, if no one was supposed to touch Jesus before the ascension, then he should not have let anyone, including the women and his disciples, touch him. On the other hand, if the women and the disciples can touch Jesus before his ascension, then he should have let Mary Magdalene touch him too. And also as Carson has seen, if we were not supposed to touch Jesus before his ascension into heaven, but we can afterward, how are we supposed to do that? How can we touch Jesus after he goes to heaven?

Thankfully, there is a simple and biblical answer to why Jesus did not let Mary touch him. But before we study it, we should note some of the unsatisfactory solutions
have been postulated to solve it. One is that Jesus did not let Mary touch him because she was touching him out of doubt, not faith. She doubted he was “real” or that it was really him. But the other disciples and Thomas doubted too, in fact, the very reason Jesus told them to touch and handle him was to get rid of their doubt, so that “solution” does not work.

Another unsatisfactory solution is that Mary had grabbed Jesus so she would not lose him again, but if that were the case he would have simply told her she could let go “because” he would be with her forever. Instead he told her to let him go “because” he had not yet gone up to his Father. But if his going up to God is the ascension, then the reason he told Mary to let him go would be incorrect since he let others touch him before his ascension.

Yet another unsatisfactory solution postulated by some Bible teachers is that Mary must have grabbed him in worship, and Jesus was telling Mary not to worship him at that time. But why would he not allow her worship and why would his being in heaven be a better time to worship him? Besides, he let other people worship him before his ascension, including the women who grabbed his feet and the people he met in Galilee (Matthew 28:9, 17).

Still another proposed solution is that he told Mary to let him go so that he was then free to ascend to the Father in heaven; as if he could not ascend while she was holding him. But then when she supposedly let go, he stayed on earth for another forty days. So that “solution” cannot be correct.

Another solution, a quite inventive one, is that the phrase “I have not yet gone up to my Father,” is parenthetical. Removing the words in the parenthesis would make the verse read: “Do not cling to me, for…go rather to my brothers and tell them I am going up to the Father.” In other words, “Let me go so you can go tell my brothers I am going up to the Father.” However, that proposed solution has many problems. Not the least of them is that it requires a very unusual and unnatural way to read the Greek text. Also, if Jesus was going to be around for forty more days, why would Mary have to let go of him and hurry off to tell the disciples about the ascension? Jesus’ allowing Mary to hold him for a few more minutes would not change anything. Also, why would Jesus want Mary to give the disciples a message about his ascension, when they did not understand there would even be ascension? (There will be more on this point later). This solution does not work.

Some scholars explain the verse in a totally different manner, and say that “going up” to the Father refers to some kind of progressive glorification of Christ. These scholars correctly note that the word that most English Bibles translate as “ascended” (anabainō; #305 ἀναβάνω), is a very common Greek word. It occurs more than eighty times in the New Testament, and refers to all kinds of ways of “going up” or “coming up.” In essence, the reasoning of these scholars is that after his resurrection, Jesus went through a progressive glorification, which John 20:17 refers to as an “ascension,” a “going up” (cp. Frederic Godet, Commentary on John’s Gospel). In other words, according to this interpretation, after his resurrection, over a period of time, Jesus “went up” to greater and greater state of glorification, and he had just started the process when he met Mary, so he did not want her to touch him. We reject this proposed solution for a number of reasons. The first is that we assert that when God raised Jesus from the dead he was fully glorified and given all authority in heaven and on earth. Also, it does not
make sense that after his resurrection he was not glorified enough to let Mary touch him, but perhaps only about an hour later he was glorified enough that other women could touch him, and by the end of the day he was so glorified that any disciple could touch him.

None of the above explanations of the verse are satisfactory. However, the number of explanations and the wide variety of them shows us that properly understanding the verse will require good translation work, an understanding of the scope of Scripture and Jewish laws and customs, and sound logic. What we will now see is that the solution to the problem is biblical, but to understand it, there is some important background we must understand.

One thing we must understand is that the Greek word most English Bibles translate as “ascended,” is anabainō, which is a common Greek word and is used of many types of “going up” in the New Testament. Examples of anabainō in the New Testament include when Jesus “went up” out of the water at his baptism (Matt. 3:16); when Jesus “went up” a mountain (Matt. 5:1; 14:23; 15:29), when thorns “came up” out of the soil (Matt. 13:7); when Jesus and the disciples “went up” into a boat (Matt. 14:32); when Jesus and his apostles “were going up” to Jerusalem (Matt. 20:17); and when the multitude “went up” to Pilate (Mark 15:8). The point is that anabainō is the common word for “going up” from one place to another. Since the Bible uses anabainō for the times when Jesus climbs up a mountain, it would be the normal word the Bible would use to say that Jesus “went up” from the area of the tomb to the Temple, because the Temple was on top of Mt. Moriah. In John 20:17, anabainō does not refer to Jesus’ ascension into heaven, and should not have been translated as “ascended.”

Another key to understanding the verse is in the last sentence of the verse: “But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am going up to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God.’” Jesus said “I am going up,” using the present tense verb. That indicates that going up to his Father was something that Jesus was in the process of doing or just starting to do. Although there are times when the present tense of a verb is used as a generalization for the future tense of the verb, that does not seem likely here. After all, if Jesus was speaking of his ascension into heaven, then he would have been speaking of an event that was forty days away, so it would have been more natural for him to use the future tense of the verb and said, “I will go up to my Father.” The simple and straightforward reading of “I am going up to my Father” is that his “going up,” was something that was happening or going to happen right then.

Another key to understanding what Jesus meant when he said he had not yet “gone up” to his Father is that Mary knew what he was talking about. Even though the meaning of what Jesus said may not be immediately apparent to us, it was clear to Mary. She was certainly glad (and astounded!) to see Jesus. However, once she grasped that she was really speaking to the resurrected Christ, there is no evidence that she was confused by his message to tell the disciples he was going up to the Father. This should have signaled us from the start that the “going up to the Father” did not refer to his ascension into heaven, because the disciples did not know about his ascension into heaven.

Whenever Jesus spoke of his death or resurrection, the disciples were confused and did not know what he meant (see commentary on Luke 18:34). Similarly, they did not understand what he was talking about when he spoke of his ascension into heaven (John 14:5; 16:17-19). Even after his resurrection, when they finally understood about his
death and resurrection, there is no indication they understood about his ascension. As late as Acts 1:6 the disciples were asking Jesus if he was going to restore the kingdom to Israel at that time, and they were speaking of his kingdom on earth (see commentary on Matt. 5:5). They were not expecting him to leave earth, even though he had told them he was going to, which is why they were so caught off guard when he did leave, and angels had to appear and tell them he was coming back (Acts 1:9-11).

Since Jesus told Mary to tell to the disciples that he was “going up,” he could not have been speaking of his ascension into heaven because neither she, nor the disciples knew about the ascension. Even if Jesus had taken time to explain to Mary about his ascension into heaven, she could not have then told the disciples about it. She could not even get them to believe she had seen the risen Christ! How could she have gotten them to believe that this risen Christ was going to go up into heaven?

From the evidence we can see that the “going up” in John 20:17 had nothing to do with Jesus’ ascension into heaven, but instead was something that Jesus told Mary to tell the disciples that would help them believe that they had really seen the resurrected Christ. It had to be something the disciples would have understood and something that they knew he had to do on that Sunday. We will see that what Jesus had to do was present himself in the Temple as the High Priest and the Firstfruits offering.

The Messiah was the fulfillment of the types and symbols in the Old Testament. For example, he was the true Passover Lamb; the true acceptable sacrifice; the true Sabbath rest for God’s people; and the true High Priest. He was also the true “firstfruits” to God, that is, the first of God’s true harvest (God’s true harvest is the harvest of people who get up from the dead to everlasting life, and Jesus was the first one to be raised from the dead to everlasting life). After his resurrection, Jesus was both the High Priest (Ps. 110:4; Zech. 6:13; Heb. 5:5; 8:1) and the firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:20, 23), and he had to go to the Temple and show himself in both those roles.

According to the Law of Moses, the firstfruits of the harvest were shown to God during the Feast of Unleavened Bread “on the day after the Sabbath.” On that day, the High Priest was to wave firstfruits of the harvest in the Temple (Lev. 23:10, 11). The day after the Sabbath is Sunday, and in the year Jesus was crucified it was Sunday the 18th of Nisan [For more on this occurring the Sunday after the Saturday Sabbath, see commentary on Acts 2:1]. Sunday was the day Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene, but when Jesus met Mary at the tomb, it was still dark and before sunrise (see commentary on John 20:1). It would be proper for him to wait until after the sun had risen before showing himself to God in the Temple. That is because, “the purpose of such [waving] rites was to show the offering to God,” which would logically be after the sun came up (The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus, Baruch Levine, p. 157.) The firstfruits were publicly waved “so it will be accepted on your [the people’s] behalf” (Lev. 23:11). In other words, the High Priest waved the firstfruits offering publicly and so that it was accepted for the people.

After the sun came up, Jesus Christ, as the acceptable firstfruits, went up from the tomb area to the Temple on Mt. Moriah and showed himself publicly to God and was acceptable in God’s sight to represent the rest of the harvest—all the believers who will be raised from the dead. The High Priest showing the firstfruits in the Temple was something all the Apostles and disciples understood from their Jewish upbringing, and knew was supposed to happen that very day. So if they believed Mary’s testimony that
Jesus had been raised from the dead, they would also understand he had to go up to the Temple and show himself to God there. Therefore, when Mary appeared to them and told them Jesus was alive, she bolstered her statement by telling them that he had to “go up to the Father,” that is, appear in the Temple. We know she told them Jesus had to go up to the Father (in the Temple) because when Mary got to the disciples, she not only told them she had seen Jesus alive, but she also told them what he had said to her (John 20:18).

As both the High Priest and the Offering, Jesus had to remain Levitically clean until after he offered himself, and he would not be Levitically clean if Mary touched him (Lev. 22:1-8). Mary was uncleanness by virtue of the fact that she had been in the tomb that morning and seen that the body of Jesus was gone. However, after Jesus had fulfilled his role as High Priest and firstfruits offering by showing himself in the Temple, he could let people touch him—and he did. As we saw in Matthew 28:9, the first people he allowed to touch him were the women who came to the tomb to anoint his body with spices. However, the Bible makes it clear that he came to them after the sun had come up (Mark 16:2). So Jesus had time to go to the Temple before the time he saw Mary Magdalene and told her not to touch him and the time he saw the other women and allowed them to grab his feet. We should remember that when Jesus saw Mary he was in the process of starting up to the Temple (“I am going up to my Father;” John 20:17). So by the time he allowed the women to take hold of his feet later that morning, he would have been finished with his brief priestly duties. Also, he could invite the disciples to “handle” him later that day when they were behind locked doors (Luke 24:39).

20:18. “went and announced to the disciples.” After seeing Jesus alive, Mary went back to the disciples and told them that she had seen the Lord, but they did not believe her. Since Jesus had met Mary before he met the other women, Mary would have arrived where the disciples were hiding some time before the other women. It is quite possible that Mary arrived to tell the disciples just about the time Jesus was appearing to the other women.

20:19. “Jesus came.” Jesus appeared to the apostles and disciples as they were gathered together behind locked doors. John 20:19 lets us know it is in the evening on Sunday, because it was still the first day of the week. If it was after sunset, then Monday, the second day of the week, would have started.

This was the first time Jesus appeared to the disciples as a group, but Thomas was not with them (John 20:24). Jesus had already appeared to people a number of times: to Mary Magdalene; to the women who came with spices to the tomb, to Peter, and to the two men that he met on the road to Emmaus. All these people were present when Jesus appeared in the room, and we can tell from Luke 24:34 that the people in this room full of disciples were quite convinced that Jesus was alive. Still, he now appeared inside the locked room, which startled and frightened the disciples. This was likely due to the fact that he simply appeared in the room, whereas the Jesus they were used to would have had to knock on the door. Jesus tried to calm them by saying “Peace be unto you,” but they thought they were seeing a spirit. Nevertheless, he corrected them and told them that a spirit did not have flesh and bone like he had. He then showed them his hands and feet.

Jesus had just taught the scriptures about himself to the two men to the road to Emmaus and now he opened the scriptures to these disciples who were gathered together, thus giving them a scriptural as well as an experiential reason to believe that he was alive.

**20:21. “as the Father has sent me.”** The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

**20:22. “breathed on them.”** The Greek word for “breathed on” is emphusaō (#1720 ἐμφυσάω; pronounced em-foo-sah'-o), and it means to breathe on or to blow on. The word “them” is correctly supplied because the Greek reads, “blew on and says ‘to them’” (autois), and the dative pronoun autois (to them) governs both the verb “blew” and the verb “says.” When understood as “blew on” we can see that Jesus was instructing his disciples about the Day of Pentecost, when the Temple was filled with the sound of a mighty wind.

The beauty of the two meanings of emphusaō is that the Greek text is showing the two things Jesus is doing for his disciples. He is giving instruction for the Day of Pentecost when the Temple will be filled with the sound of a rushing, mighty wind, because he breathed on them, blew on them, and said, “Receive holy spirit.” At the same time, Jesus is making a powerful association between what happened in Genesis, what is foretold in Ezekiel, and what will happen on the Day of Pentecost when he pours out the gift of holy spirit. The use of emphusaō here in John 20:22 takes us back to its use in Genesis 2:7 in the Septuagint, where God formed Adam from the dust of the ground and “breathed” into him the breath of life, and he became a living soul. In Genesis, God breathed natural life into Adam, now Jesus foretells when spiritual life will be breathed into the disciples. Also, the Bible foretells that believers will receive resurrection life when the ruach (“spirit, breath, wind”) “breathes” on the dead bodies of Israel, and they come to life. “Then said he unto me, Prophesy to the wind [ruach], prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind [ruach], ‘Thus saith the Lord Yahweh: Come from the four winds [ruach], O breath [ruach], and breathe upon these slain, that they may live’” (Ezek. 37:9; cp. 9-14).

It is important to realize that the disciples did not receive the gift of holy spirit at this time, which was the Sunday that he first appeared to his disciples, starting with Mary Magdalene early that morning. Jesus was giving them instructions for when the holy spirit would be poured out in the near future, which we know from Acts occurred some 50 days later on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus breathed or blew out, making a wind-like sound, and said, “Receive holy spirit.” Some 50 days later, on the Day of Pentecost, the disciples were in the Temple when it was filled with the sound of a rushing, mighty wind (but there was no wind; only the sound; Acts 2:2), and the gift of holy spirit was poured out on the Apostles who were filled with it and began to speak in tongues; the first time in history anyone had spoken in tongues (Acts 2:4).

**“holy spirit.”** There is no definite article. This holy spirit is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]

**20:25. “I will not ever believe.”** At some point after Jesus left the disciples, Thomas rejoined them. The Bible does not give us a specific time, so it could have been just before sunset and still on Sunday the 18th of Nisan, or after sunset and thus on Monday the 19th of Nisan (this is very likely), or even in the next few days. Even though everyone would have testified to Jesus’ being alive, Thomas did not believe what they said.
20:26. “eight days later.” The Lord appeared a second time in a locked room to all the disciples (including Thomas) eight days later, that is, eight days after he appeared to them the first time. Generally in the biblical culture, when counting set numbers of something, the first and last thing are both counted, so “eight days later” is Sunday to Sunday, eight days. Thus the Lord appeared the first time to the disciples on a Sunday the 18th of Nisan, and they were behind locked doors. Then he waited a week before appearing a second time. His second appearance to all the disciples was also on a Sunday, the 25th of Nisan, and the disciples were still behind locked doors. This time, however, Thomas was with them.

We cannot be sure, but it is possible that the fact that Jesus appeared to the disciples on Resurrection Sunday, then not again until the following Sunday, helped establish the tradition of holding Christian meetings on Sunday.

20:28. “my god.” Any good Greek-English lexicon will give examples of the Greek word theos, often translated “God,” also referring to a pagan “god” or “goddess” (Acts 19:37), the Devil or a demon (2 Cor. 4:4), or of people who represent God in some way (John 10:34). The fact that Thomas called Jesus “God” does not mean he thought Jesus was part of the Triune God, but he did think of him as God’s highest representative and worthy to be called “god.”

To understand what Thomas said there is some background information that we must understand. For one thing, Thomas was almost certainly speaking Hebrew or Aramaic, and thus the flexibility of the word “God” in those languages will be covered in some detail below. It is also important to know that the early manuscripts of the Bible were written in all capital letters. That means that technically, both Elohim in Hebrew and Theos in Greek should always be translated “GOD,” in all capital letters. Since the biblical languages used the word “GOD” to refer to God, lesser divinities such as the Devil, angels, and demons, and also to rulers, judges, and people who represented God Him in some way, Bible readers are forced to use the context and scope of Scripture to determine whether the modern English translation should be “God,” “god,” or “gods.”

[For more information on this, see commentary on Hebrews 1:8].

The following few paragraphs are about the biblical, especially the Semitic, way of using the words for “God.” It is quite detailed, but in light of the huge Trinitarian bias to make Thomas say that Jesus is “God,” it seems necessary to quite fully show that in biblical language you could call someone Elohim or Theos without meaning they were the Most High God. It is helpful in understanding the Bible to know that the Hebrew word Elohim (“God”) is a plural form—Elohim is always plural. It is a uniplural noun like our English word “deer” or “fish,” and so it has to be translated according to the context and can mean “God,” “a god,” or “gods.” When we see the word “fish” we must determine from the context if it is singular or plural. In a sentence like, “Did you eat the fish?” there may not be enough context to determine whether the person ate one fish or more than one. This problem can occur in the Hebrew text as well, although we sometimes get help in the Hebrew from the accompanying verb.

Elohim is not the only uniplural noun in Hebrew. Two others are “water” and “heaven” (cp. Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar, 2nd addition by A. Cowley, pp. 244, 246). Trinitarians assert that the reason Elohim is plural is because it refers to the plurality in the Trinity, but even if there was a Trinity, and we do not believe there is, that would not be likely. For one thing, God gave the Hebrew language to the Jews, so they should be
the experts in their own language, and they have never believed *Elohim* referred to any plurality in God. Just as “water” and “heaven” are plural in part because they are so vast, *Elohim* seems to be plural because of the vastness and greatness of God.

The majority of the times *Elohim* occurs in the Bible, it refers to the true God. However, even a brief glance through a Hebrew concordance will show that many times it refers to false gods. Dozens of verses could be cited as examples, but a few are: “have no other gods [*Elohim*] before me” (Exod. 20:3); “Do not bow down before their gods [*Elohim*]” (Exod. 23:24); “they chose new gods [*Elohim*]” ( Judges 5:8); and, “[Solomon’s] wives turned his heart after other gods [*Elohim*]” (1 Kings 11:4).

There are times when *Elohim* is used to refer to a specific pagan god: for example, Dagon (Judges 16:23, 1 Samuel 5:7), Chemosh (Judges 11:24), and Baal (1 Kings 18:24-27).

*Elohim,* “God,” can also refer to angels or other spirit beings. One example is Psalm 8:5, which says God made mankind a little lower than *Elohim.* Given the flexible meaning of *Elohim,* the verse could be saying that God made mankind a little lower than He Himself, or it could be saying that He made mankind a little lower than his representatives in the spirit world, i.e., angels. Thankfully, the interpretation is not in doubt because the verse is quoted in Hebrews 2:7, which says “angels,” letting us know that in Psalm 8:5, *Elohim* refers to God’s representatives, the angels. Thus Psalm 8:5 is an excellent example of how the New Testament clarifies our understanding of the Old Testament. Another example is Judges 13:22, where Manoah and his wife saw an angel, but exclaimed, “We have seen God [*Elohim.*]” Their statement made perfect sense in the biblical culture because they saw God’s representative.

There are times when God’s representative are called “God” (*Elohim* and even Yahweh!) when they represent God and speak on His behalf. This is referred to as “agency.” The essence of the principle of agency is: “a person’s agent is regarded as the person himself” (Werblowsky and Wigoder, *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion*, p. 15). The principle of agency is well attested by scholars and occurs quite a few times in the Bible. For example, in Genesis 16:13, even though Hagar was speaking to an angel, she referred to him as Yahweh and *El* (God). In Genesis 31:11 an angel speaks to Jacob, but in verse 13 he says, “I am the God [*El*] of Bethel.” In Genesis 32:28 and 30 it seems Jacob is wrestling with God [*Elohim*], but we learn from Hosea 12:3 that it was an angel representing God. Another example is that Exodus 13:21 says “Yahweh” went before Israel in the pillar of fire, but 14:19 and 23:20-23 let us know it was an angel, a representative of God. So “Yahweh” did go in front of Israel as represented by his angel protector. Similarly, if you read Judges 2:1-4, an angel speaks to the Israelites, but his speech is in first person as if he were God Himself.

*Elohim,* “God,” can also refer to human rulers, kings, prophets, and people who represent God in some way. Thus Exodus 21:6; 22:8 and 9, almost certainly refer to God’s representatives as *Elohim,* “God” (Exod. 22:27 likely does too). In those verses the accompanying verb is plural, not singular, so the traditional teaching of the Rabbis, that the meaning is “judges,” which is also in the KJV, is almost certainly correct. Psalm 82:1 is noteworthy because it uses Elohim twice; at the beginning of the verse to refer to the true God, and at the end of the verse to refer to rulers and people who represent him. The verse says, “*Elohim* [“God”] stands in the congregation of the mighty; he judges among the “*Elohim*” [“gods”].” Furthermore, verse 6 says, “You are *Elohim* [“gods”];
and all of you are sons of the Most High.” As sons of the Most High, these rulers are qualified to be called Elohim, [“gods”]. Psalm 97:7 also calls rulers Elohim.

There are times when specific individuals are called Elohim, “God.” One example is Moses. In Exodus 7:1, God is speaking to Moses and says, “See, I have made you God [Elohim] to Pharaoh” (Darby). Given the uniplural nature of Elohim, another translation is, “See, I have made you a god [Elohim] to Pharaoh” (BBE, KJV), but the fact is that Moses, who represents Elohim (“God”) can legitimately be called Elohim (“God”) in the biblical culture. Another example is when King Saul wanted to speak to the dead prophet Samuel and went to a woman who was a medium and necromancer (1 Sam. 28:7-15). When she conjured up “Samuel” (actually a demon impersonating Samuel), the woman said, “I see Elohim coming up from the ground” (1 Samuel 28:13). This is a good example of a person being called Elohim, and we could translate it “God” and understand the custom of God’s representatives being called “God,” or a more easily understood translation for the English reader is simply, “a god;” the woman saw “a god” coming up who she thought was Samuel.

Given the language of the time, and given that Jesus did represent the Father and have divine authority, for Thomas to refer to Jesus as “god” is certainly understandable. In contrast, to assert that Thomas said that Jesus was “God,” and thus 1/3 of a triune God, seems incredible. As was noted above, in biblical times it was common to call God’s representatives “God,” and the Old Testament contains quite a few examples, such as when Jacob wrestled with “God” and it is clear that he was actually wrestling with an angel (Hosea 12:4).

It is common to read commentaries that assert that Thomas shifted from the depths of unbelief to the height of faith and called Jesus his “God.” But on what basis would Thomas do that? The commentators point out John 1:1, that the Gospel says “the Word was God.” First, there is solid evidence it does not actually say that (see commentary on John 1:1). More to the point, however, the Gospel of John was not written until decades after Thomas spoke, and there no evidence that Jesus ever taught the Trinity or that he was “fully human and fully God.” Quite the opposite. He called God, “the true God” (John 17:3); he said the Father was greater than he was (John 14:28); and he referred to the Father as his God both before and after his resurrection (Matt. 27:46; John 20:17). Also, when he did have chances to “correct” people’s understanding about him or to teach the Trinity, such as with the woman at the well (John 4), or the Pharisee who asked him about the first and great commandment (Mark 12), he did not teach about the Trinity or say that he was man but also God. Very importantly, the few verses in the Gospels where Jesus said something that Trinitarians use to show Jesus is God can all be interpreted in a non-Trinitarian way. There is just no evidence that people at the time of Jesus knew about the Trinity or that Jesus was fully God and fully man—there was no teaching about it.

There are many Trinitarian authorities who admit that there was no knowledge of Trinitarian doctrine at the time Thomas spoke. For example, if the disciples believed that Jesus was “God” in the sense that many Christians do, they would not have “all fled” just a few days before when he was arrested. The confession of the two disciples walking along the road to Emmaus demonstrated the thoughts of Jesus’ followers at the time. Speaking to the resurrected Christ, whom they mistook as just a traveler, they talked about Jesus. They said Jesus “was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before
God…and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:19-21). The disciples thought Jesus was the Messiah, a “prophet,” and the Son of God, but not God Himself.

Even in realizing that Jesus was the Christ, they knew that according to the Old Testament prophecies, the Christ, the anointed of God, was to be a man: he was to be an offspring of Eve (Gen. 3:15) and through the line of Abraham and David, and “God” did not fit that description. He was to be anointed with holy spirit by God as foretold in Isaiah 61:1, a verse Jesus quoted about himself (Luke 4:18); whereas God does not need to be anointed with holy spirit. The Messiah was to be “one of their own” (Jer. 30:21), not God. We know how hard Jesus worked to teach the disciples that he would die and be resurrected—how many different times he taught it—and the disciples never did “get it.” Are we to believe that somehow Jesus taught the Trinity, something that went against everything the disciples were taught and believed, but there is no mention of Jesus ever teaching it anywhere and yet the disciples somehow “got” that teaching? That seems too incredible to believe. There is no evidence from the gospel accounts that Jesus’ disciples believed him to be God, and Thomas, upon seeing the resurrected Christ, was not birthing a new theology in a moment of surprise.

Besides the biblical use of the words for “God” being used for God’s representatives, there is a contributing cultural reason Thomas may have used the word “god” to refer to Jesus when Jesus appeared to him. In the Greco-Roman culture it was becoming customary to refer to the emperor as “god,” but usually only after he was dead. So, for example, after Julius Caesar was murdered in 44 BC, the Roman senate voted that he was a god. Elevating great people into the ranks of the gods is a process scholars refer to as “deification.” If dead Roman emperors were “gods,” it is reasonable that Thomas, knowing Jesus had been dead but now seeing him alive, referred to him “god.”

The context of the verse shows that its subject is the fact that Jesus was alive. Only three verses earlier, Thomas had ignored the eyewitness testimony of the other apostles when they told him they had seen the Lord. The resurrection of Christ was such a disputed doctrine that Thomas did not believe it (the other apostles had not either), and thus Jesus’ death would have caused Thomas to doubt that Jesus was who he said he was—the Messiah. Thomas believed Jesus was dead. Thus, he was shocked and astonished when he saw—and was confronted by—Jesus himself. Thomas, upon being confronted by the living Christ, instantly believed in the resurrection, i.e., that God had raised the man Jesus from the dead, and, given the standard use of “God” in the culture as one with God’s authority, it certainly makes sense that Thomas would proclaim, “My Lord and my god.” There is no mention of the Trinity in the context, and there is no reason to believe that the disciples would have even been aware of such a doctrine. Thomas spoke what he would have known: that the man Jesus who he thought was dead was alive and had divine authority. [For more information on this verse and further references, see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, One God & One Lord: Reconsidering the Cornerstone of the Christian Faith].

20:31. “will have life.” The verb “have” is in the subjunctive mood, thus many versions have “may” have life, but the Greek conjunction hina (#2443 ἢνα) that started the phrase is the reason the verb is subjunctive, and therefore we must get the sense of the verb from the context. In this case, what is written in the Word of God is written so that we will
have life if we believe, not that we “may” have it (cp. A. Nyland, *The Source New Testament*).


“name.” See 1 John 3:23 note “on the name of his son Jesus Christ.”

### Chapter 21

21:1. “After these things Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples…” After appearing to the disciples as a group on Sunday, Nisan 25, Jesus appeared to the Apostles on the Sea of Galilee. The trip to Galilee usually took three days, so this meeting could have been close to the 28th of Nisan, but judging by the fact that Peter started fishing again, it was likely a while after that. It seems likely that after Jesus appeared to the group of disciples a second time and then them leaving for Galilee, that Peter would have waited a while for the Lord to show up. However, when that did not happen as quickly as he expected, and not being sure of what to do, he went back to fishing.

We should remember that the general populace did not yet believe Jesus had been raised from the dead, so most of the Apostles’ source of money had dried up. Peter therefore took the lead and said he was going fishing, the job he knew. However, Jesus appeared to them, which was the third time Jesus appeared to all the apostles at one time. The first time was the Sunday after his crucifixion (John 20:19-24), and Thomas was not there at the time. The second was the following Sunday, and this time all the apostles, including Thomas, were there (John 20:26-29). Jesus’ meeting the apostles on the Sea of Galilee is the third time he appeared to all of them together (John 21:14), and got them refocused on ministry.

21:3. “I am going fishing.” Jesus appears to the Apostles on the Sea of Galilee. The Apostles finally obeyed and went to Galilee, but seemed unsure of what to do once they got there. With Jesus dead, and the general populace not yet believing that he had been raised from the dead, it seems most of their source of money had dried up, Peter took the lead and said he was going fishing, the job he knew. Jesus appeared to them and got them refocused on ministry.


21:15. “do you love me more than these?” Jesus was asking Peter if he loved Jesus more than he loved fishing. Jesus was asking Peter if he would leave the security of his fishing trade to go into ministry full time. Some people think that Jesus was asking Peter if he loved Jesus more than the other disciples did. That is not the case. First, that is the kind of question that fosters division between people. It leads to a proud, braggart position of the heart and sometimes then even gets manifested among the people. Jesus never fostered division among the apostles. Second, the extent that someone loves the Lord is a matter of the heart. We cannot look at other Christians and tell whether we love Jesus more than they do. Jesus knew this, and would never ask Peter to evaluate the love that the other apostles had for him. Third, the context makes it clear what Jesus was asking Peter to do: give up fishing and take on full time ministry, because three times Jesus asked Peter to feed his sheep, i.e., the people.
“I am your friend.” This is the best rendition of the Greek we could think of to keep the meaning. To understand this verse, and the ones that follow, it is important to understand the difference between *agapē* love and *phileō* love.

There are four Greek words for love that are important for Christians to understand. They are *agapē*, *philos*, *storgē*, and *eros*. Three of them appear in the Bible. If we are going to understand the Bible and the biblical world, it is important that we understand what these four words mean and how they differ.

The Greek word that refers to the love of God is *agapē* (the verb form is *agapaō* [#25 ἀγαπάω], the noun form is *agapē* [#26 ἀγάπη]). *Agapē* love is the very nature of God, for God is love (1 John 4:7-12, 16). The big key to understanding *agapē* is to realize that it can be known from the action it prompts. In fact, we sometimes speak of the “action model” of *agapē* love. People today are accustomed to thinking of love as a feeling, but that is not necessarily the case with *agapē* love. *Agapē* is love because of what it does, not because of how it feels.

God so “loved” (*agapē*) that He gave His Son. It did not feel good to God to do that, but it was the loving thing to do. Christ so loved (*agapē*) that he gave his life. He did not want to die, but he loved, so he did what God required. A mother who loves a sick baby will stay up all night long caring for it, which is not something she wants to do, but is a true act of *agapē* love. *Agapē* love is not simply an impulse generated from feelings. Rather, *agapē* love is an exercise of the will, a deliberate choice. This is why God can command us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44; Exod. 23:1-5). He is not commanding us to “have a good feeling” for our enemies, but to act in a loving way toward them. In fact, Luke 6:27 says to love our enemies and then tells us how to love them, which is by doing good to them: “love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.”

*Agapē* love is related to obedience and commitment, and not necessarily feeling and emotion. “Loving” someone is to obey God on another’s behalf, seeking his or her long-term blessing and profit. The way to know that we love (*agapē*) God is that we keep His commandments. Jesus said, “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me (John 14:21). There are Christians who say they love God, but their lifestyle is contrary to the will of God. These people mistake their feeling of affection for God for true *agapē* love. Jesus made this clear: “He who does not love me will not obey my teaching” (John 14:24). Love is the distinctive character of the Christian life in relation to other Christians and to all humanity. The “loving” thing to do may not always be easy, and true love is not “ mushy sentimentalism.” There is often a cost to genuine love. For example, asking someone to leave your Christian fellowship because he persists in flagrant sin is loving, but never easy (1 Cor. 5:1-5). That is not to say the *agapē* love cannot have feelings attached to it, and the ideal situation occurs when the loving thing to do also is what we want to do. Christians are to be known for their love to one another (John 13:35).

*Phileō*, which is translated as “love” in many English versions, is different from *agapaō* love (*philos* is the noun form [#5384 φιλός], and *phileō*, [#5368 φιλέω]) is the verb form of the root word.) *Phileō* means “to have a special interest in someone or something, frequently with focus on close association; have affection for, like, consider someone a friend” (William Arndt and F. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*). It would probably be helpful if *phileō* were never translated “love” in the New Testament, because it refers to a strong liking or a strong friendship. Of course, we see how *phileō* gets
translated “love,” because in modern culture we say we “love” things that we strongly like: “I love ice cream” or “I love my car.” The word phileō implies a strong emotional connection, and thus is used of the deep friendship between friends, and is used of the way people “really like” things, or get mentally attached to them. Thus, you can agapē your enemies, but you cannot phileō them.

The difference between agapē and phileō becomes very important in John 21, but unfortunately it is obscured in most English translations. After being raised from the dead, Jesus met Peter. Here is the short version of what they said to each other.

Jesus: Simon…do you love (agapē) me more than these [fish?].
Peter: Yes, Lord; you know that I love (phileō) you.
Jesus: Simon…do you love (agapē) me?
Peter: Yes, Lord, you know that I love (phileō) you.
Jesus: Simon…do you love (phileō) me?
Peter: [Grieved] “Lord, you know that I love (phileō) you.”

Why did Jesus use agapē and Peter use phileō? Jesus was asking Peter if he loved him with the love of God, a love that may require sacrifice. After all, Jesus had just gone through something he did not want to do but did anyway because of his agapē love. In contrast, Peter avoided possible torture by denying Jesus. Thus, Jesus twice asked Peter, “Do you agapē me?” In other words, “Are you willing to do things for my sake that you do not want to do?” Peter, on the other hand, still felt the sting of having denied Jesus, and was hopeful that their friendship was intact. Peter wondered if Jesus held Peter’s denial against him. Would Jesus still treat Peter as a close friend? Peter was not sure where he stood with Jesus, so he was trying to let Jesus know that he was still a true friend, and had phileō love for Jesus.

The third time Jesus spoke to Peter, he came to Peter’s level and asked if Peter were indeed a true friend (phileō), which grieved Peter. Nevertheless, it was important, because Jesus knew what Peter did not know—that Jesus would ascend into heaven, and Peter and the others would be left to carry out his work on earth, which would require that they do things they did not want to, even, it turned out, die as a martyr.

The third Greek word for “love,” which refers to sexual love or passionate love is eros, and we get English words such as “erotic.” When Eros was used as a proper noun, it referred to the Greek god of love. The Greek word eros does not appear in the Bible, so we will only just mention it here, but it has had such an impact on English and our view of sexual love that it is important to mention.

The fourth Greek word we need to understand is storgē, which is the love and affection that naturally occurs between parents and children, can exist between siblings, and exists between husbands and wives in a good marriage. It occurs in Romans 12:10, and for more on storgē see the note on that verse.

If one is going to have a wonderful Christian life, obedient to the voice of God and have rich fellowship with other Christians, he or she will need to exercise all three kinds of love that are in the Bible. We need agapē love because some of the things that God requires of us are not fun or easy, but need to be done. We need to have phileō love because we need true friends to stand with us, people who are emotionally connected to us and with whom we can share our deepest thoughts and feelings. Lastly, we Christians need to have storgē love between us, a deep family affection that comforts us and helps us feel connected to all our spiritual family.
21:17. “are you my friend…are you my friend…I am your friend.” See the note on John 21:15.
21:22. “You follow me!” Jesus did not reveal the Sacred Secret. He still spoke as if his return was imminent.
Acts

Chapter 1

1:1. “All.” Figure of speech synecdoche (the whole for a part), for “all that was necessary.” John 21:25 makes it clear that there is no way “all” that Jesus did could be recorded.

1:2. “until the day in which he was taken up.” This sets the parameters for the book of Luke. It covered all Jesus’ life until he was taken up (which is covered in Acts), including the things Jesus received from his Father via holy spirit.

“he, having given commandments.” The Greek verb entellomai (#1781 ἐντέλλομαι) is in a masculine singular aorist participle, and thus can be translated “he, having given commandments.”

“after he, through holy spirit, had given the commandments to the apostles whom he had chosen.” God, via the gift of holy spirit on Jesus, gave him what to say, and how and when to say it. Jesus did not just tell his apostles what he thought was important, he gave them the commands that God told him to give them. Jesus had gotten what to say to them from God, just as he said in John 12:49: “For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.”

Having this in the introduction to Acts gives us the proper emphasis in the book of Acts. Luke writes that in his former book he covered what Jesus did and taught. From that broad starting point, Luke could have emphasized anything about Jesus’ life: his miracles, his holiness, his love, etc. However, what Luke states, and thus emphasizes, is that Jesus gave the commandments that he received from God via holy spirit, to the apostles. This launches the Book of Acts, and gives unprecedented credibility to the apostles, who now take off where Jesus left off. If there was any doubt that the apostles were qualified to continue the ministry of Jesus, it is now removed.

“holy spirit.” There is no article “the” in the Greek text, although one could be supplied because of the preposition dia if that made the sentence clearer, which in this case it does not seem to. Daniel Wallace writes in Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics (p. 247): “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.” A. T. Robertson writes: “…the article is not the only means of showing that a word is definite. …The context and history of the phrase in question must decide. …[As for prepositional phrases], these were also considered definite enough without the article.” Robertson then cites some examples (Grammar of the Greek New Testament, pp. 790-792).

In this verse, the “holy spirit” refers to the gift of holy spirit that God put upon some believers before the Day of Pentecost. See Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be Like Christ from Spirit & Truth Fellowship. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

1:3. “appearing to them over a period of forty days.” This does not say 40 days from Jesus’ resurrection, which was on Saturday, the 17th on Nisan (Nisan was the first month of the Jewish year), but 40 days of Jesus’ “appearing” to the disciples. His first “appearance” was on Sunday morning, the 18th of Nisan. If we take the number 40 literally, and also realize that when counting a number such as the number of days in a
period of time the first and last day are counted, 40 days from Sunday, Nisan 18 (counting that day) brings us to the 27th day of the second Jewish month (called both Zif and Iyyar), which was a Thursday. Thus, the ascension was Thursday, the 27th of Zif. 

Pentecost fell on Sunday, the 8th day of the third Jewish month, Sivan. We would say Pentecost fell 10 days after the ascension (because in our normal English counting we would not count the day of the ascension, but would start on the next day). We should remember, however, that although the Bible tells us that Jesus appeared to the disciples for 40 days, it does not tell us how long after that was the Day of Pentecost, we have to know that from the ancient sources (and they disagree; see commentary on Acts 2:1).

1:4. “being assembled together.” This verse has a textual variant that is not easily dealt with, leaving us with three alternatives: assemble together, spend the night together, or eat salt together (which is the literal, usually translated simply “eat together”). The scholars are divided. Less think that “spend the night together” is the meaning here, and we agree. Those who say, “eat salt together,” do so because of the parallel record in Luke 24:43-53, and this may in fact be the record being referred to in Acts 1:4, but it may also be, not the same record, but a similar one. Jesus no doubt spoke of the coming holy spirit on a number of occasions. “Being assembled together” is very likely, it is the choice reported in A Textual Commentary of the Greek New Testament (Metzger); and would also have to be the case even if Jesus and his disciples were eating together, so that is the variant we went with in our version.

“to wait for the promise of the Father.” The “promise” is the figure of speech metonymy (cp. Bullinger, Figures) for that which was promised, the gift. The apostles did not have to wait for the promise; it had been given long ago. They had to wait for what was promised, i.e., the gift of holy spirit. Dynamic Equivalent versions such as the NIV or paraphrased versions such as the Good New Bible, add the word “gift” so the English reader is not confused.

“which, said he, “you heard from me.” The REV translates this as an ellipsis, adding, “said he.” However the Greek text is the figure of speech anacoluthon, non-sequence. In this case, the indirect address of the first part of the verse suddenly becomes a direct quotation of Jesus.

1:5. “because.” The Greek is hoti (#3754 ὅτι), and it means, “that, because, or since.” Lenski (Commentary; Acts) and Robinson (Greek Grammar) refer to this as the consecutive hoti. The question we must ask, and answer, is why did Jesus command his disciples to stay in Jerusalem? It was to wait for what the Father had promised, i.e., the gift of holy spirit. The disciples had already been baptized in water. If water baptism was all that was important and necessary for salvation, there would have been no need for the disciples to stay in Jerusalem or receive the gift of holy spirit. Sadly, many people reverse what Jesus said here in Acts. They say water baptism is essential for the believer and act as if baptism in holy spirit is not really essential but perhaps “nice to have,” or valuable in many ways. Jesus was teaching quite the opposite. He knew the disciples had already been water baptized. He also knew it would no longer be intrinsically valuable after the Church started on the Day of Pentecost. Thus, he commanded his disciples to stay in Jerusalem and receive baptism in holy spirit “because” John [only] baptized in water, but holy spirit was going to be first poured out in Jerusalem.

“with water.” The Greek is hudōr (#5204 ὕδωρ) in the dative, thus, “with water.” Thus it is clear that the element that people were baptized with was water. However, in
the later part of the verse, the specific word “in” (ἐν, #1722 ἐν) is used, emphasizing that the Christian is baptized “in” holy spirit. There is one baptism for the Christian, and it is spirit, not water (cp. Eph. 4:5). John’s baptism was a shadow of what was to come, and even John himself said this (Matt. 3:11; etc.). There is no reason to baptize in water today. Nevertheless, the practice continues, and sadly some even teach that it is necessary for salvation. [For more on baptism, see John Schoenheit, The History & Doctrine of Christian Baptism (Spirit & Truth Fellowship, 2011).]

“in holy spirit.” There is no definite article. This holy spirit is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]

1:6. “is it at this time you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” The question is logical. Jesus had just recently (most likely even that day) spoken to them about the coming holy spirit (Acts 1:5). The disciples were well acquainted with the Old Testament prophecies that the gift of holy spirit would be poured out in association with judgment upon the nations and the Messianic Age (Isa. 32:15-18; Joel 2:28-3:17). Therefore when Jesus told them that the gift of holy spirit was going to be poured out, it was natural for them to assume that the Messianic Kingdom was at hand.

“restore.” The Greek verb is apokathistēmi (#600 ἀποκαθίστημι), and it means to restore, to restore to a former state. The restoration of Israel and indeed, the earth itself, was foretold in Scripture (cp. Ps. 14:7; Hosea 6:11; Matt. 17:11; 19:28; Mark 9:12). Apokathistēmi is in the present tense, active voice, so some versions have translated it, “are you restoring,” but that very literal translation is misleading. The present tense verb is used to help show that the essence of the disciples’ question was “Is this going to happen now?” English also uses the present tense verb for something that might happen soon. For example, if a man is going to build a deck on his house, and a friend come over to visit, the homeowner might say, “I am going to build a deck.” The friend might then ask, “Are you building it today,” using the present tense “are…building,” instead of the future tense. If the friend was using strict English grammar he would use a future tense and say, “Are you going to build it today,” but in common English, as in common Greek, a present tense verb was sometimes used for something that was going to happen soon. The disciples knew the coming of holy spirit was associated with the Messianic Kingdom, so when Jesus said the holy spirit was going to be poured out, the disciples wanted to know if the Kingdom was going to be restored also.

1:8. “when the holy spirit.” Acts 1:8 is one of the clearest verses that show us that when a person gets born again and receives the gift of holy spirit, that person gets spiritual power, and thus the ability to operate the manifestations of holy spirit right then, not later. However, this fact has been confused, and the translation of this verse in the King James Version is partly to blame. The KJV reads: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.” What modern readers usually do not understand is that in 1611, the phrase “after that” is not a good translation of the Greek participle in this verse. The Greek text clearly indicates the power comes “when” holy spirit comes, which is at the time a person is saved via being born again. The modern versions we checked all had “when,” including the New King James Version, which has updated the English of the King James Version. When a person receives the gift of holy spirit, at that time they are spiritually powerful (cp. commentary note on Eph. 1:13). [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]
“witnesses.” The Greek is martus (#3144 μάρτυς), from which we get our English word, “martyr.” The word “witness” became martyr, because in the great persecutions of the Church in the first three centuries after Christ, many people gave a clear witness of Christ by standing firm in their faith even through torture and death, becoming martyrs for Christ.

1:10. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

1:12. “a Sabbath day’s journey.” The original Sabbath day’s journey set by tradition was 2000 cubits (about 3000 feet, or slightly over one half mile), which the rabbis took from Joshua 3:4 and 5, that there was to be 2000 cubits between the “place” of the people and the ark of the covenant. Since we know the distance between the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem is about one half mile, we know that the Sabbath day’s journey in Acts 1:12 is the 2000 cubit journey. However, later the rabbis decided the “place” of Joshua 3:4 could be the city where a person lived, and thus the Sabbath day’s journey was lengthened to 2000 cubits from the outside of your city. Then the Rabbis decided that if a person put food somewhere, that became his abode and thus his “place,” so a person could walk up to 2000 cubits to where his food was and then another 2000 cubits, for a total of over 1.1 miles (1.7 km).Sometime around New Testament times (the exact times these traditions changed is hard to pin down), the rabbis decided that if a person had to walk 4000 cubits away from home on the Sabbath, he had to be able to get back, so the Sabbath day’s journey was lengthened to 8000 cubits, or over 2 miles (3 km). These types of traditions which were not based in Scripture were part of the burdens that the religious leaders put on people.

1:14. “of one accord.” homothumadon (#3661 ὁμοθυμάδων). From homos (the same) and thumos (related to the soul, the life, the feelings, the passions). “Old adverb in -don from adjective homothumos and that from homos, same, and thumos, mind or spirit, with the same mind or spirit. Common in ancient Greek and papyri. In the New Testament eleven times in Acts and nowhere else save Ro 15:6” (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*). It means to be of one mind, one passion.

1:15. “names.” The word “names” is used idiomatically for “people.” This kind of idiom poses a difficulty to translators. If we translate literally, people could be confused and not know what the verse was saying. In fact, in modern English we sometimes use “name” to refer to important people, but that is not the meaning here. The Bible is not saying there were about 120 important people and an uncounted number of unimportant people gathered there. However, the use of “names” has an emphasis that we should not miss, because it points to the importance of every individual. Every person gathered there was special and important to God.

“together at that one place.” The phrase occurs in the Septuagint as an idiom for “together,” which is why so many Bible versions read “together” (HCSB; KJV; NASB; NRSV). However, in this case the text is giving us more than just a statement that the people were together, although that is clearly also part of the meaning of the word. By the one phrase in Greek, God communicates that the people were “together at that one place.” This immediately shows us that they are not in the “upper room.” For one thing, the houses in Jerusalem were quite small; it would not have been possible to get about 120 people in a room in a house. Second, and fatal to the argument that the 120 were in the upper room, was that it was where the men, the Apostles, were living in Jerusalem.
They would not have had a mixture of men and women up in the room where
the men were staying.

The “one place” where the disciples “continued steadfastly in prayer” was the
Temple. Luke 24:53 says the disciples were “continually in the Temple,” and the 37 acre
Temple complex was the main place where groups of people gathered. For more on the
Pentecost event happening in the Temple, see commentary on Acts 2:2, “house.”

1:16. “Men, brothers.” The Greek word “men” is ἀνήρ (#435 ἀνήρ), the standard Greek
word for an adult male. It is used in formal address, and so in the Book of Acts it occurs
in combination with “brothers” (as here, 2:29, etc.; “Men, brothers”), “Jews” (2:14;
“Men, Jews”); “Israel” (2:22; “Men; Israelites”); “Men, brothers and fathers” (Acts 7:2);
“Athenians” (17:22; “Men, Athenians”); “Ephesians” (19:35; Men, Ephesians). Lenski
says, “The assembly consisted of men, otherwise andres could not have been used;
adelphoi [brothers] might include adelphai [sisters], just as today ‘brethren’ may include
‘sisters,’ but andres [men] could not include gunaikes [women], just as to this day the
address ‘men’ omits ‘women.’” (Lenski; note on Acts 1:16). We agree that Peter was
only addressing the men, which is why he specifically used the term “men.” However, it
seems clear from the context, especially the previous two verses, that there were women
in the audience. However, according to the Jewish custom of the day, they would have
been protected from freely interacting with the men, and certainly excluded from
voting for a replacement for Judas.

It was a common custom in the ancient Middle East to only address the men in an
audience, and often, only to count them (which is why in cases such as the record we
know as “The feeding of the 5000,” the number 5000 included only men. The women and
children were stated to be there, and likely outnumbered the men, but were not counted
[Matt. 14:21]). As the Christian faith developed through the first century, and God
revealed that there was neither male nor female in Christ (Gal. 3:28), women took on
greater roles of responsibility in the Church. Thus, Romans 16 mentions Phoebe, a
deacon, and Andronicus and Junia, who were apostles (Rom. 16:7; although some
theologians dispute that interpretation). Sadly, the chauvinism in the Church regained
ascendancy, and so for most of the time since Christ, the Church has denied proper
recognition and leadership roles to women. We feel that it is important to understand the
Bible in the context of the times it was written and properly reflect the biblical customs.
Therefore, we have decided to retain the biblical phrase “Men, brothers,” rather than to
change it to something like “brothers and sisters.” We feel it is more helpful to both
Christian men and women to properly understand the biblical customs and thinking of the
times, than to artificially include women and thus make Peter (and Paul, and others) say
something he really did not say.

“Holy Spirit.” This seems to be more of a reference to God, the Holy Spirit, than it is
to the gift of God, which is “holy spirit.” However it is possible that it is a reference with
more emphasis on the gift than on God Himself, in which case, “holy spirit” would make
more sense in English.

There are a couple difficulties in translating this phrase. The first is the English
forces us to make a choice between “Spirit” (God) and “spirit” (the gift from God). The
original texts would have either all capital or all lower case letters, and thus the copyist
would not have to make a decision whether or not God or His gift of holy spirit was
indicated, he could leave that decision to the reader. The second difficulty is that a person
who really understands the subject, and also knows that God always placed His gift of holy spirit upon them when He wanted to inspire them with a prophetic word, would realize that “SPIRIT” in this kind of context really meant “The Spirit (God) by way of His gift of spirit.” Thus the one word “SPIRIT” actually covered both the Giver and the gift in the original understanding of the text, which cannot be easily done in English, which forces us to either read “Spirit” (God) or “spirit” (His gift to us). Many people spoke or acted prophetically when the spirit came upon them (cp. Num. 11:17, 24, 25; 24:2, 3; Judg. 3:10; 1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 1 Chron. 12:18; 2 Chron. 15:1; 24:20; Joel 2:28). Nevertheless, it was always God who put the holy spirit upon people and who was the origin of the message. This is clearly recognized by the people and in the prophetic messages themselves when the message is from God, not from His gift of spirit (cp. 2 Chron. 20:14, 15; 24:20; Isa. 59:21). Other times David is said to have spoken by the spirit are Matthew 22:43; Mark 12:36, and Acts 4:25. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]

1:18. (“Now this man acquired a field… the field of blood.”) This verse and verse 19 are the figure of speech parenthesis, in this case a parenthetical (a parenthesis complete in itself). This parenthesis was added by Luke for the benefit of his wide audience over the whole Christian world. Many of them would not have heard what happened to Judas and why there needed to be a replacement for him. Peter did not speak the words in verses 18 and 19 to his audience, for they all perfectly understood why Judas needed a replacement. The reason we are sure the verses are a parenthetical is in the note on verse 19.

There is very much discussion about the differences in the account of Judas’ death here in Acts and the account in Matthew 27:5 which simply states that Judas “hanged himself.” Most commentators simply say there were two accounts of his death, and Matthew and Luke recorded different traditions. However, first, the Bible is authored by God, and He would know how Judas died and what His inspired writers would put down. Second, it is unlikely that Luke and Matthew, both very familiar with the apostles and many people who knew Judas and what happened personally, would write differing accounts. Judas was an infamous person, and if his death was gory as Acts describes, Matthew would certainly have known about it. There is no need to see a contradiction between Matthew and Acts. Matthew says Judas hanged himself. What happened in Acts seems clear enough: Judas fell down prone, broke open in the middle (with a noise), and all his bowels gushed out.

The problem Christians face is how to harmonize the record in Acts with what Matthew says. There are two ways that have been proposed. The first is that at some point when Judas was hanging from a tree, the rope gave way and he fell down prone onto the ground, and the impact of the fall caused him to burst open. This seems unlikely, but it would be more possible if there were roots or rocks on the ground that Judas’ body would have hit, and there were plenty of those around the trees in Judea. Furthermore, if the tree was an olive tree, it would almost certainly have little protrusions, such as one often sees around cypress trees. Also, Judas may have hung for a couple days before the rope broke, making his body more susceptible to bursting open.

Another proposal, by Victor Wierwille (Jesus Christ Our Passover) is that Judas “hanged” himself by falling on his sword, much like Saul had done many years before (1 Samuel 31:4). Being impaled was a common form of suicide and execution in the ancient biblical world. For example, when Haman was hanged, what happened was a typical
execution in the Assyrian and Persian world; he was impaled on a giant stake (Esther 7:10; 8:7; 9:13, 14). The Assyrians used this type of hanging to intimidate their enemies, and it is portrayed on Assyrian rock cuts (Herbert G. May, Oxford Bible Atlas, p. 105. Both the second and third editions have the picture, but it is redrawn and therefore much easier to see in the second edition). The problem with that explanation is that when Matthew says that Judas hanged himself, the Greek word is *apagchomai* (ἅπαγχομαι), a word that only occurs one time in the NT, and means, to strangle oneself, (Bullinger, Vine, Zodhiates). There is another word for hanging that refers to being suspended, and it is used of the criminals and Jesus hanging on the cross, being suspended there by the nails that were through the wrists and feet. That word is *kremannumi* (κρεμάννυμι) and it is used in verses such as Luke 23:39 and Acts 5:30. It seems unlikely that Matthew would say that Judas went out and strangled himself by hanging if he could have used a word “hang” that meant to be suspended, i.e., suspended on the stake on which he fell. Interestingly, the Hebrew also makes a difference between hanging that would take place on a stake, i.e., impaling, and hanging that involves strangling. When Haman was hanged, almost certainly by impaling, the Hebrew is *talah* (תלאר), “to hang, to hang up any object, to hang up for display,” but when Ahithophel hung himself, the Hebrew is *chanaq* (ךנהק), to strangle, or to die by hanging. It is appealing to think that when Matthew wrote that Judas hanged himself, what he meant was that Judas fell on a stake, because then Matthew and Acts would harmonize beautifully. However, given the meaning of *apagchomai* in the Greek from classical times on down, it seems more likely that Judas must have hung himself from a tree and then dropped down prone, bursting in the middle. There would be no need for that whole account to occur in Acts, because the emphasis in Acts was that Judas was a privileged apostle, but due to his selfishness he even acted as the guide of those who arrested Jesus. Thus he met a very ignoble end, broken apart in the middle of a field he had purchased with the money he has stolen from the believers. (The money he got for betraying Jesus he returned to the priests; Matt. 27:3. He had other money that he stole from the gifts given by believers; John 12:6).

“falling down prone.” The Greek reads *ginomai prenes* (ginomai (#1096 γίνομαι) means to become; prenes (#4248 πρηνής) means, “prone, headlong, head-first”). Judas “became prone,” which we understand from the context was to fall down prone, or fall down prostrate.

“burst open.” The Greek is *laschō* (#2997 λασχω (λακάω), and it means to break open, break apart. Meyer gives evidence from Homer and other ancient Greek writers that this is an expression that means to burst open with a noise (Meyer’s Commentary, Acts, p. 33).

1:19. “in their language…Akeldama.” The word “Akeldama” is Aramaic. Verses 18 and 19 are a parenthesis, added by Luke to explain why there needed to be a replacement for Judas (see commentary on verse 18). Luke was a native Greek speaker, and wrote in Greek. In contrast, Peter’s native language was Aramaic, and he would have spoken Hebrew as well. Peter would never have called “akeldama” a word “in their language,” because he was speaking to a room full of Aramaic speaking Jews, and “akeldama” was their language. Luke added “in their language” to clarify the meaning of “akeldama” to his Greek-speaking audience. This verse shows that the Book of Acts was originally written in Greek.

1:24. “You, Lord.” The evidence shows that this prayer is to Jesus, not to the Father. By far the most certain evidence that this is a prayer to Jesus has to do with who would choose the apostle that would replace Judas. Jesus “chose” the original twelve apostles. Luke 6:13 says, “he called his disciples, and he chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles.” The word “chose” is eklegomai (ᵉᵏˡᵉᵍᵒᵐᵃⁱ), and although it is not an unusual word, it is important, because it was used of Jesus’ original choosing, then it is used in Acts 1:2, referring to “the apostles whom he [Jesus] had chosen.” Jesus had chosen the Twelve, and Acts confirms that in its opening verses. So it makes sense that when Peter prays, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen,” that he would be asking the Lord Jesus to now reveal the man who he chose to replace Judas—simply continuing the Lord Jesus’ process of choosing apostles. This also fits with Ephesians 4:11, which says that it is Jesus who gives the equipping ministries to the Church. Thus it is the Lord Jesus who chose the original Twelve Apostles, and also is who appoints apostles to the Church, so it would be unusual if in this one case asked God who He had chosen to replace Judas.

It is clear from the prayer in Acts 1:24 that the apostles knew that Jesus already “had chosen” a replacement for Judas. They did not pray, “help us choose a replacement for Judas,” they prayed, “show us which person you have chosen.” In contrast to Jesus choosing a replacement for Judas, it does not flow well that Jesus would choose the original apostles, then Acts 1:2 would confirm that fact, but then Peter would suddenly pray “You, Lord,” and ask God whom He had chosen.

Peter was likely the one to lead the prayer, although there may have been “congregational prayer” as well, with other people praying after Peter took the lead. Peter was the recognized leader of the Church at this time and he stood up to speak about a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:15). A piece of contributing evidence that this prayer was to Jesus is that it is unlikely that the apostles would address the Father in such a familiar manner as to open a prayer with “You, Lord” (су курiOS). On the other hand, the apostles had a very familiar relationship with Jesus, whom they had just seen on earth some ten days earlier, and addressing him that way would be more natural to them.

Chapter 2

2:1. “Pentecost.” The Greek word pentēkosτē (ᶜ⁴⁰⁰⁵ πεντηκοστῆ; pen-tā-cos- tā’), was the Greek name of the Jewish feast that came 50 days after Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Technically the word is the substantive feminine form of pentēkostos, (πεντηκοστός), “fiftieth.” The Feast of Pentecost had several names. It was called the “the Feast of Weeks” (Exod. 34:22; Deut. 16:10); the “Feast of Harvest” (Exod. 23:16) and the “Day of Firstfruits” (Num. 28:26). Traditionally, Pentecost ended the wheat harvest, and wheat was the last of the grains to be harvested in Israel.

God chose the Day of Pentecost to be the day on which He started the Christian Church and made the New Birth available for the very first time [see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation”]. Pentecost was a one day feast, whereas “Passover” and the Feast of Tabernacles were seven day feasts (“Passover” became the general term for the total time that involved the day of the Passover sacrifice and then the seven-day
Feast of Unleavened Bread). Pentecost was the second of the three main Jewish feasts, and fell 50 days after the “day after the Sabbath” in the Passover. The fact that Pentecost was only a one day feast meant that all the worshippers would be in the Temple on that one day, whereas for the Passover Feast and the Feast of Tabernacles, worshippers might be in the Temple on one day, but miss another. All the devout Jews in the area were assembled in the Temple at the time of the morning sacrifice when the gift of holy spirit was poured out from heaven.

Although the Old Testament is clear that Pentecost falls fifty days from the first day “after the Sabbath,” during the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, there has always been disagreement among the Jews as to when to start counting the 50 days. That is because the OT does not seem to be clear on which “Sabbath” to start the counting after—the special Sabbath that was the first day of the feast, or the regular weekly Sabbath that came during the feast. In biblical times, there were at least four major views on counting the days (Goudoever, Biblical Calendars). Does “the day after the Sabbath” refer to the 16th of Nisan, the day after the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was always a special Sabbath (Lev. 23:7)? If it does and the Pharisees thought it did, then “Pentecost” did not fall on a set day of the week, but varied from year to year. On the other hand, many people, including the Sadducees, believed that “the day after the Sabbath” referred to the day after the weekly Sabbath that occurred during the seven-day Passover feast. If that were the case, then the counting started on the Sunday after the weekly Sabbath and continued for seven Sabbaths (49 days), and then ended on the 50th day, which was always a Sunday. The Counsel of Nicaea 325 AD, decided that was going to be the way the Christian Church would count the 50 days, and it has been that way ever since for the Orthodox Church, which accounts for our modern reference to “Pentecost Sunday.”

Many qualified commentators (and the Pharisees), start the counting the 50 days on the 16th of Nisan, the day after the “Special Sabbath” that begins the Feast of Unleavened Bread. However, in this case we have to agree with the Sadducees and the many qualified commentators who say that the “Sabbath” in Leviticus 23:11 is the weekly Sabbath, and who start counting the 50 days to Pentecost starting with the regular weekly Sabbath that falls during the Feast. Goudoever agrees that the 50 day counting begins on Sunday after the weekly Sabbath, and says, “this is the original meaning of Leviticus 23:11” (Biblical Calendars, p. 19). The JPS Torah Commentary on Leviticus by Baruch Levine agrees, and says that Leviticus 23:11, “uses the abbreviation Shabbat in its normal sense of a particular day, the Sabbath.” Some commentators try to use Joshua 5:11 to try to show that the 50 days should be counted from the 16th of Nisan, but that verse says nothing about waiving the grain offering.

Very convincing evidence that we gain from the scope of Scripture that the 50 days of Pentecost are counted from the day after the weekly Sabbath is the fact that the waive-sheaf was a type of Christ. Both the waive-sheaf that was the first of the harvest, and the harvest it represented, were types and symbols of future events. The true harvest of the earth is those people who will be raised from the dead to everlasting life. Jesus fulfilled the type of the waive-sheaf by being the true firstfruits of the harvest, because he is the firstfruits of the dead (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). Jesus presented himself in the Temple as the High Priest and the firstfruits on Sunday, the 18th of Nisan (the first month of the year), shortly after he met Mary Magdalene at the tomb (see commentary on John 20:17).
Then, counting that day as day one, we can see that Pentecost fell 50 days later, on Sunday the 8th day of the third month, Sivan.

We can now set some firm dates concerning Jesus’ last week on earth. His crucifixion would have been Wednesday, the 14th of Nisan. The day of his resurrection was Saturday the 17th of Nisan just before sunset. His appearing to Mary Magdalene and then going up to God in the Temple was Sunday, the 18th of Nisan. So the Day of Pentecost was 50 days later, on Sunday the 8th of Sivan.

There were many “hidden types” in the Pentecost Feast; however, we should be aware that it seems Jews did not understand the meaning of many of the types associated with their feasts. During the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover), only one sheaf of grain was waived and that one sheaf was acceptable for all the people (Lev. 23:11). This symbolized that the one true sheaf, Jesus Christ, was the acceptable firstfruits for everyone else. During the feast of Pentecost, there were two loaves of bread offered (Lev. 23:17), which could symbolize the Jews and Gentiles both being acceptable to God.

At Passover the bread that the people ate was made without yeast, and yeast is usually a type for sin. So at Passover the people ate the bread that had no “sin,” and the true bread without sin was Jesus Christ. In contrast to Passover, at the Feast of Pentecost, the two loaves were made with yeast (Exod. 34:22). This symbolizes that Jews and Gentiles are acceptable to God in spite of our sin when we accept Christ as Lord.

Also, the Feast of Pentecost was called, “the Day of Firstfruits” (Num. 28:26) even though it was the end of the grain harvest, but God knew that the Day of Pentecost would be when He would give the “firstfruits of the gift of holy spirit” to God’s people (Rom. 8:23). Thus it was that on the Day of Pentecost, Jesus Christ poured out from heaven the promised gift of holy spirit and started the Christian Church.

“they.” The Twelve Apostles, not the 120 disciples. See commentary on 2:3.

“in one place.” Almost certainly the Temple, not a private house. See commentary on Acts 2:2, “house.”

2:2. “house.” In this verse, “house” refers to the Temple. The Greek word is oikos (#3624 οἶκος) and its primary definition is “house,” a building in which people live. However, oikos was applied to all kinds of dwellings, including the king’s palace (Matt. 11:8), the Temple of God (Matt. 21:13 [from Isa. 56:7]; Luke 11:51; John 2:16; Acts 7:47, 49), temples of idols (Jud. 9:27, 46; 16:27, 29, 30; 1 Sam. 5:2, 5; 31:9, 10; 2 Kings 5:18; 10:21); the human body as a house of something living in it (Matt. 12:44); a family or extended family (Heb. 3:6), descendants from a common ancestor (Matt. 10:6, “the house of Israel”), a family, kingdom, or nation (Luke 11:17); the Christian believers (1 Pet. 2:5), a household including the possessions and property (Acts 7:10).

Many times in the Old Testament the word “house” was applied to the dwelling of God, both when it was just a tent in the wilderness, and when it was the large and stable Temple in Jerusalem. Sometimes the house referred to the Tabernacle or Temple in the phrase “house of the Lord” (cp. Exod. 23:19; 34:26; Judg. 19:18; 1 Sam. 1:7; 3:15; 2 Sam. 12:20; 1 Kings 3:1, 2; 5:3, 5; 6:1). Sometimes the phrase was “house of God” (cp. Judg. 18:31; 20:18, 26, 31; 21:2). Many times, however, the word “house” was used alone and it is from the context that we know it referred to the Temple (cp. 2 Sam. 7:5-7, 13; 1 Kings 5:17, 18; 6:2-10; 8:16; 9:3; 2 Kings 22:6; Ezra 1:2; 3:12; 6:15; Neh. 11:12). As we saw above, the New Testament continued referring to the Temple as the “house.”
There are a number of reasons that lead us to conclude that the “house” where the outpouring of holy spirit on the Day of Pentecost occurred was the Temple. For one thing, Jesus had instructed his disciples to stay in Jerusalem until the gift of holy spirit was poured out (Acts 1:4). The two closing verses of the Gospel of Luke tell us where the Apostles stayed during that time. After the ascension, they “returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God” (Luke 24:52, 53). For them to be continuously in the Temple meant that they would be there when the Temple was open during the day.

We must also remember that this particular day was the Day of Pentecost, which was one of the three feasts of the Old Testament when Jews were commanded to travel to Jerusalem. In contrast to Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles, which were seven-day feasts, Pentecost was a one-day feast. It is inconceivable that the Apostles and disciples who were dedicated Jews, and whom Luke says were continuously in the Temple, would not have been in the Temple on Pentecost at the time of the morning sacrifice, about nine o’clock in the morning.

Another reason that the “house” would have been the Temple was the sound that was like a rushing wind filled the entire “house.” This was a very impressive event, and it was the first thing that caught the attention of the crowd. If the Pentecost experience had been in a private home in Jerusalem, and the sound filled that “house,” there is no reason to believe any other Jews would have heard the sound or been interested—certainly not a “multitude” as Acts 2:6 states. In contrast, the Temple complex was about 37 acres, and packed with Jews from every nation, who had all come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost in obedience to the Mosaic Law.

There is no reason to doubt that this Pentecost was a typical June day in Jerusalem: a hot, cloudless day with no wind or perhaps only a slight breeze. Yet at about nine in the morning everyone in the Temple heard a loud sound as if there was a violent wind—but there was no wind. What could that mean? Everyone would have been curious; wondering about it, talking about it, and looking around. Then it would not have been missed that it looked like fire was falling from heaven, spreading out into separate tongues, and coming to rest on a small group of men. That would have brought the crowd running in the direction of the Apostles. As the crowd got close, however, what they heard was those Apostles speaking out in the different languages of the crowd present—languages the men from Galilee did not themselves know!

That phenomenon would have bewildered and amazed the crowd, likely numbering in many thousands, and Peter took the opportunity to speak to the huge crowd. So now we have seen some more things that make it almost impossible for the “house” to be the upper room. The huge crowd of unbelieving Jews in the Temple would not have heard the sound of the wind if it had only filled a local house. Then, the crowd could not have gotten through the streets of Jerusalem, which were very narrow then just as they are today. Lastly, there would have been no place for Peter to address a crowd that was so large that three thousand people believed. No doubt there were thousands who did not believe as well.

It has been suggested that many houses had a courtyard, and that is where the 120 could have gathered and thus where the Pentecost experience occurred. However, modern day archaeology, and well as testimony from ancient sources, shows us that at the time of Christ, the larger houses in Jerusalem were generally on the far western side of the city,
while around the Temple the houses were smaller and the streets very narrow. No one in the Temple could have heard the sound of wind in a house on the west side of Jerusalem, perhaps a half mile away, especially given the walls of the Temple. In contrast to a house somewhere in Jerusalem that could not accommodate a multitude, the Temple had many acres of open space and the crowd could have easily heard the sound, seen the “flames of fire,” heard the Apostles speaking in tongues, and then heard Peter speak.

While most scholars recognize that there is enough lack of clarity in Luke’s writings that we cannot say for certain where the Pentecost event occurred, a number of scholars recognize that the Temple is much more likely to be the “house” in Acts 2:2 than a private home in Jerusalem. The NIV Study Bible note reads: “Evidently not the upstairs room where they were staying (1:13) but perhaps some place in the Temple precincts....” The New King James Version Study Bible note reads, “The place may have been part of the temple. It is difficult to imagine how the large crowd mentioned in v. 5 could have observed the activities in the upper room or congregated in the narrow streets outside the house where the disciples were meeting.” F. F. Bruce compares the upper room with the Temple and concludes that the Temple is the more likely place for Pentecost (New International Commentary: Acts).

“They were sitting.” The Twelve Apostles, not the 120 disciples. See commentary on 2:3. 2:3. “they...each of them.” This is referring to the Twelve Apostles, not the 120 disciples. The thing that looked like fire that was divided into different flame-tongues, came to rest on each one of the Twelve Apostles, and it was the 12 who first spoke in tongues on the Day of Pentecost. The context switched from the 120 disciples to the decision to get a twelfth apostle in 1:16. By 1:26, Matthias was added to the eleven, making twelve. Then we must remember that in the original text there were no chapters and verses, so when 2:1 says “they were all together,” the “they” refers to the eleven and Matthias, from the verse before. We get a better picture of the way the text reads by taking out the chapter and verse numbers, and also the punctuation, all which have been added by translators to add clarity, but sometimes they misguide us.

“And they gave forth their lots and the lot fell upon Matthias and he was numbered with the eleven apostles and when the day of Pentecost was fully come they were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 1:26-2:1 KJV without punctuation).

Acts 2:1 does start with “and,” even though it is not translated in many versions. Besides the grammatical evidence that “they” refers to the Twelve Apostles, not the 120 disciples, there are at least two more important pieces of evidence. The first is that Acts 2:1 says, “they were all together in one place.” The Temple complex was almost forty acres, and getting 120 people together there would have been difficult. Not impossible, but difficult. However, the much more conclusive evidence that only the Apostles had the initial experience of Pentecost is in Acts 2:7, “are not all these that speak Galileans?” The Twelve Apostles were all Galileans, but not all of the 120 disciples were Galileans.

“spreading out.” The Greek word is diamerizō (#1266 διαμερίζω). In the passive voice, which it is here, it means to be divided off or divided into separate parts, to be separated or separated away from, to be dispersed, “to spread out” (Louv-Nida), to be distributed. Here, as in many places, the Greek says more than we can easily say in English. What the people saw was the tongues that looked like tongues of flame coming
down and spreading out such that each apostle had a tongue of flame resting on him. What is also contained in the Greek word is that these tongues of what looked like flame were “distributed,” by the Lord (see commentary on Acts 2:33). This was no random event. The apostles were selected by the Lord and received his sign of approval. Fire from heaven was always a sign of divine presence or action. God’s fire was used in judgment to consume his enemies, and it was also used as a sign of divine approval. For example, fire on Mt. Sinai signaled divine presence (Exod. 19:18). A pillar of fire over the Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle) signaled God’s presence there (Exod. 40:38; Num. 9:16).

God lit the Tabernacle altar with fire from heaven (Lev. 9:24), which is why the Levites were told to keep the fire going and never let it go out (Lev. 6:12, 13). God accepted Gideons’ offering with divine fire (Judg. 6:21). Elijah’s sacrifice was accepted by fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:38), as was David’s (1 Chron. 21:26). God also lit the fire on the altar of the Temple with fire from heaven (2 Chron. 7:1-3). The Jewish audience collected there at the Temple on the Day of Pentecost understood all this, and had the opportunity to see that God (and His Messiah) accepted the Apostles.

2:4. “they were all filled.” The Twelve Apostles, not the 120 disciples. See commentary on 2:3.

“with holy spirit.” The Greek has no definite article, and spirit is in the genitive case. This is not confusing to the Greek reader. We say “filled with,” while the Greeks indicated that by saying “filled of” (Cp. Luke 4:28; 5:26; Acts 3:10; 5:17; 13:45 and 52; 19:29). [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

“speak in tongues.” For a much fuller explanation of speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:5.

“the Spirit.” The Greek word translated “Spirit” is pneuma (#4151 πνεῦμα). This use of “the Spirit” refers to Jesus Christ, who was pouring out the language of speaking in tongues (see v. 33). Jesus is also called “the Spirit” in Romans 8:26 and 27, 2 Corinthians 3:17 and 18; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, and 22 (see commentary on Revelation 2:7).

After his resurrection Jesus is sometimes called “the Spirit.” That is because when God raised Jesus from the dead, He gave him a spiritually powered body. His body was flesh and bone (Luke 24:39), but it was not made alive by “soul,” but by spirit; he was raised “a spiritual body (see commentary 1 Corinthians 15:44).

This verse in Acts has both the gift of holy spirit and “the Spirit,” Jesus, who pours out the language to those who speak in tongues. This may seem confusing to us today, but among the first century Christians, who were accustomed to the gift of holy spirit and to Jesus being called “the Spirit,” it was clear.

We believe that the second pneuma, “the pneuma,” is Jesus for a couple reasons. For one, the Bible says that Jesus, “the Spirit” “poured out what you now...hear (Acts 2:33).” It was Jesus who gave the tongues. It comes from Jesus, through the gift of holy spirit to our mind, but Jesus is the source. Another reason is that the Bible makes it clear that the gift of holy spirit inside us never “speaks of itself” but only “speaks what it hears” (John 16:13). Thus the one who “was giving them” tongues would have been Jesus. Furthermore, note that the Spirit was “giving to them” what to say. “Them” is most naturally the apostles, not the minds of the apostles. If the second spirit in Acts 2:4
is holy spirit, then the holy spirit was giving the minds of the apostles what to say. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

The verb, “was giving them” is imperfect, showing that the giving continued over a period of time. It was not “given” as a one-time thing. Jesus continued to give the language as long as the people spoke in tongues.

2:5. “deeply religious.” The Greek is eulabēs (#2126 εὐλαβής); see commentary on “godly man” in Acts 10:2.

2:7. “Galileans.” The gift of holy spirit was first poured out on the Twelve Apostles, not the 120 disciples. The Twelve were from Galilee, but not all the 120 would have been. See commentary on 2:3.

“Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

2:9. “Parthians.” Parthia was in what is Iran today, and where Persia had been before it. The natives spoke a Persian dialect.

“Medes.” Media was not a country at the time of the New Testament. The Persians had united with the Medes to form the larger Persian Empire (cp. Esther 1:3, 18, 19; Dan. 5:28; 6:8, 12, 15; 8:20). These people were Jews who were apparently descended from the Jews of the time of Daniel who were carried as captives to that area.

“Elamites.” Elam was not a country at the time of the New Testament. The Elamites occupied the area north and west of the Persian Gulf. Elam had become part of the ancient Persian Empire.

“those who live in Mesopotamia.” At the time of the New Testament, this area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers was part of the Parthian Empire. Today it is Iraq.

“Judea.” This most probably does not mean what we usually think of as Judea, the area in southern Israel. It likely means the areas where the Jews had settled (or been deported to), and in this case refers to areas in what we know as Syria today.

“Cappadocia.” A Roman province in the southeast of what we know as Turkey today.

“Pontus.” A Roman province in what is now northern Turkey, on the Black Sea.

“Asia.” A Roman province that was on the far southwest of what we call Turkey today. The important city of Ephesus was in Asia.

2:10. “Phrygia.” An area in that is now in central Turkey. In New Testament times, eastern Phrygia was in the Roman province of Galatia, while the western part was in the province of Asia.

“Pamphylia.” A Roman province in what is today southern Turkey.

“Egypt.” The country of Egypt.

“parts of Libya near Cyrene.” The city of Cyrene was the capital of Libya in northern Africa on the Mediterranean Sea, which in 27 BC was made, together with Crete, the Roman province of Cyrenaica.

“visitors from Rome.” In other words, not true Roman citizens, but Jews and proselytes who lived in Rome, and who would have likely spoken Latin and Greek.

“proselytes.” This is almost certainly referring to those Gentiles who were fully proselytes, and not just “proselytes of the gate.” For information on the two different kinds of proselytes in Judaism at the time of Christ, see commentary on Acts 10:2.

2:11. “Cretans.” People who live on the Island of Crete, which in 27 BC was made, together with Cyrene in Libya, the Roman province of Cyrenaica.
“Arabians.” Likely people of the Nabatean kingdom of Arabia, mostly in what is Saudi Arabia today.

2:13. “sweet new wine.” It is not “new wine” as in wine that was freshly pressed (which would have been neos oinos in the Greek); rather this comes from gleukos (#1098 γλεῦκος). Most lexicons define this word as “sweet new wine” (BDAG; Thayer; Louw-Nida; Friberg; Gingrich), that is, wine that is still in the process of fermenting. The grape harvest in Palestine ended in August, or September at the latest, which by the time of Pentecost (usually June but sometimes May) would have been some eight months past, so the fermentation would have been over. However, the ancients had ways to keep the wine sweet and from turning to wine vinegar, such as adding honey to it, which would also prolong the fermentation process.

These mockers are typical of unbelievers. They ignore the facts (like the fire from heaven and the fact that no group of drunken people speaks fluently in other languages) and instead just voice their doubt and unbelief. Sadly, the mocking deters many Christians from getting involved in the conflict of the faith, since most people dislike and avoid conflict. The Adversary wages a harsh and relentless war of words, and often these empty arguments sound so plausible they stop Christians. For example, a dedicated Christian who prayed daily, gave regularly, and went to meetings regularly might have someone say to him, “You don’t have to be legalistic about your faith.” That almost sounds persuasive, until we really stop to think that being dedicated is not being “legalistic.” Many such hollow accusations have hindered Christians in their walk with the Lord.

2:15. “third hour.” This is about our 9 AM. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].


“a portion of my spirit.” The Greek of this phrase gives the sense of God having a large amount of spirit from which he pours some out upon mankind. Literally, it reads, “I will pour out from my spirit.” The preposition apo (“from; away from”) combines with the genitive “of my spirit,” to make the equivalent of a partitive genitive, showing that God is taking some of, or part of, His spirit, and putting it on people. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon notes that the apo in Acts 2:17 is used of “the separation of apart from the whole; where of a whole some part is taken.” The BDAG Greek-English Lexicon and the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament both reference Acts 2:17 as a case where the genitive with apo is a substitute for the partitive genitive. The NAB agrees, and translates the phrase, “I will pour out a portion of my spirit.” The Septuagint has the partitive idea in Joel, the idea being, “some of my spirit,” (The Acts of the Apostles: The Anchor Bible commentary; Joseph A. Fitzmyer). Some translations simply have “I will pour out of my spirit” (Darby; Douay-Rheims; KJV; Rotherham), which could be more clearly translated as, “I will pour out some of my spirit.” Thus the concept that God only pours out part of His spirit upon people is inherent in the text.

It is important that we recognize that there is a difference between what we today hear in Peter’s teaching and what Peter’s Jewish audience would have heard. Because of the Epistles to the Church, we today know that when the gift of holy spirit was poured out, it came as the New Birth and was sealed inside the believers. Although that is quite true, Peter’s audience did not know about that.
That God was now “pouring out” his spirit (i.e., giving it abundantly), would have meant two distinct things to Peter’s audience. Although they did not yet understand the New Birth, they did know from Joel that, if Peter was correct about the timing (which he was), God would give spirit to everyone. This is in contrast to how things were in the Old Testament. For example, in Numbers 11, God only put the gift of holy spirit on 70 men out of all the millions of Israelites. Moses said that he wished “that all the people of Yahweh, were prophets! Yea, let Yahweh put his spirit upon them” (Rotherham), but that did not happen. Throughout the history of the Old Testament right up until the day Peter was speaking, God had only given His holy spirit to a relatively few individuals. But now on the Day of Pentecost, the ascended Christ would pour out the gift of holy spirit upon anyone who believed (Acts 2:38; Eph. 1:13).

The second thing that the words “poured out” indicated to Peter’s Jewish audience would be that God would work powerfully through His spirit and energize many prophecies, miracles, etc. The connotation of “pour out” was that the energizing of the spirit would not be just a trickle of prophecies and power, but a great flowing of the manifestations of holy spirit, which is what we should still be seeing today. That is also clear in the immediate context, which we can see because Peter spoke of prophecy, visions, and dreams.

Although many English versions capitalize the word “Spirit” as if it referred to “the Holy Spirit,” clearly it does not. This “spirit” is the gift of holy spirit that each person gets when he or she is born again.

2:18. Quoted from Joel 2:29 with some variation.
2:19. Quoted from Joel 2:30

“the sun will be turned into darkness.” This is not a regular reoccurring eclipse, but a special supernatural occurrence in the time of Tribulation that precedes the Second Coming of Christ when he comes from heaven to earth and fights and wins the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19). This prediction, as the quotation itself, is in Joel, and Jesus spoke of the sun being darkened when he taught his disciples about the Great Tribulation (cp. Matt. 24:29), and the book of Revelation says the sun will be darkened (Rev. 6:12; 8:12). The sun being darkened is connected to the wrath of God, not just in these verses, but in the ninth of the ten plagues that struck Egypt at the time of the Exodus, which was a plague of darkness (Exod. 10:21).

“the moon into blood.” The moon does not literally become “blood,” but becomes blood colored. This is well described in Revelation 6:12, which uses the word “like” to describe the appearance of the moon: “and the full moon became like blood.” The verb metastrephō (#3344 μεταστρέφω), translated “turned” governs both the nouns sun and moon, so that we understand the moon is “turned” into blood, i.e., turned into blood from the point of view of someone looking at it from earth, i.e., it becomes blood colored. In a lunar eclipse, the moon can take on a dark red appearance, but this verse is not referring to a lunar eclipse, but to a full moon, which is usually brilliant white. Instead, at this time in the Tribulation, the full moon is blood red. Although Acts 2:20 simply says “moon,” the book of Revelation specifically says, “whole moon,” which we refer to as a “full moon.”

2:21. Quoted from Joel 2:32
2:26. “rest.” From the Greek *kataskēnoō* (#2681 κατασκηνόω), literally meaning “to pitch one’s tent,” that is to dwell, settle, or live. However, the translation “live” (NIV) could give the misleading impression that David was “alive” while resting in death. Rather, the sense is that after David had died, his flesh would “tent,” that is, dwell, settle down, or better, “rest” (cp. HCSB, KJV, NIV2011, YLT), in the hope of resurrection.

The point of the passage is not that David was “living” but exactly the opposite, as verses 29 and 34 make clear: “he both died and was buried… [and] did not ascend into the heavens.” BDAG points out how early Christian gravestones used this word as a euphemism for “resting.”

2:27. “soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; and attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here *psuchē* is used of the person himself. Thus, the HCSB and NIV use the word “me” instead of “my soul.” This is one of the many verses that prove the soul is not immortal, although to understand that point clearly, we must understand what “the grave” is in the last part of the verse. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”]

“the grave.” The Greek word we translate “grave” is *hadēs* (#86 ᾧδης). *Hades* was the Greek word used to represent the Hebrew word *sheol*, which was the state of being dead. When the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek around 250 BC, the Hebrew word *sheol* was translated by the Greek word *hades*. *Sheol* was not the physical grave itself, but the state of being dead (the actual physical grave was referred to as the *qeber*; #6913 קֶבֶר). Some theologians refer to *sheol* as “gravedom” (the reign of the grave; or the reign of death). It is not a place, but a state of being—the state of being dead. In the Hebrew Old Testament, dead people are said to be in *sheol* (cp. 37:35; 42:38; 1 Kings 2:6; Job 7:9; Ps. 6:5; 16:10; Prob. 7:27; etc.).

It was actually a bad choice to translate *sheol as hadēs*, because in *sheol* people are dead, whereas in the Greek mythology, *hadēs* was a place where the souls of dead people are alive. So when the Greeks translated *sheol* as *hadēs*, it introduced great confusion about the state of the dead into Judaism and then into Christianity, and that confusion still exists today. It would have been better if the Greeks had simply transliterated *sheol* into Greek and brought it into the Greek language as a loan-word. The Bible, properly translated, makes it clear that dead people are dead until the Rapture or a resurrection. [For more on *hadēs* being equivalent to *sheol*, see Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance*; “hell”].

This verse shows how mistranslation can skew theology. If this verse were being read by a first-century Greek who did not know that *hadēs* was the Greek translation of *sheol*, he would be led to think that people, including Jesus, had gone to the *hadēs* of Greek mythology, ruled by the god *Hadēs*, which is not even close to what the text is saying. However, something similar has happened today, because many Christians think that *hadēs* is another name for the place in Christian mythology called “Hell,” which is ruled by the Devil and his demons, and is where evil people go when they die. Jesus certainly did not go to a place where there are dead people being tormented by demons. He died and was dead. We need to be clear on this point: the New Testament *hadēs* is the same as the Old Testament *sheol*, and it was not a “place” at all, but a state—the state of being dead. That is why the prophecy was that God would not abandon people to *sheol*
(hadēs). If God did not raise people up from being dead, they would stay dead forever. The soul does not live on after the body dies. When the body dies, the soul is dead; gone [for more on the dead being dead and not alive in any form, see Appendix 4: “The Dead are Dead”].


2:30. Quoted from Psalm 132:11.


2:33. “the promised holy spirit.” The holy spirit was called “the promised holy spirit” because God had promised to send His gift of holy spirit in the Old Testament. The Old Testament prophets had foretold that a new spirit was coming in the future, one that was different from the spirit God gave in Old Testament times. It was foretold to come as part of the Messianic Kingdom and the New Covenant that God would make with Israel (Isa. 32:15-18; 44:3-5; Ezek. 11:17-21; 36:26, 27; Joel 2:28, 29). The Old Testament prophets said the spirit would be “poured out” (i.e., given in fullness) into all the believers (Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28, 29), which came to pass (Acts 2:33; 10:45; Titus 3:6). Jesus knew that it would come before his kingdom, perhaps to help believers to endure the Great Tribulation (John 15:26-16:16).

Although the Christian Church was a sacred secret, hidden in God and not foretold in the Old Testament, in His wonderful grace God has given the Christian Church the gift of holy spirit that He promised to give in the Millennial Kingdom. That is why in Acts and the Church Epistles this new holy spirit is sometimes referred to as “the promised holy spirit (Eph. 1:13; cp. Acts 2:33; Rom. 8:23).

The Greek text places “holy spirit” as the object of the preposition “of”: saying, “the holy spirit of promise.” This is a common construction, particularly in the Semitic languages but used in Greek also. Grammatically, nouns have more force than adjectives, so saying, “the holy spirit of promise” places more emphasis on “promise” than does the phrase, “the promised holy spirit.” However, due to the Trinitarian teaching that “the Holy Spirit” is a person and not the gift of God (a belief promulgated and supported in most versions by the translation “the Holy Spirit”), the phrase “the holy spirit of promise” tends to be unclear, while “the promised holy spirit” is much clearer. For more on the promised holy spirit, see commentary on John 7:39 and commentary on Ephesians 1:13.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

2:34, 35. Quoted from Psalm 110:1.

2:38. “in the name of Jesus Christ.” This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority. [For more on the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6].

“the gift of the holy spirit.” This holy spirit is the gift of God, poured out on the day of Pentecost. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

2:39. “As many as the Lord our God calls.” Many theologians assert that this verse means a person cannot be saved unless God first calls him, at which point the person can then decide to call upon God and be saved. That is not what this verse is saying. Peter did
not know the Christian doctrine set forth by Augustine, Calvin, and others, that a person could not exercise his free will and be saved unless God first gave him saving grace.

Peter was a Jew who had been taught from the Old Testament that God chose and called the nation of Israel, but not the Gentile nations, and Peter thought of “calling” in this context in terms of groups of people, not individuals. Peter did recognize that an individual Gentile could be saved even if God did not call the Gentiles as nations. He certainly would have recognized that Ruth the Moabite, for example, was saved. Furthermore, he was aware that there were many proselytes to Judaism from the Gentile nations. In this address in the Temple, Peter says, “the promise [of the holy spirit] is to you [Jews] and your children,” because he was aware that the holy spirit had been promised to Israel. Furthermore, when he said the promise of holy spirit was to “you,” the word is plural, meaning “you as a group.” The promise was not given to “each of you individually,” even though each person would have to receive the spirit by their own faith.

In spite of the fact Peter was addressing a group of Jews, and knew the holy spirit had been promised to Jews, he also knew that Joel had said the spirit would be poured out on “all people” (Joel 2:28). Thus, likely by revelation he added, “and to all who are far off.” He himself was not thinking of the Gentiles at that time, because years later he argued with the Lord about entering the house of a Gentile (Acts 10:14). Nevertheless, he was inspired to say in his message that God can call whatever peoples or nations He wanted, and that they too could be baptized and receive holy spirit. This would occur individual by individual for the nations, just as it had for Israel.

2:41. “souls.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; and attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here psuchē is used of the person himself. Thus, many versions, including the HCSB, NAB, and NET, say “people” instead of “souls.” [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

2:42. “fellowship.” The Greek word is koinōnia (#2842 κοινωνία; pronounced koy-no-nee'-ä). Like many words, it has a range of meanings and uses, so it is important to pay attention to the context to determine which meaning it has in that particular context. Koinōnia refers to a close association involving mutual interests and sharing; a close relationship characterized by involvement and sharing. From that basic definition it came to refer to the love or good will that comes with a close relationship, and thus was used of “generosity” or “participation,” and it also came to refer to the result of close association, which is sharing, giving, and was even used of “a gift” or “a contribution” (2 Cor. 9:13). Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon offers one definition of koinōnia as: “joint participation,” and another as “intimacy.” The Internet encyclopedia Wikipedia says, “The essential meaning of the [word] koinōnia embraces concepts conveyed in the English terms community, communion, joint participation, sharing and intimacy.” We, as well as other Christians who have studied the subject, have come up with the useful definition to describe fellowship among Christians: “intimate joint participation.” The beauty of having a definitive definition of koinōnia is that it allows us to tell if we are actually having true Christian fellowship or not. To help us understand “intimate” in a social context, someone once defined “intimacy” as “in-to-me-see,” which is accurate and clear. It is amazing the extent to which we can be with others and never let them see
into us. Many people can talk for hours without ever letting the listener “see” into them. That may be wise to do “on the street,” but it is certainly not how fellowship, *koinonia*, is supposed to work among Christians.

For example, a person may go to a large church and sit in the auditorium and listen to the pastor or teacher. That person may well be learning valuable things, but that is not “fellowship” because it is not intimate (no sharing of hearts), and it is not “joint participation,” it is one-way communication. Listening to a lecture on television is not “fellowship,” and sitting and listening to one in an auditorium is not either. One-way communication is not fellowship. Listening to teachings is important for building the like-mindedness necessary to have fellowship, but it is not itself “fellowship.” Similarly, a person who goes to a church but just chats and “makes small talk” may be engaging in “joint participation” but that is not true “fellowship” either because there is no “full sharing,” no “intimate joint participation” in which people open their hearts to each other.

We all know when we have genuine fellowship with others, that is, true, “intimate joint participation.” We let people into our hearts and lives, and are with people who open their hearts and lives to us, and that happens among people who are in close association and when we are with people we trust.

The New Testament has several of the different uses of *koinōnia*. Here in Acts 2:42, *koinōnia* refers to all the aspects of “fellowship”: there was the intimate joint participation among the believers, the love and good will that comes with that relationship, and also sharing, giving, gifts, and contributions among the community of believers. In 2 Corinthians 6:14, “…what fellowship does light have with darkness,” *koinōnia* primarily refers to the intimate joint participation that is unavailable in that unbalanced relationship. In Romans 15:26 we see *koinōnia* used to mean a gift or contribution, which is also its meaning in Hebrews 13:16. In 1 Corinthians 10:26, *koinōnia* is used as to refer to participation, as it does in Philippians 1:5.

The basis of true *koinōnia* among Christians is our love of God, and our commitment to Him. Beyond that, it is important that we agree on certain basics of the Faith. If we do not, there is often enough discord to produce lack of trust and no true intimate joint participation.

The epistle of 1 John lays out the relationship between teaching and “fellowship.” 1 John 1:3 says, “that which we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you also may have fellowship with us.” Note that John does not think that telling people what he had seen and heard was “fellowship,” but rather John taught what he had seen and heard “so that” there could be “fellowship.” The teaching produced the like-mindedness that was necessary for intimate joint participation to occur.

“*prayer.*” The Greek word for “prayer,” *proseuchē* (#4335 προσευχή), is in the plural, but it is a collective singular, like the English word “deer” or “fish,” which can be one or more than one. In this case, the disciples devoted themselves to the practice of prayer, which would include all kinds of prayer.

2:43. “*every soul.*” This means every person. See commentary on Acts 2:41.

2:46. “*from house to house.*” The emphasis is that each house was involved. Some versions read that they broke their bread “at home,” but this misses the point. It is not that each one ate at home, but rather that every home was involved, and they shared with each other.
“in the Temple.” These early Christians were all Jews, so they continued worshipping in the Temple.

“sincerity.” The Greek is ἀφελότης (#858 ἀφελότης), and means “simplicity.” The root word comes from a description of land that was without rock, hence smooth. Thus the idea is simplicity, or humility of heart. Sincerity captures this feeling more than simplicity, which could be read in a negative sense.

2:47. “and having favor with all the people.” The italics make clear who “all the people” are: the people of the city, in this case, Jerusalem. This tells us a lot about the early Christians. They were all Jews at this point, and they commended themselves to both God and man. They were joyful, full of praise, often in the Temple, sharing and helping each other and others out, so no wonder they had the favor (grace) of all the people of the city.

Chapter 3

3:1. “at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.” The ninth hour corresponds roughly to our hour from 3 to 4 PM. The Jews counted twelve hours in the day, with the first starting at what is roughly equivalent to our 6 AM. As early as the time of David (c. 950 BC) the Bible alludes to there being three daily hours of prayer among the Jews: “Evening and morning and at noon I will utter my complaint….” (Ps. 55:17). By the time of Daniel (c. 500 BC) the three times for prayer each day seems to be quite well established, because Daniel prayed upon his knees three times each day (Dan. 6:10).

However, ancient sources disagree as to exactly when the three hours of prayer were observed. According to the Talmud, the Jewish people prayed three times each day: morning, afternoon, and evening. John Lightfoot says that the prayers coincide with the morning and evening sacrifice, and that prayers were also made between those times, “from the sixth hour and a half,” which would be close to noon, around 12:30 PM. Yet he also points out that the Jerusalem Talmud says the practice was “The recital of the Shema in bed is the foundation; that is, after the stars have begun to appear.” After the stars had begun to appear is certainly later than the evening sacrifice, however. F.F. Bruce writes, “a service of public prayer accompanied these two sacrifices [the morning and evening] and there was a further service at sunset.” Acts 3:1 confirms that the ninth hour, about 3 PM, was in fact an hour of prayer.

Adam Clarke refers to rabbis who teach that people should pray when the sun rises, when it reached meridian [i.e., noon], and when the sun has set, “passed just under the horizon (see Adam Clarke, The New Testament with a Commentary, Vol. 5, Matt.-Acts, p. 704.) Lange writes: “…in the later age of the apostles, custom had firmly established the three hours of prayer, namely, the third hour of the day, in the morning…the sixth, at noon; and the ninth, in the evening. The first and third coincided with the hours in which the morning and the evening sacrifices were, respectively, offered.”(John P. Lange, Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: John-Acts, Acts 3:1.) In conclusion, it seems clear that the ancient sources testify to there being three hours of prayer, one of them coinciding with the morning sacrifice and one coinciding with the evening sacrifice. The sources disagree as to whether the third hour is close to noon, or after the evening sacrifice close to when the stars appear in the evening.
In Acts 10:3 the angel appeared to Cornelius at the hour of the evening sacrifice (the ninth hour). In Acts 10:9 Peter went up to the roof of the house in which he was staying and prayed at the sixth hour, about noon, and some commentators have used that to support the idea of an hour of prayer being around noon, but the Bible never says Peter prayed at a recognized hour of prayer, he may have just been moved to pray about that time.

Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].

3:6. “I have no silver and gold.” The Greek literally reads, “silver and gold do not exist/are not present for me.” The Greek word translated “have” is huparchō (#5225 ὑπάρχω), which means, “to exist,” or “have at one’s disposal” (BDAG). The use of this verb does not mean Peter is denying money even exists to him, rather, he is saying he does not have any. There is no money present at his disposal. Thus the translation, “I have no silver and gold.”

“In the name of Jesus Christ.” This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ.

Because of the patron-client society of the biblical cultures, including the Greek and Roman cultures, “who you knew” was extremely important in day-to-day life. Personally knowing a socially powerful and well-connected person had all kinds of advantages. For example, if a person was in need or in trouble, he could use the name of his powerful friend to gain favor and influence. It was actually that very custom that led rulers such as Solomon to acquire hundreds of wives and concubines (Solomon himself had 700 wives and 300 concubines; 1 Kings 11:3). Families would encourage the marriage of a daughter to a ruler because they knew that they would then have a valuable social connection, and even have the potential of having the next ruler or powerful person in the kingdom come from the family.

In the Roman society, the patron-client relationship was very important and often somewhat formalized. The patron supported the client with influence and often money as well, and the client looked out for his patron’s interests and watched for ways to spread his influence, acted as “eyes and ears” for him, and might accompany him from place to place as a vocal supporter and bodyguard.

Legal trouble was one kind of trouble that knowing a powerful person could help with. In our modern times, we like to think that “the rule of law” provides protection to the innocent, and the courts are only interested in who is “right” according to the law of the land. In biblical times judgment was much more arbitrary, and often the judges did what was expedient for themselves without much attention to the guilt or innocence of the parties involved. This shows up throughout the Bible, which is why the Bible is so explicit about bribery. Paul spent two years in a Roman prison in Caesarea because the governor wanted a bribe (Acts 24:26). Also, in the “Parable of the Persistent Widow,” the judge “neither feared God nor cared about men” (Luke 18:1-8), and the widow had to beg for justice over and over. The judge finally judged the case, but for his own good, not hers. So it was that in biblical law courts, whether Eastern (Israel, Syria, Egypt, etc.) or Western (Greece, Rome), having the influence of a powerful person in the courtroom could win the case.
In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using
the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority. It is
important to realize that “the name of Jesus Christ” is not a “formula,” that is, it is not
like a “magic formula” that has to be said at the right time in the right order with the right
emphasis or it won’t work. There is no magic behind the words, “the name of Jesus
Christ.” The name represents authority only because the one being named, Jesus Christ,
exists and has authority, and also the one using the name has an actual relationship with
the one whose name he is using. This is very clear from the culture. If a person tried to
get out of trouble by using a name he invented, he would not have any authority. The
person has to exist and genuinely be a powerful person. Similarly, if someone used the
name of a powerful person, but had no relationship with the person, the “name” would
not work, in fact, he would be in serious trouble for using it. We see that exact scenario in
Acts 19:13-16 when some exorcists who were not Christian tried to use the name of Jesus
Christ to gain authority over demons because they knew about Paul using it, and the
demon hurt them badly.
The proof that “the name of Jesus Christ” is not some kind of formula is in the Bible
itself. As we saw above, using the name of Jesus without a relationship with Jesus does
not work, and can even by harmful. In contrast, if a person has a relationship with Jesus
Christ, then although “the name of Jesus Christ” can be used, sometimes it is not
necessary to speak the name out loud. The simple fact that the person has a relationship
with Jesus is enough. Thus, in Acts, sometimes we see the name of Jesus Christ being
used, and sometimes not. Peter said to the lame man, “In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up
and walk,” and he did (Acts 3:6). But in Acts 9:40, Peter raised the dead by just saying,
“Tabitha, get up!” Similarly, in Acts 16:18, when Paul was delivering a woman from a
demon, he said, “In the name of Jesus Christ come out of her,” and the demon came out,
but Paul healed a lame man in Lystra by just saying, “Stand up on your feet” (Acts
14:10).
The idea of authority is also present when Christians baptize people “in the name of
Jesus Christ.” For example, if a minister says, “I baptize you in the name of Jesus Christ,”
he means that it is in his authority as a minister of Christ that he can baptize. When Peter
told the people to be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38), he meant that the
people would be baptized by those people using the authority of Jesus Christ. Jesus had
authorized his disciples to baptize people (John 4:1, 2), and his disciples still had his
authority to baptize people.
3:13. “Servant Jesus.” Jesus was the great servant of God, as the prophets had declared.
The greatest of these declarations are the “Servant Songs” of Isaiah. Isaiah presents the
Messiah as the “servant” of God and foretells much of what he will do. The servant songs
in Isaiah do not have definitive “stop” verses, so scholars differ as to when they end but
our studies lead us to conclude that the four songs are: Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-11, and
52:13-53:12. The most famous Servant Song is Isaiah 52:13-53:12, and it describes the
torture, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Isaiah 52:13 begins, “Behold, my
servant,” and tells how Jesus will bear our sins and sicknesses.
A verse that ties the role of the Servant foretold in Old Testament prophecy with
Jesus Christ in his ministry is when he quoted Isaiah 42:1 concerning himself: “Here is
my servant whom I have chosen…I will put my spirit on him” (Matt. 12:18). It is clear
that when the disciples prayed to God and referred to Jesus as “your holy servant Jesus,

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whom you anointed” (Acts 4:27), they were making a reference to the prophecy in Isaiah 42:1. This is confirmed by the fact that in the very next verse the prayer continues that the rulers gathered against Jesus: “to do whatever your hand and your council decided beforehand would happen.” Of course, people knew what God has planned beforehand for the Messiah because it is clearly laid out in the Servant Songs, especially Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

Both Hebrew and Greek have several different words that can mean “servant.” Here in Acts 3:13 the word translated “Servant” in most versions, but “Son” in the KJV, is παῖς (παῖς), and it has a range of meanings that include an infant; a boy or girl child (depending on the gender of the noun); a servant; a slave; or an attendant or minister, such as a king or lord might have. The exact meaning was determined by the context. In this case, the clear reference in Acts to the Servant Songs of Isaiah shows us that “servant” is the proper translation of παῖς in Acts.

Here in Acts 3:13 the context of παῖς is the suffering and subsequent glorification of Jesus, clearly a subject to the Servant Songs, and not something the Jews would readily identify with the “Son.” R. C. H. Lenski writes: “Pais is never used in the sense of “Son of God;” that thought is always expressed by huios theou.” Simon Kistemaker (New Testament Commentary: Acts), writes: “God has glorified Jesus, whom Peter deliberately calls “servant” to remind his listeners of Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the suffering and glory of the Lord’s servant (Isa. 52:13-53:12). They should know that Jesus fulfilled this messianic prophecy (cp. Matt. 12:18).” Actually, the fact that Peter deliberately called Jesus the “servant” is even clearer than Kistemaker says, because Peter had everyone’s attention due to the fact that he had just healed a man who was over 40 years old. The prophecy in Isaiah included the suffering of Jesus, but it also specifically said that we are healed through his wounds—and here was living proof the prophecy was correct! We should also note that the majority of the modern translations read “servant.”

3:15. “out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among those who are dead.”

3:21. “restoration of all things.” Peter is speaking of the Messianic Age, when the heavens and earth will be restored to an Edenic state. Jesus called this the “New Beginning” (see commentary on Matthew 19:28 and Matthew 5:5).

3:21. “from ancient times.” The Greek reads apo aiōn, more literally, “from the ages,” but it means “throughout the ages” or more understandably, “from ancient times.” The rendering in some versions, “from the beginning,” is not clear, especially in light of the Old Testament. The restoration of all things, which will occur when Christ comes back and conquers the earth and begins the Messianic Age (Millennial Kingdom), was implied but not clearly laid out in Scripture until after the times of Moses, which is why the Sadducees did not even believe in a resurrection, much less a restoration of Eden. In fact, in Acts 3:24, Peter clarifies that it is from the time of Samuel that the prophets have clearly spoken of these things. [For the comparison of the Millennial Kingdom and Eden, see commentary on Luke 23:43].

3:22. Quoted from Deuteronomy 18:15.

3:23. Quoted from Deuteronomy 18:19.

3:24. “Samuel.” Although the resurrection and Millennial Kingdom was implied in the books of Moses and Joshua, it was not clearly taught in those Scriptures. It was certainly known about, because Job, a contemporary of Abraham, knew about it (Job 19:25-27). Furthermore, Hebrew 11 tells us that people living before the time of Samuel and David knew about it, people such as Abraham, Joseph, and Moses. Nevertheless, it was during the time of Samuel and David when the restoration of the earth was more clearly taught (cp. Ps. 37:9-11, 22, 29, 34), and then as time progressed the prophecies became clearer and clearer. For example, Ezekiel 37 clearly teaches about the resurrection of the dead and their return to the land of Israel (Ezek. 37:11-14).

Chapter 4

4:1. “commander.” The Greek word is stratēgos (#4755 στρατηγός), in the singular form, and the “commander of the temple” was the top commander of the Temple police. In the Jewish writings he is called, “the man of the Temple Mount.” The Temple police were a large number of hand-picked Levites who kept order at the Temple. They had the power to arrest people, which is what they were sent to do to Jesus but were unable to do (John 7:30, 32, 45).

At night the Temple police were placed in twenty-four stations around the Temple and its compound. Twenty-one of the stations were occupied by Levites, while three were occupied by both Levites and priests. There were ten men at each station except for the three innermost to the Sanctuary, which had ten Levites and ten priests. Thus, there were 240 Levites and thirty priests on guard in the Temple every night. [For more on the Temple police, see commentary on Luke 22:4].

4:2. “out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “from among the dead.”
4:7. “in the midst.” The Greek word is mesos (#3319 μέσος), and means midst or middle. Acts is historically accurate in this description, for the Sanhedrin met in a semicircle on a raised semicircular platform so that all the members could see one another, while the accused stood on a lower level, but clearly “in the midst” of them.

“By what power or in what name.” Annas, Caiaphas, and the rest of the Sanhedrin knew that a miracle had been done. While it was proper according to the law to use the name of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Solomon, or some other well-accepted names to appropriate the power or authority of God, it was against Jewish law to use magic. The point of their “investigation” was to discover if the apostles had done the miracle by magic and thus broken any laws, at which point they could imprison them or even perhaps kill them. However, no specific regulation apparently existed concerning the name of Jesus, and the miracle was a great one and well known to all the people of Jerusalem (v. 16), so they felt that all they could do was threaten them not to use “this name” any more (v. 18). We Christians need to realize that there is great power in using the name of Jesus Christ when we walk by revelation and faith.

4:8. “holy spirit.” There is no definite article. This holy spirit is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].
4:10. “in the name of Jesus Christ.” This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority. [For more on the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6].

“out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among those who are dead.”

4:11. Quoted from Psalm 118:22.

“rejected.” From exoutheneō (#1848 ἐξουθενέω), See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:20.

4:13. “uneducated.” Greek is agrammatos, (#62 ἀγράμματος). “Illiterate, without learning: (i.e. unversed in the learning of the Jewish schools)” (Thayer). This does not refer to having no education. It means that the apostles had not gone to the schools for “higher education,” i.e., in Rabbinic training.

“ordinary.” The Greek word idiotēs (#2399 ιδιώτης), a word “very common in Greek writings from Herodotus down; properly, a private person, opposed to a magistrate, ruler, king.” (Thayer). They held no public office, were not of a noble class, etc. They were regular people. They did not do a miracle because they had special rank or privilege.

4:24. “Master.” The Greek is despotēs (#1203 δεσπότης) and means master or lord, and it refers to someone who has legal control and authority over others, such as subjects or slaves (cp. 1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:9). It is used both as a title for God (Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24), and a title for Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 1:4). See commentary on Luke 2:29.

4:25. Quoted from Psalm 2:1.

“through holy spirit.” This is God (cp. v. 24) energizing David through His gift of holy spirit. In the Old Testament, when God wanted people to speak for Him, He put His spirit (His gift) upon them and gave them revelation via that gift of holy spirit. David had the spirit of God upon him (1 Sam. 16:13), and God energized David through that spirit. (Cp. commentary Matt. 22:43; Mark 12:36; and Acts 1:16). [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

“Peoples.” This refers to the tribes of the People of Israel. See commentary on Matthew 2:5.

4:26. “The kings of the earth took their stand…” The quotation continues from Psalm 2, and is of 2:2.


4:31. “filled with holy spirit.” This holy spirit is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

4:32. “And the multitude.” This verse begins a new topic, which includes the death of Ananias and Sapphira, and actually this verse should have been 5:1. The Ananias and Sapphira record would generally be better understood if people saw that what it involves begins in Acts 4:32 with the Christians being of one heart and one mind, and sharing their possessions. See commentary on Acts 5:5.

“soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person.
or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the person himself. All of the believers had the same attitude and feelings about their material possessions. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”]

“had all things in common.” It has been said that this was the first example of communism. It is truly much more noble than that because it was for a much higher purpose than political stability, a political system, or a humane society that was egalitarian. The sharing was not to produce “equality” of what was owned, but to make sure that everyone in the Christian community had what they needed so they could focus on God and the things of God, especially evangelism. This communal sharing was not to redistribute wealth so everyone could have a good time in life. Verse 34 indicates that those who owned lands or houses sold them. The Expositor’s Greek Testament notes that, “The language shows that we are not meant to infer that the men sold all that they had.” In other words, people did not give away everything and then share and share alike. They gave their plurality to those who needed things to survive. A.T. Robertson (Word Studies) notes that this giving occurred over a period of time and was based on need. As the need arose something would be sold to fill that need by way of the apostles’ distribution.

Chapter 5

5:3. “How is it.” The Greek is the idiomatic phrase, dia ti, which can often mean “why?” However, in this case Peter is not asking “Ananias, ‘why’ has Satan filled your heart?” That would be asking what motivated Satan to fill your heart, and the answer would be: “For the same reason Satan does everything he does: to steal, kill, and destroy” (John 10:10). This question is deeper. Peter likely did not realize Ananias would drop dead; and the question is: “How is it that the Adversary has filled your heart?” In other words, what did you think about, wish for, want, and covet, that gave Satan such a foothold in your life? The question, quickly made rhetorical by Ananias’ death, should not be rhetorical to us. We are responsible to guard our minds and lives against the work of the Adversary.

“the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σάτανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

“the Holy Spirit.” “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”]

5:4. “unsold.” Cp. Robertson and ESV; NIV; NASB; NRSV; NET; NAB. Although there is no Greek word for unsold, this is clearly the meaning. The literal reading is, “remaining for you did it not remain?” The NASB, like the REV, puts “unsold” in italics, “While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own?”

“contrived.” The Greek word is tithemi (#5087 τίθημι), and means, “to set, put, or place; to make or to make (or set) for one’s self or for one’s use; to set, fix, establish.” Although many versions have “conceived,” Lenski points out that this is not broad
enough, and it is more than conceive, it is to think through the entire process. The argument could be made that the translation could be “put,” or “placed,” with the idea that the plan was not started in the heart but “placed” there as it developed, but it makes more sense that the idea was both conceived and planned in the evil hearts of Ananias and Sapphira.

5:5. “fell down and breathed out his last breath.” When Ananias heard Peter’s rebuke, he fell down dead. Why? To get the fullness of this, it helps if we read the whole record. The context of the Ananias and Sapphira record begins in Acts 4:32 with the Christians being on one heart and one mind, and sharing their possessions, and in fact a good argument could be made for the fact that the whole Ananias record would be better understood if the Acts 5:1 was where Acts 4:32 is now.

Many people assume God killed Ananias because of his sin, but the Bible never says that. The Bible is full of sinners who God does not kill, so why would He kill Ananias and Sapphira? After all, basically all they did was lie. They sold a piece of land for an amount of money, then told the Apostles they had sold it for less than they actually sold it for, and they did that so they could keep part of the money. But the money was theirs to keep if they wanted; they were under no obligation to give any of their money to the apostles. Their sin was to lie about the amount they gave. Frankly, this sin probably happens almost every Sunday in our churches: people say they tithe (give 10%), when actually they give less than the tithe. Yet we do not see Christians dying in churches every weekend.

The Bible never says God killed Ananias and Sapphira, so how did they die? Although it is possible that they both died of heart attacks from the shock of being publicly discovered and reproved, that is not likely. What almost certainly happened is that Satan killed them. That would be consistent with the scope of Scripture. Hebrews 2:14 says that Satan holds the power of death (Heb. 2:14). Furthermore, Scripture says Satan controls this fallen world (1 John 5:19), and that he has authority over the world (Luke 4:6).

It is precisely because Satan controls the world that it is such a dangerous, heartless place. If God controlled the world, it would be a wonderful place. The world reflects the nature of the one who controls it. Before the Fall of Adam and Eve, the world was a wonderful and safe place because God was in control. After the Fall, when Satan became “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4) and the “ruler of the authority of the air” (Eph. 2:2), the world became a difficult place to live. For example, animals became dangerous and plants developed thorns. After Jesus Christ conquers the world in the Battle of Armageddon and controls it, and Satan is no longer in control, the world will return to being a wonderful and safe place (Isa. 11:1-9; see commentary on Matt. 5:5, the meek will inherit the earth).

The Bible shows that when demons get into the mind or body of a person, there are times when they exert a lot of power over that person. They can cause physical diseases such as epilepsy (Matt. 17:15), muteness (Matt. 9:33), or deformities (Luke 13:11). They can occupy the mind and feed it information (Acts 16:16; this is how psychics and false prophets operate). They can also produce wild behavior and insanity (Mark 5:1-15). What happened to Judas is in some ways close to what happened to Ananias. When Satan entered into the heart of Judas, he betrayed Jesus and later killed himself (Luke 22:3, 4; John 13:2).
The Bible does not tell us every detail about the Devil and his demons, but it tells us enough that we can surmise what happened to Ananias and Sapphira. Just as a demon can cause disease and cripple the body, a demon can shut down organs and produce death. There is evidence in the Old Testament that there is a demon of death. The Hebrew word “death” in Isaiah 28:15 and 18, and Jeremiah 9:21, is maveth (4194), and it is personified, as if it was a living being, a demon. The Holman Christian Standard Bible handles the personification very well by having “Death” with a capital “D.” Furthermore, Proverbs 16:14 mentions an angel of death, and Revelation 6:8 mentions a demon named “Death.” These verses, in combination with the New Testament statement that the Devil holds the power of death, are good evidence that there is a demon of death. Still further evidence for a demon of death is that lots of ancient mythologies had a “god” of death, and in Ugaritic mythology there is a “god” of death that had a similar name to maveth. In studying Isaiah and Jeremiah, we see they are an example of the word “death” referring to the natural event, death, and also the demon that often causes it.

In reading Acts 5 in light of the scope of Scripture about the Devil and demons, we can see that Satan killed Ananias and Sapphira, and his reason for killing them, and his timing, could not have been better to fulfill his purposes. The Church had been growing consistently since the Day of Pentecost, when about three thousand people got saved (Acts 2:41). A couple thousand more were added by Acts 4:4. Satan was no doubt very upset about the spread of the Gospel, and looked for a way to stop it. That opportunity presented itself when Ananias and Sapphira, who had allowed Satan into their hearts and had plotted together to lie about their gift to the Church, went in to see Peter.

What Peter spoke by revelation when he spoke to Ananias is a very important key to knowing what happened to Ananias and Sapphira. First, we must remember that the only way Peter knew Ananias lied and kept part of the money for himself was by direct revelation from God. He had no other way to know Ananias was lying. Second, we need to notice that Peter said, “Why has Satan filled your heart...?” Like Judas, Ananias was demonized, “possessed,” by a demon, and Satan took advantage of the opportunity and killed Ananias. Why would Satan do that? The results speak for themselves.

If newspapers existed at the time of Christ, we can imagine the headline in the Jerusalem Gazette the next morning: “Cult leader kills faithful followers after they donate their life savings!” Remember, everyone thought Ananias and Sapphira gave all the money they had from the sale of their land; no one knew they were hiding part of the profit. Furthermore, medical forensics were not very developed in those days. All people knew was that Ananias, and later Sapphira, went to see Peter and other Church leaders to give them a lot of money, and then turned up dead later that day.

The result of the death of Ananias and Sapphira was immediate and profound. The Word of God had been spreading rapidly since the Day of Pentecost, but now, “great fear came upon the whole Church and upon all those who heard these things” (5:11), and “no one dared join himself to them” (5:13). The word “fear” in the Greek can mean either “fear” or “respect, awe,” and here it likely means both. Faithful Christians who believed what the Apostles said, that Ananias had lied about his gift to the Church and had “just dropped dead” were filled with awe, while borderline Christians and unbelievers were filled with genuine fear, which is why no one else dared to join the Christians. Thus the spread of the Gospel in Jerusalem was stopped—at least for a while.
The paragraph structure in most versions of Acts, and the paragraph headings that many versions have to help the reader understand the Bible, are misplaced in Acts 5, and actually make the Bible harder to understand. Most Bibles start a new paragraph with Acts 5:12, and in doing so break away Acts 5:12 and 13 from the record of Ananias and Sapphira. But verses 12 and 13 are not a new subject; they are the conclusion of the Ananias and Sapphira record. Bibles that have paragraph headings make the division in the record even worse. For example, the NIV has a break before verse 12, with a paragraph heading that reads, “The Apostles Heal Many.” The ESV, NET, NKJV, and most other English versions make their paragraph break in the same place, and also add a paragraph heading that makes a clear split between verses 11 and 12.

The result of the paragraph break and the paragraph title is that almost no one connects verses 12 and 13 with the death of Ananias and Sapphira. Almost no one connects their death with the fact that the Church stopped growing for a time. However, there is no reason to separate Acts 5:12 and 13 from the Ananias and Sapphira story except the tradition that breaks the paragraph in that place. Nothing in the Greek text dictates a split between verses 11 and 12, and the context dictates that the new paragraph should start with verse 14, not verse 12.

If we put break in this section after verse 13, the effect that the death of Ananias and Sapphira had on the spread of the Gospel becomes much clearer. Also, we can more clearly see how the Apostles continued to showcase the power of the Gospel in spite of the setback. Here’s the progression: in verse 10, Sapphira died. In verse 11, great “fear” came upon the people—both Christian and non-Christian. In verse 12, the Apostles countered the Adversary’s attack by gathering the Church together in the Temple and doing signs and wonders. In verse 13 we learn the unbelievers were still fearful and would not join the Christians, but they saw the miracles and held them in high regard. The Bible does not say how long there was a pause in the growth of the Church, but by verse 14 we see that the people’s fear subsided and the church was expanding again. With the death of Ananias and Sapphira and the temporary pause in the growth of the Church, the peaceful “honeymoon period” that the Church had enjoyed since it began on the Day of Pentecost was over. The Church was in a spiritual and physical war. Soon after Satan killed Ananias and Sapphira to stop the move of the Word, the High Priest, the one who had had Jesus executed, put the Apostles in prison (Acts 5:17–42). Although the Apostles were released from prison, they were publicly whipped, a harsh action that would have caused more timid Jews not to join the Church. By Acts 6, there was a division in the Church over the distribution of goods that came to the Church. In Acts 7 and 8, Stephen, one of the leaders of the Church, was stoned to death. In Acts 9 there was a “great persecution” against the Church. And the controversies and persecution of Christians has never stopped since that early time.

5:9. “See!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

5:10. “breathed out her last breath.” See commentary on 5:5; “fell down and breathed out his last breath.”

5:20. “all the words.” The full message. The Apostles were not to reduce the message to what was acceptable and what might keep them out of trouble. They were to speak “all the word,” that is, the whole message.
“of this life.” The context of the angel’s message is clear. The Apostles were telling about the new and everlasting life a person could have through Jesus Christ when they were arrested, and now the angel tells them to proclaim the full message “of this life,” that is, of the life they had been talking about that got them into trouble in the first place. That the word “life” is sometimes used for “life in the Age to Come” or “everlasting life,” see commentary on John 5:40.


5:25. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).


5:28. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“strictly command you.” The Greek represents the phrase “strictly command you” by the figure of speech polyptoton: “command you with a command.”

5:30. “Tree.” The Greek word is xulon (#3586 ξύλον pronounced zoo'-lon) and it means a tree, log, a piece of timber (1 Cor. 3:12), a piece of wood (Rev. 18:12), or something made from wood such as a beam, a cross, a club (Mark 14:48), or even the stocks that Paul’s feet were placed in (Acts 16:24). Since Jesus carried his cross for a distance, then it was given to Simon of Cyrene, the translation “tree” is not exactly correct, since Jesus did not carry a tree. This has caused some translators to use the word “cross” (Darby, NASB; NIV11). However, xulon can mean “tree,” and Peter was making a point to the religious leaders that they had taken the Messiah and hanged him on a “tree” as if he was accursed of God, since the Law said that anyone who was hanged on a tree was accursed (Deut. 21:23). Thus we can assume that Peter used “tree” deliberately, to heighten the sense of evil committed by the religious leaders. For what we know about the shape of the wood Jesus was crucified on, see commentary on John 19:17, “cross.”

5:31. “He is the one.” This is emphatic in the Greek; the sentence starts with “This one.” It is less wordy to say, “God exalted him,” but it loses the emphasis of the Greek text.

5:32. “the holy spirit that God has given.” Refers to the gift of holy spirit poured out on the Day of Pentecost. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

5:34. “People.” The Jews were referred to as “the People.” See commentary on Matthew 2:5.

5:35. “consider carefully.” Cp. NIV; NRSV. Literally, the phrase is “pay close attention to yourselves”, “take care to yourselves,” but the meaning is “consider carefully” what you are going to do.

Chapter 6
6:5. “and of holy spirit.” This refers to God’s gift of holy spirit. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

6:7. “And the word of God increased.” The primary meaning of this phrase is that the Word of God continued to spread as more and more people got saved. However, it also almost certainly includes the increase, or growth, of the Word of God in the believers as they kept on growing spiritually.

“of the priests.” The majority of the priests in Jerusalem were Sadducees, and the Sadducees traditionally believed that there was no resurrection from the dead (see commentary on Matthew 22:23). For them to go from believing that there was no resurrection to believing in the resurrection of Christ and then, of course, to believing they would be themselves resurrected, was a huge shift. The Word of God makes no statement about the impact that converting a large number of the priests to the faith had on the Temple services there in Jerusalem, or even whether or not some of them quit working in the Temple or were forced to leave.

6:13. “Place” is capitalized (and in v. 14) because it is a designation of the Temple. The word “place” was a designation of the Temple. See commentary on topos in Matthew 24:15.

6:15. “the face of an angel.” There are times when the passage of time and different cultural norms affect the way we think about the Bible. In the Western world in modern times, when we think about someone “being an angel” or “looking like an angel,” we think of soft, pleasant smiles, kind eyes, and an innocent looking face. Thus, when we think of Stephen, about to die, having “the face of an angel,” we think of an innocent, pleasant face gazing up into heaven. This is not, however, what someone from the culture of the first century would think. Angels appear many times in the Bible, and are never portrayed with pleasant, innocent faces. John Calvin, writing around 1550, pointed out that people who were condemned on court usually became pale, stammered, and showed signs of fear, but “Luke teacheth that there was no such thing in Stephen, but that there appeared rather in him a certain majesty” (Calvin’s Commentaries, Acts 6:15).

When angels appear to man, they either blend into mankind so well they are unnoticed (Gen. 19; Lot and the angels), or they inspire awe and even fear in those who see them. Samson’s mother was told by an angel she would have a son, but she did not know she was speaking to an angel. She thought she was speaking to a man of God, but she reported the incident to her husband, saying, “A man of God hath come unto me, and his appearance is as the appearance of a messenger of God, very fearful…” (Judges 13:6 Young’s Literal Translation). We would not say “fearful,” we would say, “causing fear.” The modern translations usually say something such as “awesome” or “awe inspiring.” When the angel appeared to Cornelius, he became afraid even though he was a Roman centurion trained to look death in the face without fear (Acts 10:4). Psalm 103:20 refers to angels as “mighty ones,” and no doubt the expression of their face reflects their power. They are often portrayed as being God’s warrior’s, ready to fight for Him (Num. 22:31; 2 Sam. 24:16; 2 Kings 19:35; Ps. 35:5, Dan. 6:22). When they do appear to people, they often cause them to be afraid, and have to calm them down, usually by saying “Fear not” (Matt. 28:5; Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10).

From what we know of angels, Stephen’s face would have reflected the majesty that Calvin pointed out, and supernaturally radiated with power, determination, resolute confidence—an awe inspiring sight.
Chapter 7

7:3. Quoted from Genesis 12:1.
7:5. Quoted from Genesis 17:8.
7:6. 7. Quoted from Genesis 15:13, 14.
7:14. “seventy-five.” Stephen was disputing with Jews who were part of the diaspora, the Jews who had been dispersed over the Mediterranean world. They were from Cyrene in North Africa, Alexandria Egypt (where the Septuagint was translated), Cilicia, a Roman province in what is southeast Turkey today, and Asia, the Roman province on the far west end of what is Turkey today (Acts 6:9). Because these Jews were part of the diaspora, their “Bible” would have been the Septuagint, and Stephen accommodated their beliefs by quoting from the Septuagint when he spoke. So, for example, the Septuagint says that 75 people of Jacob’s family went to Egypt, while the Hebrew text says 70 people went to Egypt. For more on the Septuagint and the original text of the New Testament being in Greek, see commentary on Luke 3:4.


7:33, 34. Quoted from Exodus 3:5, 7, 10.
7:37. Quoted from Deuteronomy 18:15.
7:38. “words.” The Greek word is logion (#3051 λόγιον; pronounced log’-ee-on), and it is the diminutive of logos, “word” or “message.” Literally, it is “little words.” We can see why the Bible uses the word logion for communications from God, because the Greeks used logion for the divine utterances of the oracles, particularly the Oracle of Delphi. The reason for that was that the messages from the oracles were typically short. Thus in time, logion was used of the communications that come from the gods. We felt the translation “oracle” was too obscure for our English translation, although it occurs in many English Bibles, because the English word “oracle” has many meanings that do not apply. We went with “words” because it accurately represents that it is the words coming from God, and whereas the “word” of God means His entire communication, “words” of God can refer to smaller pieces of His revelation. The word occurs 4 times in the New Testament: Acts 7:38; Romans 3:2; Hebrews 5:12, and 1 Peter 4:11.
7:40. Quoted from Exodus 32:1.
7:42. Quoted from Amos 5:25-27.
7:43. Quoted from Amos 5:25-27.

“worship.” See commentary on Matthew 2:2.
7:45. “Joshua.” Joshua brought the Israelites into the Promised Land. The King James Version makes this verse a little hard to understand because it says “Jesus” was the one who brought the Israelites into the Promised Land. This is a case of mistranslation. The name “Jesus” and the name “Joshua” are the same in Hebrew and Greek, even though they are different in English. On two occasions the translators of the KJV put “Jesus” when they should have put “Joshua,” and Acts 7:45 is one of them. This point is well established by William Barclay, a professor and author at Trinity College in Glasgow. He writes:
To us the name Jesus is a holy and sacred name, and we would count it almost blasphemy to give it to any child or call any person by it. But in New Testament times it was one of the commonest of names. It is the Greek form by which three Hebrew Old Testament names are regularly represented—Joshua (e.g., Ex. 17:10); Jehoshua (e.g., Zech. 3:1); Jeshua (Neh. 7:7). There are indeed two occasions in the AV [the KJV] in which Joshua is very confusingly called “Jesus.” In Acts 7:45, we read that the fathers brought the tabernacle into the land of Palestine with Jesus. In Hebrews 4:8, it is said that if “Jesus” had been able to give the people rest, there would have been no need to speak of still another day. In both cases, “Jesus” is Joshua, a fact which is made clear in all the more modern translations. By the second century, the name “Jesus” was vanishing as an ordinary name. Amongst the Jews it vanished because it had become a hated name by which no Jew would call his son; and amongst the Christians it has vanished because it was too sacred for common use.


One of the easiest and most accessible keys to correct biblical interpretation is the context. Examine the context of Acts 7:45, and it becomes exceedingly clear that the verse is not speaking of Jesus.

“possession of the nations.” The “possession of the nations,” until Israel took it back from them, was the Promised Land, which we know as Israel today, although modern Israel is not nearly as large today as the land promised to Abraham.

7:49. Quoted from Isaiah 66:1.
7:50. Quoted from Isaiah 66:2.
7:51. “resist the Holy Spirit.” Here, Holy Spirit is referring to God. “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

7:53. “delivered.” The Greek word is diatagē (#1296 διαταγή), and it refers to the fact that the Law was given to the Jews by angels who were under the direction of God (cp. BDAG Greek-English lexicon). Although the Old Testament is clear that some of the Law, such as the Ten Commandments themselves, were given by God, the Jewish belief was that the Law came through angel intermediaries (cp. Heb. 2:2).

7:55. “saw the glory of God.” This verse, and there are many others like it, is a problem for Christians who have been taught that no one has ever seen God. The key to understanding what Stephen saw is realizing that God does come into concretion in a human form that we (and angels) can see and understand. He does this so that He can better relate to, and fellowship with, His creation. God created mankind so He could intimately fellowship with us, so it is reasonable and scriptural that He occasionally becomes visible and takes on human form to be intimate with His creation. There are Old Testament verses in which Yahweh appears in the form of a man, and those appearances continue in the New Testament. In fact, Scripture records a number of people to whom God appeared: Adam and Eve (they heard His footsteps, Gen. 3:8), Abraham (Gen. 12:7; 15:1; 17:1;18:1), Jacob (Gen. 28:13), Moses and the elders of Israel (Exod. 24:9-11), Samuel (1 Sam. 3:10), Solomon (two times: 1 Kings 3:5; 9:2; 11:5), Micaiah (1 Kings
Acts 22:19-22), Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-5), Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:26-28), Amos (Amos 7:7), Daniel (Dan. 7:9-14), Stephen (Acts 7:56) and the Apostle John (Rev. 5:1-8). In contrast to many great men and women of God who saw God in a visible form, Jesus upbraided the unbelieving Jews by saying: “You have never heard his voice at any time, nor seen his form” (John 5:37).

Much of the confusion about the subject of God appearing as a man comes from John 1:18, which says, “no one has seen God at any time.” It is helpful to read the context to understand the verse. John 1:17 and 18 say: “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, the only begotten Son, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” In Don’t Blame God!, the language of that phrase is examined and explained. We write:

Please note that truth, in its fullness, came not with Moses, but with Jesus Christ. It was he who for the first time in history made God truly understandable. It is not that the Old Testament believers knew nothing of God, but rather that their knowledge and understanding of Him were quite limited (“veiled”). Since truth came by Jesus Christ (“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus.”), we believe that the first part of John 1:18—“no man hath seen God at any time”—means that no man had “known” God (as He truly is) at any previous time. It is Jesus Christ who reveals, or makes known, God to man. In many languages, “to see” is a common idiom for “to know.” In the Hebrew language, one of the definitions for “see” (Hebrew = ra’ ah) is “see, so as to learn, to know.” Similarly, the Greek word translated “see” in verse 18 (horaō) can be “to see with the eyes” or “to see with the mind, to perceive, know.” Even in English, one of the definitions for “see” is “to know or understand.” For example, when two people are discussing something, one might say to the other, “I see what you mean.”

The usage of “see” as it pertains to knowing is found in many places in the New Testament. Jesus said to Philip, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Here again the word “see” is used to indicate knowing. Anyone who knew Christ (not just those who “saw” him) would know the Father. In fact, Christ had made that plain two verses earlier when he said to Philip, “If you really knew me you would know my Father as well” (John 14:7) (Don’t Blame God! Spirit & Truth Fellowship, pp. 59,60).

Further evidence that “see” means “know” in John 1:18 is that the phrase “no man has seen God” is contrasted with the phrase “has made Him known.” So from the context and vocabulary in John 1:18, we can see that it is not talking about “seeing” God with one’s eyes; it is saying that the truth about God came by Jesus Christ. Before Jesus Christ came, no one really knew God as He truly is, a loving heavenly Father. We agree with the text note on John 1:18 in the NIV Study Bible, which says, “Since no human being can see God as He really is, those who saw God saw Him in a form He took on Himself temporarily for the occasion.”

The Bible also calls God “the invisible God.” This is true, because God’s natural state is invisible to us. However, that does not prevent Him from occasionally becoming
visible. Angels and demons are also naturally invisible, but they become visible at certain times. If angels and demons can become visible, then God certainly can too.

It is often stated that the people could not have really seen God because a person will die if he sees God. This idea comes mainly from the conversation Moses had with God. Moses asked to see the glory of God, and God responded, “You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live” (Exod. 33:20). It is clear from the context that the “face” of God was the “glory” of God, because that is what Moses asked to see. We agree that human beings are not equipped to comprehend God in all His fullness, and exposure to all that God is would be lethal. However, we know that God created mankind so He could fellowship with us, and we assert that the human-like form that He has sometimes assumes so we can relate to Him is not His fullness in any way.

It is important that we realize that when the Bible says that people saw God, they saw “God” and not Jesus Christ in some other form. There are two records that clearly show both God and Jesus at the same time; one record is in the Old Testament, and one is in the New Testament. The first of these two records is Daniel 7:9-14, in which “the Ancient of Days” is God and “the Son of Man” is Jesus Christ. The second record is in Revelation 4 and 5. Those two chapters portray God sitting on a throne surrounded by elders and other spiritual creatures, and He is holding a scroll in His right hand. Then “a Lamb,” which the context makes clear is Jesus Christ, approaches God and takes the scroll from Him. Records like this are very clear that God can and does occasionally take on the form of a human being, and it is clear He does that so we can better identify with Him.

Once we understand that God can and does take on a human form so that we can relate to Him, we can understand the passages that show God as if He were a man. We can also better understand what “heaven,” the place where God and angels live and demons go to accuse us (Rev. 12:10), may look like. We know that angels come into concretion like humans, and the Bible gives us a picture of “heaven” that contains a Tent of Meeting (“Tabernacle”), and also a throne room.

Our first glimpse of the heavenly throne room is in Exodus 24:10, when the elders of Israel climbed part way up Mt. Sinai, “and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself.” Here we see God in human form, and He has feet and a “hand” (24:11). The pavement of heaven is blue in color. We again see blue in Ezekiel 1:26, where it is the color of the throne of God. Also in Ezekiel, in the radiance around God, who is sitting on His throne, we see colors like those of a rainbow.

The blue pavement, with the great throne on it, must have looked like the “floor” of heaven to anyone who saw it in a vision. Jacob was one such person, who saw a great staircase going into heaven (not a “ladder” like a fireman’s ladder), with angels walking up and down it, some going down to earth and some going back up to heaven (Gen. 28:12). At the top of the staircase stood Yahweh, the God of Israel, who spoke to Jacob. God would have been standing on some kind of floor at the top of the staircase, and although the Bible does not give the color in Genesis, it would make sense that, if it appeared in Jacob’s dream vision, it was blue.

In Revelation 4 we again see God on the throne, and again we see the colors of a rainbow around Him (Rev. 4:3). In fact, Revelation 5:13 refers to God as “him who sits on the throne” letting us know that it was a common understanding that God would take
on human form and sit on His throne. Revelation also clearly shows us that there is a temple in heaven (Rev. 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:5-8; 16:1, and 17), and Hebrews 8:1-5 indicates that the Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle) and Temple on earth were made after the pattern of the Temple that already existed in heaven.

Having seen that God appears in human form, and also that the “picture” of heaven the Bible paints for us both in Old and New Testament is consistent, we are in a position to understand more about what likely happened in Acts 7:55 and 56. Stephen was being stoned by the religious Jews, and God gave him a revelation vision of the situation in heaven. Stephen saw God, surrounded by glory, and Jesus standing at His right hand, the way any oriental vizier would do. From that short vision, we get the idea that God, the Creator and One True God, was sitting on his throne, and Jesus Christ, to whom He had given “all authority,” was standing at His right hand. The text does not say, but we can bet the “floor” looked blue, and the throne was surrounded by the colors of the rainbow, as we saw in Exodus, Ezekiel, and Revelation.

There is much information wrapped up in Stephen’s vision. From a fleshly perspective it certainly looked like the Jews had the upper hand, but God shows that although sin and death are powerful now, God is the Power, and will have the last word. By his very presence in the vision, Jesus shows that the Devil’s “best punch,” which is death, has been overcome—he is alive, not dead. The vision was certainly an inspiration to Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian Church, and it should be an inspiration to us as well.

Also part of the vision was God’s love for His enemies, and His efforts to bring them to Himself. Although many in the audience seemed hardened beyond repentance, there was one man anyway whose heart was stirred. No one in the audience could doubt that the vision was real to Stephen, and therefore possibly a genuine reality, and if that were the case, then Jesus was not a dead imposter but the living Messiah. Sometime later, when Saul met Jesus face to face, he said, “Who are you, Lord?”

Another message of hope we should get from this record is that God will not always remain as distant as He now sometimes seems. The Bible tells of a time when “the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God” (Rev. 21:3). The future will not be like today, when God is mostly invisible to us but rarely, oh so rarely, appears in a form we can relate to. In the future, God will dwell openly with us.

“full of holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

7:56. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

7:59. “he was calling on the Lord and saying, “Lord Jesus.” To “call on” was a common prayer formula. Stephen was asking the Lord Jesus for help, as we all should. For more on the formula, “calling on,” see commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:2. [For more information on prayer to Jesus, see Appendix 15: “Can We Pray to Jesus?”.

“receive my spirit.” The Greek word for “spirit” is pneuma (#4151 πνεῦμα). Here “spirit” refers to the natural life of the body. Stephen was being stoned to death, and made a last cry to the Lord Jesus to receive his “life.” Although the vocabulary is different, this is in essence what Jesus said on the cross when he said to God, “into your hands I commit my spirit” (Matt. 27:50; Luke 23:46). Jesus would “accept” or “receive”
Stephen’s life in the sense that he would remember it and restore it at the resurrection. In that sense, Stephen’s life would be similar to the treasure we store up in heaven as we live for God (Matt. 6:20). There is no actual “treasure” in heaven being stored for us. Rather, saying that we store up treasures in heaven is a way of saying God remembers what we do and keeps an account, and we will be given treasure at the Judgment. Similarly, Stephen saying “receive my spirit” does not mean his “spirit” goes to the presence of Jesus and lives there. Rather, Stephen is asking Jesus to accept his life and remember it, and give Stephen life again in the resurrection. For more on “spirit” in this sense see the note on Luke 23:46.

7:60. “fell asleep.” Falling asleep or being asleep was a common biblical euphemism and metaphor for death. Note that the text says, “he” fell asleep. It is the person who dies, and he dies in every sense of the word; he is totally dead. The life in his body is gone, and his soul and spirit are both gone, they cease to exist. [For more on the dead being dead and not alive in any form, see Appendix 4: “The Dead are Dead”. For more on “soul” and that soul and spirit can cease to exist, see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

Death is so horrible that we can understand why people use the euphemism and say “asleep” rather than “dead.” Although death is called “sleep,” the metaphor, like all metaphors, is imperfect. There are similarities, which is why “sleep” is used for death, but there are also big differences. We will examine the similarities first.

• Both death and sleep are overpowering forces. We cannot prevent our death, and we cannot help falling asleep when we are tired. Even if we try to force ourselves to stay awake, eventually sleep will overpower us.
• There is no awareness of time in either death or sleep. Time passes and we do not know it. Those who are dead and those who are asleep may have been so for a few minutes, a few hours, a few days, or many years, but they are not aware of the passing of time.
• No productive work can be done when we are dead or asleep. The Bible warns people not to be lazy and sleep instead of getting work done, and the dead do no work either.
• In both death and sleep there is a continuity of the person. We know that when a person falls asleep, he is the same person when he wakes up. The process of sleep did not change him into someone else. Similarly, the person who dies and is resurrected is the same person, which is why after the resurrection we will be repaid for what we did in this life. We see this in Jesus Christ. He was the same person after his resurrection as he was when he was alive on earth, he just had a different body and more capabilities.
• Both death and sleep come to an end. Our death ends when we are resurrected, just as our sleep ends when we wake up.

Now that we have seen the similarities between sleep and death that are the reason death was called “sleep,” we must keep in mind that the metaphor is not totally accurate: death is not sleep. In sleep, the person’s bodily functions continue, and he will wake up on his own when his body is rested. In death, the body, soul, and spirit are all dead. The person cannot wake up on his own but must await the resurrection power of God.

Sometimes people use the phrase “soul sleep.” That was a term that was popularized by John Calvin (1509-1564), who used it in a pejorative way, criticizing the belief. Calvin believed that the soul lived on after a person died. Due to the pejorative
nature of the term “soul sleep,” people who believed the soul ceased to exist when the body died generally referred to their belief in other ways, including “materialism,” “conditional immortality,” and since the 1970’s, “Christian mortalism.” Some of the “greats” of Christianity believed the soul did not live on after a person died, including William Tyndale, John Wycliffe, and Martin Luther.

Not only was the term “soul sleep” pejorative, it is not accurate. The phrase “soul sleep” never occurs in the Bible. It is always the person, the individual, who sleeps, and he is said to be asleep because he is dead—every part of him. It is inaccurate to suggest that only the soul sleeps as if the rest of the person did not. [For more on the fact that when people die they are totally dead and awaiting a resurrection, see Appendix 4: “The Dead are Dead”].

Chapter 8

8:2. “deeply religious.” The Greek is eulabēs (εὐλαβής); see commentary on “godly man” in Acts 10:2.

8:5. “a city.” There is a textual variant that reads “the city,” rather than “a city.” This reading is portrayed by such versions as ESV, NASB, NRSV, KJV, and ASV. In this case “the city of Samaria” would not be referring to the city Samaria itself, because by New Testament times the city no longer went by that name; it had been called Sebaste since the time of Herod the Great (BDAG). All through the NT, Samaria refers to the district and not the town. So the understanding would be “the (main) city of Samaria” (Metzger, Textual Commentary; BDAG; NET translation note), which is how the NET translates the phrase.

We feel, however, that the original reading was most likely “a city” (cp. NIV, HCSB, NJB, YLT). As Kistemaker notes, “the historical context seems to favor a less important city, perhaps Shechem (or Sychar).” Shechem would have been the center of religious activity of Samaria, it is “here the magician Simon would most naturally establish himself” (Lenski). Given the fact that it was most likely not the “main” city of Samaria, and given the problems with the textual witnesses for the reading “the city” (“‘Aleph has the reading ‘Caesarea’ in place of ‘Samaria,’ and B has ‘Paul’ instead of ‘Phillip’ in v.6” [Lenski]), we have rendered the phrase “a city of Samaria.”

8:12. “in the name of Jesus Christ.” This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority. [For more on the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6].

8:15. “receive holy spirit.” A section of Scripture that has caused people to think that someone may receive the holy spirit as a separate event after they are saved is Acts 8:14-17.

Acts 8:14-17 REV
14) Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received [dechomai] the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John,
15) who, when they had come down, prayed for them in order that they might receive [lambanō] holy spirit,
16) for as yet it was fallen upon none of them, they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
17) Then they laid their hands on them, and they received [lambanō] holy spirit.

These verses seem to say that the disciples in Samaria “received” the Word of God but had not received holy spirit. The reason for the confusion is that in most English versions two different Greek words are translated by the same English word, which hides the clearer meaning of the Greek text and causes the whole passage to be misunderstood. The two Greek words that need to be properly understood in the context of the gift of holy spirit are dechomai and lambanō. Both words have a wide range of meaning, and both can mean “receive.” However, there are some important differences. Lambanō has an emphasis on the action taken by the one receiving. Vine’s Dictionary of New Testament Words notes:

“There is a certain distinction between lambanō and dechomai (more pronounced in the earlier, classical use), in that in many instances lambanō suggests a self-prompted taking, whereas dechomai more frequently indicates “a welcoming or an appropriating reception”

“Self-prompted taking” is a key phrase, and in this context it refers to outwardly manifesting the gift of holy spirit that was already born on the inside. It is a sad fact that many Christians do not outwardly manifest holy spirit because they are waiting for God to move them when they should take hold of what God has already given them and use it. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon adds, “...the suggestion of self-prompted taking still adheres to lambanō in many connections ...in distinction from [dechomai being] a receiving of what is offered.”

Studying the uses of lambanō in connection with the gift of holy spirit shows us that when someone “receives” or “takes” the holy spirit, there is often a visible manifestation of it. The record in Acts 8 is a case in point. Under the ministry of Philip, many people in the city of Samaria were saved. This is quite clear because Acts 8:14 says they “had received the word of God.” However, the word “received” (“accepted” NIV) is dechomai. The people of Samaria had accepted the Word of the Lord and were saved, but there was something missing, there was still a “self-prompted taking” that had not occurred. The people were saved, but they had missed doing something, that is, “receiving” the gift of holy spirit into manifestation. However, we need to remember that since the gift of holy spirit can be received in the New Birth without any awareness on the part of the one who is saved, without an outward manifestation, it is completely possible to deny the reality of having inwardly received holy spirit at all.

Peter and John came to Samaria and ministered to the people who were saved and had “received” (dechomai) the gift of holy spirit, and when Peter and John personally ministered to them, then the Samaritans “received” [lambanō] the holy spirit, that is, they actively took the gift of God that was inside them and manifested it outwardly.

When the people of Samaria “received” [lambanō] the holy spirit, something visible in the senses world occurred, because Simon the sorcerer “saw” that the people “received,” and you cannot see when someone gets saved (Acts 8:18). In fact, Simon offered Peter and John money to buy the power to lay hands on people and have them
“receive” [lambanō], outwardly manifest, holy spirit. This record in Acts 8 is similar to what happens in the lives of many Christians today. They are born again under the preaching ministry of one person, but they do not outwardly manifest holy spirit at that time. Then later, after being ministered to by someone else, they go ahead and “receive,” actively take and manifest holy spirit, often by speaking in tongues.

God’s gift of holy spirit is not something a person receives after he is saved. We Christians receive it when we are saved. No one has to earn holy spirit because, like salvation, it is a free gift (Acts 2:38; 10:45), not a reward for good works. We do not earn it, we do not have to pray for it to come into us, and we do not have to be “spiritually qualified” to receive it. It was God’s idea to give it to us as a free gift at the moment we are born again. However, as we have seen, it is possible to have the gift of holy spirit born inside and not “receive” (lambanō) it into manifestation, i.e., outwardly manifest it.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

8:17. “received holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

8:19. “receives holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

8:22. “Therefore, repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.” Cp. F.F. Bruce’s translation: “So repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord that the intent of you your heart may be forgiven” (see also HCSB). The Greek of this phrase has a condition, the sense of which most versions misunderstand entirely. It is often rendered as something like the NIV: “Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart”; or the NASB: “pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.” This gives the impression that God might not forgive Simon, or that it might not be possible for Simon to be forgiven. Neither is true. 1 John 1:9 affirms that “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” There is no question as to if God will forgive. Scripture tells us he is faithful and just to do so. The question lies in whether Simon will perform the prerequisites for forgiveness. As Lenski has written, “The implication of this conditional form is not regarding the Lord’s willingness to remit but in regard to Simon’s contrition and begging as being necessary for enabling the Lord to extend remission. Unless Simon’s heart changes, he himself will prevent the Lord’s remission.” Likewise, Kistemaker writes, “This conditional statement relates not to God’s ability to forgive sin but to Simon’s willingness to repent.” In this case the doubt is not placed on God, but on whether or not Simon will fulfill his part.

Because of the great potential for misunderstanding, we have translated the sense of the conditional phrase, rather than to stick with a more literal rendering, “repent… and pray… if perhaps the intent of your heart will be forgiven you [depending upon whether you fulfill the conditions].”

8:27. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look”).

“worship.” See commentary on Matthew 2:2, “pay him homage.”

8:30. “heard him reading.” It was very common in ancient times to read to oneself out loud. This was due to the fact that the writing was all upper case letters with no punctuation, and not even spaces between the words. All the letters, line after line, were
just in a string. Thus, Isaiah, which the Eunuch was reading, if it were English, would have looked like this:

HEWASLEDLIKEASHEEPTOTHESLAUGHTERANDASALAMMBBEFOREIT
SSHEARERSISSILENTSOHEIDIDNOTOPENHISMOUTH.

Reading out loud helped keep the eye and mind from being confused or losing the place, so as Philip approached the chariot, he could hear the eunuch reading.

8:32, 33. Quoted from Isaiah 53: 7, 8.

8:36. “See.” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

8:37. “And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” This verse is not in the original Greek text. Metzger (Textual Commentary) writes:

Verse 37 is a Western addition…There is no reason why scribes should have omitted the material, if it had originally stood in the text…The formula…was doubtless used by the early church in baptismal ceremonies, and may have been written in the margin of a copy of Acts. Its insertion into the text seems to have been due to the feeling that Philip would not have baptized the Ethiopian without securing a confession of faith, which needed to be expressed in the narrative. Although the earliest known New Testament manuscript that contains the words dates from the sixth century, the tradition of the Ethiopian’s confession of faith in Christ was current as early as the latter part of the second century, for Irenaeus quotes part of it (Against Heresies, III.xii:8). Although the passage does not appear in the late medieval manuscript on which Erasmus chiefly depended for his edition, it stands in the margin of another, from which he inserted it into his text because he “judged that it had been omitted by the carelessness of scribes.”

8:39. “stepped up out of the water.” The words in many versions, “came up out of the water” (HCSB, ESV, NIV, NASB), do not make it clear that the verse is not referring to Philip and the Eunuch breaking the surface of the water of the Jordan, but rather to them walking out of the water and up the bank of the Jordan River after the baptism was completed. The Greek text reads anebēsan ek tou hudatos (ἀνέβησαν ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος), and the word “ek” means “out of,” in the sense that they were getting “out of” the water, not standing in it. The water of the Jordan River was below the level of the bank, so in order to get into the river to perform the baptism, Philip and the Eunuch had to dismount the chariot, and they both “went down [the bank and] into the water” (v. 38). Then, after the baptism, they came up “out of” (ek) the water, which they did by stepping up onto the bank of the Jordan. If Philip and the Eunuch were standing waist deep in water, then they were not “out of” the water, but still in it.

The Greek word anabainō (#305 ἀναβαίνω) means “to go up,” “to come up,” and so saying that Philip and the Eunuch “came up” out of the water is very literal, but is too often misinterpreted to mean that they were both still in the Jordan River, so given the context, saying they “stepped up out of the water,” is a very acceptable translation, especially in light of the fact that it exactly describes what they did. Matthew 3:16 and
Mark 1:10 speak of Jesus stepping up out of the Jordan River after his baptism (see commentary on those verses).

Chapter 9

9:2. “the Way.” This was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, formal designations of the Christian Faith, and it is used in Acts 9:2, 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). Jesus had said he was “the Way,” so a follower of Jesus was a follower of “the Way;” also, since it was common to use the word “way” (the Hebrew word is derek) in the metaphorical sense of a way of life or way of doing things, scholars have postulated that “the Way” may be short for “the Way of Salvation” or “the Way of Life,” but there is no way to confirm that.

9:7. “hearing the sound of the voice.” There are three accounts in the book of Acts of Paul’s encounter with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-8; 22:6-10; 16:13-18). As they are translated in most English versions, the two accounts of Paul’s conversion in Acts 9 and Acts 22 contradict each other, because Acts 9:7 says the men with Paul heard the voice, but Acts 22:9 says they did not hear the voice. However, there is no contradiction between the two accounts, instead an apparent contradiction has been caused by not properly understanding and translating the Greek text. The Greek word akouo (#191 ἀκοοω) has a large semantic range, and can refer to both “hearing” a noise and also to “understanding” what one has heard.

Akouo can mean simply hearing the sound of something, as it does in Matthew 11:5, “the deaf hear.” This is how akouo is used in Acts 9:7; the men with Paul heard a sound. Akouo can also mean “understand,” as it does in 1 Corinthians 14:2, “For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God, for no man understands.” From reading and comparing the records in Acts 9 and 22, we discover that although the men with Paul “heard” something (Acts 9:7), they did not “understand” what they heard (Acts 22:9). Since the English translators translated akouo as “understand” in Corinthians, they knew it could mean “understand,” and had they translated it that way in Acts 22:9, English readers would not have to sort out the apparent contradiction the translators created. The truth of the situation would be readily apparent. The men with Paul “heard” something, but did not “understand” what was said.

It might be helpful for us to know that the semantic range of akouo is wider than just “hear” and “understand.” It can mean “learn” about something (cp. Matt. 14:13, “Now when Jesus heard it [that John had been executed], he withdrew from there”). It can mean to pay close attention to (cp. Matthew 17:5, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear him”). Furthermore, akouo is sometimes used as a legal technical term for hearing in a judicial sense so as to be able to pass judgment (cp. Acts 25:22, “And Agrippa said to Festus, ‘I would also like to hear the man myself.’ ‘Tomorrow,’ he said, ‘you will hear him.’”).

9:10. “certain disciple.” The Greek is tis mathetes (τις μαθητης), “someone, a disciple;” or “a certain disciple.” The Word is making a very important point here. The Lord Jesus appeared in a vision to Ananias even though Ananias did not have any particular qualification to receive that blessing other than being a faithful Christian, a “disciple.” He was not an apostle, nor did he have one of the other equipping ministries of Ephesians 4:11. Furthermore, he was apparently not the local leader in Damascus, he was “a certain
disciple.” This should be great encouragement to every Christian, because this is an example of the Word teaching us how the Lord works with people and what we can expect from him. The Bible says we are to have “fellowship” with Jesus, (1 John 1:3), and that means we should communicate to him and expect him to communicate with us, just as we expect that out of anyone else with whom we have fellowship [For more on our fellowship with Christ, see commentary on 1 John 1:3].

One of the great lessons we should learn from this record of Ananias is how intimate and “natural” his relationship was with Jesus Christ. When Ananias saw Jesus and heard him calling his name, he spoke to him respectfully, but like he would to a friend. He simply said, “See, I am here, Lord.” He did not fall down, faint, or become overcome by excitement or anxiety. Ananias’ conversation with Jesus was normal, casual, and comfortable. And that was the case even though what Jesus asked Ananias to do caught Ananias off guard. Jesus told Ananias what to do (9:11, 12); then Ananias questioned the Lord about the situation (9:13, 14); then Jesus reaffirmed his instructions (9:15, 16); then Ananias obeyed (9:17ff).

This record of Ananias factors in to what we should understand about fellowship with Jesus and praying to Jesus. Ananias must have had a close relation to Jesus to feel so comfortable talking directly to him. Some people who say we cannot pray to Jesus have dealt with this record by saying that since Jesus appeared to Ananias first, then Ananias could talk with him directly. But Jesus told us he is with us all the time (Matt. 28:20), and that is true whether we actually see him or not. The fact that he is with us means we can openly communicate with him.

“and in a vision the Lord said.” This phrase needs explaining because it is not immediately clear how the Lord “said” something in a “vision.” The answer is that the Lord Jesus appeared in a vision to Ananias, and in that vision the Lord spoke. This is a familiar scene to those who read the whole Bible, because similar visions are recorded a number of times from Genesis onward.

In order to be intimate with His creation and fellowship with us, God sometimes appeared to people in human form. In fact, Scripture records a number of people to whom God appeared: Abraham is one such person, and the fact that Yahweh had appeared in human form to Abraham several times earlier explains how Abraham knew the “man” who approached his camp in Genesis 18:1 was Yahweh—Abraham recognized him the same way we recognize people whom we have met before (Gen. 12:7; 15:1; 17:1; 18:1). God also appeared to Jacob (Gen. 28:13), Moses and the elders of Israel (Exod. 24:9-11), Samuel (1 Sam. 3:10), Solomon (two times: 1 Kings 3:5; 9:2; 11:5), Micaiah (1 Kings 22:19-22), Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-5), Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:26-28), Amos (Amos 7:7), Daniel (Dan. 7:9-14), Stephen (Acts 7:56) and the Apostle John (Rev. 5:1-8). In contrast to many great men and women of God who saw God in a visible form, Jesus upbraided the unbelieving Jews who thought they knew God so well, saying to them: “You have never heard his voice at any time, nor seen his form” (John 5:37). (It is not well known among Christians that God Himself appears to people in human form, so for more on that, see commentary on Acts 7:55).

There are times when God or Jesus “appear” to people and times when they “appear in a vision.” The difference is that if God or Jesus are really present, then other people could see them too, but if it is a vision, even though they can be plainly seen by the one having the vision, no one else could see them. Thus, Stephen saw a vision of God

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and Jesus (Acts 7:55), because although he could clearly see them, no one else could. In Genesis 15:1, “the word of Yahweh came to Abram in a vision,” that is to say, Abram received instruction from Yahweh, who appeared to him in a vision. In Acts 10:3, an angel appeared to Cornelius in a vision and spoke to him. In Acts 16:9 a man from Macedonia appeared to Paul in a vision and spoke to him. In Acts 18:9 the Lord Jesus appeared to Paul in a vision. Here in Acts 9:10, the Lord Jesus appeared to Ananias in a vision and spoke to him.

“See.” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

9:11. “Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

9:14. “call upon your name.” This phrase refers to prayer, and here people in Damascus were praying to Jesus. [For more on “call upon” the name of, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:2; for more on prayer to Jesus, see commentary on John 14:14].

9:17. “filled with holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

9:28. “going in and going out.” This phrase is both an idiom and the figure of speech *polarmerismos*. Polarmerismos occurs when two extremes are put for what happens between them, thus indicating a totality. A polarmerismos in English is, “That is the long and short of it,” meaning that is all there is to the situation. A polarmerismos in the Bible occurs in Genesis 1: “And there was evening, and there was morning.” The evening and morning are put for the whole day. In the case of “going in and going out,” the reference is an idiom and primarily refers to the daily life of going in to one’s house, and out of it, in other words, living all of daily life. Solomon used almost the exact words when he became king. He prayed, “And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in” (1 Kings 3:7, KJV). Solomon said to God he was not confident as a king, he did not know how to live his life in front of the people, but God stepped in and gave him great wisdom. Here is Acts, the verse is saying that Paul lived daily life with the apostles; he went in and out with them.

9:31. “encouragement of the holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

9:38. “Lydda was close to Joppa.” Joppa is 9-10 miles (14.5-16 km) northwest of Lydda, and could have been easily reached in a 3-4 hour walk.

“sent two men.” Although the record in the Bible seems to indicate that Dorcas was already dead, she may have not be dead when they left, but only really sick and failing fast. This is indicated by the fact that they said, “Do not delay.” Of course, it is possible that she was dead, and the men wanted Peter to have an opportunity to raise her before she was buried, which would have happened by nightfall. It seems the disciples would have had more confidence that Peter could heal her than raise her from the dead, since there is no record Peter had raised anyone else from the dead before Dorcas.

“Do not delay.” A litotes (meiosis), in this case a nice way to say, “Hurry up.”
Chapter 10

10:2. “godly man.” The word comes from eusebes (#2152 εὐσεβής), which emphasizes the outward actions of one’s devotion. It can be contrasted with eulabes (#2126 εὐλαβής), a similar word that denotes one’s inward attitude of reverence and devotion to God. Vine writes, “While eulabes especially suggests the piety which characterizes the inner being, the soul, in its attitude towards God, eusebes directs us rather to the energy which, directed by holy awe of God, finds expression in devoted activity.” Bullinger points out that eulabes is more about the “avoidance through godly fear of doing anything contrary to right,” than performing one’s devotion in deeds; thus it concerns the type of person one is. On the other hand, he writes that eusebes is “reverence for God which shows itself in actions, practical piety of every kind.”

“a God-fearer.” This means that Cornelius was what the Jews referred to as a “proselyte of the gate.” The Jews had two different categories of proselytes: “proselytes of righteousness” and “proselytes of the gate.” A “proselyte of righteousness” was someone who became circumcised and fully kept the Law. Except for their non-Jewish heritage, they were considered fully Jews. These are apparently the proselytes mentioned in Acts 2:10. In contrast, a “proselyte of the gate,” also known as a “God-fearer,” was a Gentile who did not get circumcised, and these proselytes were restricted in their worship. They were called, “proselytes of the gate” because although they kept much of the Law, they were still thought of as Gentiles, and so when they were in the Temple in Jerusalem, they could not enter the Temple area restricted to Jews, but had to remain in the court of the Gentiles. According to Acts 10:2, Cornelius and all his household were God-fearers. However, when he gathered his family and friends to meet with Peter, we do not know if the entire group were God-fearers as his family was. God-fearers are also mentioned in Acts 13:16, 26.

10:3. “ninth hour.” This is roughly our 3 PM. Acts 3:1 tells us it was an hour of prayer (see commentary on Acts 3:1).


10:9. “sixth hour.” This is roughly our 12 noon. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].

10:10. “a state of suspended consciousness.” One of the definitions of ekstasis is a “state of suspended consciousness.” Most versions say “trance.” The word “trance” is correct in some contexts, but not in this one. There are many reasons for suspended states of consciousness, but the two we are concerned with as students of Scripture are those caused by God or the Lord Jesus when they give a person an experience by revelation, and the kind caused by demons, which we refer to as a “trance.” When God or the Lord Jesus give such a profound and inclusive revelation that a person’s conscious experience of the other things happening around him are suspended, the person still maintains control of themselves, is aware of what is happening, like Peter can participate in the experience by talking, etc., and will remember what has occurred. In contrast, a demonically produced trance is a type of suspended consciousness, but the person is usually not in control of himself, and frequently has no memory of what happened, including any actions he took while in the trance.
10:13. “Kill.” The word is from the Greek word thuo (#2380 θύω), meaning “to sacrifice.” It is used to refer both to the Pascal Lamb (Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7) and pagan sacrifice (Acts 14:13, 18; 1 Cor. 10:20). The same word can describe “pure” and “impure” religious sacrifice. Nevertheless, the Jews had very strict rules as to which animals were clean and able to be offered as sacrifice, and which animals were unclean and thus unfit for sacrifice. It is also helpful to remember that many of the animals that were sacrificed were eaten by the people in part, or in whole. The Lord is making a point in a way that would be very powerful to Peter, a first century Jew. By telling Peter to kill as a sacrifice and eat these unclean animals, Jesus was showing Peter that even things that had been considered unclean were acceptable to God; even though he had felt they were unfit for religious use, the Lord was showing he had made them clean.

10:14. “Lord.” This refers to the Lord Jesus, not the Lord God. Peter was in the habit of dialoging with Jesus, and referring to him as Lord, which in part explains the tenor of the conversation, and Peter’s willingness to argue, i.e., ‘Surely not, Lord,….” It is difficult to imagine Peter arguing with God in that manner. Further, verse 19 say “the Spirit said…,” which would be Jesus Christ. See commentary on Romans 8:26.

10:17. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

10:19. “the Spirit.” In this case “the Spirit” refers to Jesus. Peter spoke frankly with him just as he had when Jesus lived among the apostles. Here the Bible refers to Jesus as “the Spirit” as it does in many other places after the resurrection. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.


“bowed down before him.” See commentary note on Matthew 2:2.

10:30. “ninth hour.” This is about our 3 PM. Both the Jews and Romans divided the day into 12 hours, starting at daylight, roughly 6 AM. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].

“Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

10:36. “who is.” The Greek is more literally, “this one is Lord of all,” but it is awkward at the end of a written statement. Some versions put it in parenthesis, but that is confusing and leaves us to wonder if it was Peter’s statement or Luke’s commentary. It clearly seems to be Peter’s statement to the Gentiles about Jesus being Lord of all, and beginning.
with the “who” and ending with an exclamation point brings out the emphasis (cp. Stearns, Complete Jewish Bible).

10:38. “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with holy spirit.” Jesus’ being anointed with the holy spirit is after his baptism by John. For the complete record, see commentary on Matthew 3:16. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

“the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

10:39. “Tree.” The Greek word is xulon (#3586 ξύλον pronounced zoo’-lon) and it means a tree, log, a piece of timber (1 Cor. 3:12), a piece of wood (Rev. 18:12), or something made from wood such as a beam, a cross, a club (Mark 14:48), or even the stocks that Paul’s feet were placed in (Acts 16:24). However, xulon can mean “tree,” and Peter was making a point to the Gentiles that the religious leaders had taken the Messiah and hanged him on a “tree” as if he was accursed of God (see commentary on Acts 5:30, “tree”).


10:44. “the holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

10:45. “the gift of holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God, poured out on the Day of Pentecost. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

10:46. “speaking in tongues.” For a much fuller explanation of speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:5.

10:47. “received the holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

10:48. “in the name of Jesus Christ.” This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority. [For more on the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6].

Chapter 11

11:2. “those who were of the circumcision.” Peter was criticized by the Apostles and elders, who were Jewish Christians. There is an element of euphemism in the phrase, because the ones who would feel free to criticize Peter were his peers, who would include those who had been the Apostles with him, likely including John and James (James was shortly martyred in Jerusalem; Acts 12:2). In fact, when 11:17 says “he [Jesus] also gave
to us when we believed,” the text could well indicate some of the original Apostles who spoke in tongues on the Day of Pentecost.


**Acts 11:11.** “Look!” The Greek word is idou (ιδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

**Acts 11:15.** “the holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

**Acts 11:16.** “how he used to say.” A more literal rendition of the Greek would be, “how he was saying,” using the perfect tense, active voice of the verb. We might idiomatically say something like, “he was always saying….” The NASB does the same thing we do in this verse.

“baptized in holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

**Acts 11:17.** “I, who was I.” There is a double use of I here. Lenski notes that there are two questions fused into one: “Who was I” and “Was I able.” (cp. Robertson; *Word Pictures in the New Testament*). Peter aggressively defends his actions to the Jews, as well he should. However, his humanity shows through later when he gives in to pressure from the Jews about eating with Gentiles (Gal. 2:11).


**Acts 11:23.** “the purposes of their hearts.” The Greek word translated “purposes’ is prothesis (πρόθεσις), and here means, that which is planned or purposed in advance. The heart can have plans or purposes, things it plans for the future.

**Acts 11:24.** “full of holy spirit and trust.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].


**Acts 11:26.** “called.” The Greek word is chrematizō (χρηματίζω), and it meant “to transact business,” or “to transact business under the name of,” thus, go under the name of or simply “to be called.”

“Christians.” According to the chronology in Acts, the name “Christian” was coined in either 43 or 44 AD, 16 or 17 years after the crucifixion (given a 28 AD crucifixion). The name would have been coined by the Greeks, because the Jews would never have given the people whom they thought were heretics a name that meant a follower of their Messiah—they thought the Christians were deceived and deceivers.

It is unknown whether the name “Christian” was given to the believers by the unbelieving Greeks or if the believers called themselves Christians to identify themselves, but it seems more likely that since they had been already known as disciples or followers of “the Way” (cp. Acts 9:2), that the term “Christian” was given to them by unbelieving Greeks who wanted an easy way to identify them. Much has been written on the grammatical form of the Greek and Latin words for “Christian,” but the basic meaning is “follower of Christ.”

Since the term “Christian” was coined by Greeks in Antioch of Syria in 43 or 44 AD, Jesus never called himself a Christian, neither did the early Apostles and disciples.

It is not known how quickly the name “Christian” spread, but it did spread. It is only used three times in the New Testament, but all three are significant. The first use tells us how the term came into existence. The second use is by Herod Agrippa II, great
grandson of Herod the Great and the man appointed by the Romans to be the ruler of territory in northern Israel (Acts 26:28). Herod Agrippa II may have more or less passed himself off as a Jew, but he was living in incest with his sister Bernice, and their relationship was part of the society gossip even back in Rome. The fact that Agrippa would use the term “Christian” in his dialogue with Paul indicates that it was a clear descriptor for those people who believed in Jesus and followed a specific set of beliefs. Agrippa said, “You are trying to persuade me to become a Christian,” and by that he meant all that “Christian” stood for. He did not say, “You are trying to get me to believe Jesus was raised from the dead,” which is a vital part of Christianity, but not all there was to “Christianity” even at that time.

The third and last time “Christian” appears in the Bible is in the first epistle of Peter. Peter wrote to the Jewish Christians scattered throughout the area we know as Turkey today (1 Peter 1:1). The fact that Peter used the term “Christian” when writing to the Jewish Christians shows that they had wholeheartedly accepted Jesus as the Messiah, and also were well known to be distinct from the Jews who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. The way Peter used “Christian,” in the phrase “if a person suffers as a Christian,” shows that the term Christian was well-known and Christians were known to suffer persecution.

We do not know why Paul did not use the term “Christian in any of his writings. Perhaps because he was trying to win Jews to Christ, he did not want to immediately alienate them by referring to himself by a term they would likely find offensive. It is also possible that if it was of pagan origin that he felt it best not to use the term.

The term “Christian” was generally known by the time of Josephus (Antiquities, xviii. 3.3) because he uses it without much description, and shortly thereafter it was used by Pliny the Younger, Tacitus, and Suetonius. Since we have these widespread surviving references to the name, with the understanding that the people who read them would know what “Christian” means, we can assume that at least by the end of the first century and early in the second, people knew who a “Christian” was. Actually, it was likely that during the persecution started by Nero that the term “Christian” came to widespread notice.

Nero did something that no emperor had done before him—he made a religion illegal. There had been occasions in Roman history when the practitioners of a given religion got out of the bounds of decency and certain religious practices were outlawed. There were other times when the religious practitioners of a certain location became rebellious and were executed, as happened when the Jews in Jerusalem rebelled against Rome, and Rome responded by killing those Jews and burning their temple, but Rome did not also make Judaism illegal—it was based on the worship of a god. It was always assumed that religion was based on the existence of a god or goddess, so you could not make the belief system itself illegal. In contradiction to that logic, Nero made the belief in Christ as Messiah illegal, and all practices and worship associated with belief in Christ illegal too. That act no doubt caught the attention of the average Roman—it certainly did with the various Roman senators, prefects, procurators, governors, etc., who had to carry out Nero’s orders. By Nero’s time, or in Nero’s time, the common people knew the term “Christian.” The term “Christian” had been coined at least 20 years earlier (coined in 43 or 44, the fire of Rome was in 64), and the Roman historian Tacitus (c. 56 – c. 120) wrote: about Nero’s torture of “people hated for their shameful offenses, whom the
common people called ‘Christians.’” So by the time of Nero’s persecution the common people referred to followers of the Way as “Christians.”

At this point it is helpful to understand why Christian were considered so hateful. Of course there were many lies and exaggerations being told about them, but also the Christians were a new group, and new groups were always held under suspicion. Beyond that, however, they would not participate in, or spoke out against, many of the Greco-Roman customs, such as the gladiator games, drinking bouts, and orgies and the common sexual customs of prostitution, homosexuality, having sex with one’s slaves, etc. Also, they refused to sacrifice to the Emperor of the gods. This was very offensive, because the Romans were very superstitious and believed that without the favor of the gods there would be famine, plagues, defeat in battle, and all sorts of horrible consequences. Since the favor of the gods was essential to national well-being, any group that refused to honor the gods was considered unsociable and dangerous to Rome. Thus the Christians were held in suspicion and hated for their beliefs and practices (the Jews were also disliked by the Romans for many of the same reasons, but there were mitigating factors. First, Judaism was an ancient religion, and thus gained respect on that account. Also, they had a Temple, priests, sacrifices, and things that the average Roman could identify with. Lastly, many Jews did not practice their religion and went to the games, the theater, etc., and thus assuaged the fears of the Romans.

The one problem with the word “Christian” being in the Bible is that there is a danger of historic anachronism if people think a first century Christian believed what a modern Christian did. The “Christians” at the time of Paul did not have big churches (they were persecuted and usually met secretly or at least quietly in houses or other places), their worship and beliefs had not been diluted or changed by thousands of years of “orthodoxy,” so, for example, they did not believe in the Trinity, or transubstantiation, or that Jesus was born on December 25th, etc. The Bible was not even completed when many of them lived, so they focused on good works and turning from evil practices like idolatry and sexual immorality, and they focused on Jesus Christ being raised from the dead.

Chapter 12

12:1. “Herod Agrippa.” “Herod Agrippa I” (reigned 37-44 AD) was the grandson of Herod the Great (the Herod who tried to kill Jesus as a baby). He was the son of Aristobulus (the Son of Herod the Great and Mariamne) and Berenice (daughter of Herod’s sister Salome and Costobarus). Herod Agrippa was born in 10 BC, and died in 44 AD. The Roman emperor Caligula liked him and gave him the region of Philip the tetrarch, and the territory of Lysanius, and gave him the title “king.” He eventually gained the territory of Herod Antipas (who imprisoned and executed John the Baptist) as well. The emperor Claudius added Judea and Samaria to Agrippa’s domain, so he ended up with the territory of his grandfather, Herod the Great.

12:2. “James.” This is the Apostle James, who was the brother of the Apostle John (Matt. 10:2). This was a huge loss to the Church. James was not just one of the Twelve Apostles; he was one of the three who were closest to Jesus. Jesus often took Peter, James, and John to places that he did not take the other apostles. For example, only Peter,
James, and John went with Jesus to the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1); only those three were with Jesus when he raised the synagogue leader’s daughter from the dead (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51); and he took those three away with him to pray on the night of his arrest (Mark 14:33). James is mentioned with Peter, John, and Andrew as being in Jerusalem before Pentecost.

Only after the Apostle James is killed is James the Lord’s brother mentioned as an elder in the Church (see commentary on Acts 12:17).

12:3. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

12:7. “look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἴδοù), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

12:17. “James.” This is James the Lord’s brother. This is the first time he is mentioned as a leader in the Church. The Apostle James had been killed by Herod (see commentary on Acts 12:2). James was leading the church at Jerusalem by Acts 15:13. It is worth noting that it is almost certain that James did not believe that his half-brother Jesus was the Messiah until sometime after the resurrection. He did not believe in Jesus as late as the Feast of Tabernacles, less than a year before Jesus’ death (John 7:5). Furthermore, the evidence is that when Jesus was dying on the cross, James still did not believe, which is why Jesus told John to take care of Jesus’ mother Mary (John 19:27). The first time we see James with the believers is in Acts 1:14, when James is with his mother Mary and the other disciples in Jerusalem in the days before Pentecost. It is generally believed that James and the other brothers of Jesus saw him after his resurrection when he went to Galilee, and believed at that time.

It is generally believed that by Acts 12:17, the persecution against the Church was so heavy that the original apostles could not stay in Jerusalem and so James was leading the church there, which is why Peter told the disciples to tell James he had gotten out of prison (Acts 12:17).

It seems that James did not have the heart to move forward with the revelation that his half-brother Jesus was giving from heaven. While Jesus was giving wonderful revelation to the Apostle Paul about the Church and there being neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ, James was still pressing Christians to keep the Law (Acts 21:20). For more on James and the Church, see commentary on Galatians 2:2.

**Chapter 13**

13:2. “the Holy Spirit.” We have punctuated this like it refers to God, which is does. However, built into the vocabulary is that it may also be referring to God’s gift of holy spirit. The early Greek texts did not have lower case letters, and so the meaning of the phrase, “THE HOLY SPIRIT” needed to be determined by the context. In this case, God is clearly directing His church by speaking to them via His gift of holy spirit, so in a sense both meanings are built into one phrase. [For more information on this kind of construction, see commentary on Acts 16:6. For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].
Acts 13:4. “the Holy Spirit.” This meaning is derived primarily from “the Holy Spirit” in verse 2, which we felt primarily refers to God. [For more information see commentary on Acts 13:2]. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

“Seleucia.” This is Seleucia Pieria, which served as a sea port of Antioch about 16 miles (26 km) further upstream, at the mouth of the Orantes River.

13:9. “filled with holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

13:10. “the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

13:11. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδοὺ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“the hand of the Lord.” This is common idiom for the power of the Lord.

13:12. “teaching about the Lord.” A very good example of a genitive of relation, well translated as “the teaching about the Lord” (NIV).

13:16. “Gentiles who are God-fearers.” The Jewish religion had much that was attractive about it. In contrast to the religion of the Greeks, Romans, and pagan, which was generally cruel and cold and did not have any kind of “manual” from the gods that told people how to live, the Jews had a “manual,” a book of clear do’s and don’ts (the Old Testament), and their religion was full of mercy and goodness. Thus there was a great interest in Judaism among the Greeks and Romans, some of whom became full proselytes (the men got circumcised) and some of whom were called “God-fearers.”

A “God-fearer,” also known as a “proselyte of the gate,” was a Gentile who followed the Law but did not get circumcised, and so God-fearers were restricted in their worship. They were called, “proselytes of the gate” because although they kept much of the Law, they were still thought of as Gentiles, and thus when they were in the Temple in Jerusalem, they could not enter the Temple area restricted to Jews, but had to remain in the court of the Gentiles (see commentary on Acts 10:2). It shows how much Paul wanted everyone to believe in Christ that when he went into the synagogue to teach, he spoke directly to everyone there, both the Jews and the God-fearers, who were still thought of as Gentiles.


13:25. “take notice!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδοὺ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

13:26. “Gentiles who are God-fearers.” A “God-fearer,” also known as a “proselyte of the gate,” was a Gentile who followed the Law but did not get circumcised, and so these proselytes were restricted in their worship. See commentary on Acts 13:16 and Acts 10:2.

13:29. “Tree.” The Greek word is xulon (#3586 ξύλον pronounced zoo'-lon) and it means a tree, log, a piece of timber (1 Cor. 3:12), a piece of wood (Rev. 18:12), or something made from wood such as a beam, a cross, a club (Mark 14:48), or even the stocks that Paul’s feet were placed in (Acts 16:24). However, xulon can mean “tree,” and Paul was
making the point that the religious leaders had taken the Messiah and hanged him on a “tree” as if he was accursed of God (see commentary on Acts 5:30, “tree”).

13:30. “out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among those who are dead.”

13:33. Quoted from Psalm 2:7. Psalm 2:7 is also quoted in Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5.

“Today I have become your Father.” The Greek for “have become your Father” is γεννάω (γεννάω) and Friberg correctly notes that when it is used of men, it means to become the father of; and when used of women it means to give birth to (Friberg, Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament).

The understanding of this verse is debated by scholars, but the context seems to make the meaning quite clear. Although there are some very competent scholars (cp. Fitzmyer; Haenchen; Meyer; etc.), who believe that anistemi (“raised up”) refers to the resurrection of Christ, there are also some very competent scholars (cp. Lenski; F. F. Bruce), who believe that in verse 33 the word anistemi (ἀνίστημι), “raised,” does not refer to Jesus’ resurrection, but his birth. We think it is clear that the word anistemi refers to the resurrection in verse 33 as well as 34.

It is true that anistemi is a very general term for rising up, getting up, put up (a building), and appearing in history (“there arose another Pharaoh”). However, many things militate against it being used for Jesus’ physical birth in this verse. First, the next verse (Acts 13:34) uses anistemi of the resurrection of Christ (“raised [anistemi] him out from among the dead”), and it seems unlikely that two uses of anistemi in such close conjunction would refer to two different events.

Second, if 13:33 were about Jesus’ birth, it would be out of place in Paul’s teaching. Paul was teaching the people of Antioch about Jesus. In 13:27 he spoke of the trial and condemnation of Christ; then in 13:28 he spoke of Jesus’ being put to death; then in 13:29 he said Jesus was placed in a tomb; then in 13:30 he said God raised Jesus from the dead; then in verse 31 he said Jesus appeared to many people who are now witnesses; then in 13:32 and 33 he said God had fulfilled his promises by “raising up” Jesus. It seems that if Paul wanted to make the point that it was the birth of Christ that fulfilled the promises, he would not have presented the facts about Jesus the way he did, nor mention the birth of Christ between verses about his resurrection (13:30 and 13:34). People who say 13:33 is about the birth of Christ are forced to say that Paul started his argument over again, but this seems like a weak argument, especially since Paul never mentioned Jesus’ birth earlier, but started with his arrest and condemnation.

Third, the New Testament never uses anistemi of anyone’s birth, but uses it 25 times for Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, and many other times for other people, such as Lazarus, being raised from the dead. This is strong evidence that anistemi is used for the resurrection in 13:33.

Fourth, Acts 13:33 says God has “fulfilled” His promises “by raising up Jesus.” Even in the context it is clear that Jesus’ birth did not “fulfill” the promises made to Israel. One of the promises was that Jesus would be condemned so that he would die for the sins of all people, and that promise was “fulfilled” when the religious leaders in Jerusalem condemned him, as Paul told the people in 13:27. Meyer writes: “By this resurrection of Jesus, God has completely fulfilled to the promise” [Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament. Emphasis his]. It was Jesus’ resurrection from the dead that “fulfilled” the promises to Israel, not his birth.
We must not be confused by thinking that “become your Father” in this context has to refer to Jesus’ birth. It is clear in Psalm 2 that God is not only speaking with Jesus, but that he was established as king (Ps. 2:6). The word “today” in the quotation from Psalm 2 helps us understand the figurative use of “have become your Father.” If Jesus is reigning as king when God says, “Today I have become your Father,” then “have become your Father” is not speaking of the day of Jesus’ birth. Meyer writes that “have become your Father” here means, “installed Thee into this divine Sonship by the resurrection, Romans 1:4, – inasmuch as the resurrection was the actual guarantee, excluding all doubt, of that Sonship of Christ.” Bengel agrees and says the phrase, “Today I have become your Father,” in this context means: “This day I have definitely declared that Thou art my Son” (Bengel’s New Testament Commentary). On the day of Jesus’ resurrection, God did not literally become Jesus’ Father, but He did from the standpoint that because of Jesus’ resurrection, God’s being the Father of Jesus could no longer be logically doubted, nor could Jesus’ authority as the Son of God be denied. From the people’s perspective, it was the resurrection that declared beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was the Son of God.

“by raising up Jesus.” In the Greek text, anistemi (#450 ἀνίστημι; “raise, raise up”) is a participle, and this is the instrumental use of the participle, thus, “by raising up” (cp. HCSB; ESV; NAB; NET; NIV).

13:34. Quoted from Isaiah 55:3. “out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “up from among those who are dead.”

13:35. Quoted from Psalm 16:10.

13:36. “sleep.” The Greek verb is koimaō (#2837 κοιμάω), to fall asleep, to be asleep. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.

13:41. Quoted from Habbakuk 1:5.

13:43. “God-fearing.” The Greek is sebomai (#4576 σέβομαι). In the New Testament sebomai is always used of worship or veneration of a god or deity, but in the Greek literature it is also used of veneration or respect of a person. It has two distinct meanings in the New Testament: the basic meaning in the Greek literature—and the one that occurs in Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7; Acts 18:13; and Acts 19:12—is “worship; venerate.” However, the Rabbis used the word in a specific sense, usually to indicate a Gentile who worshipped the God of Israel, but usually without becoming circumcised and thus becoming a full-fledged proselyte, and that use of the word spread throughout the Biblical world, even appearing in the New Testament. Robertson says the word sebomai was used “of the uncircumcised Gentiles who yet attended the synagogue worship…the rabbis used it also of proselytes of the gate who had not yet become circumcised” (Robertson; Word Pictures in the New Testament). “God-fearers, worshipers of God is a term applied to former polytheists who accepted the ethical monotheism of Israel and attended the synagogue, but who did not obligate themselves to keep the whole Mosaic law; in particular, the males did not submit to circumcision (Jos., Ant. 14, 110)” (BDAG). These “God-fearers,” or “God-fearing Gentiles,” are mentioned six times in the book of Acts (Acts 13:43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7), and often their connection with the Jews in the synagogue shows up in the context. For example, in Acts 13:43, these God-fearing people obviously heard Paul speak in the synagogue, and followed him after the service ended. In Acts 13:50 the Jews agitated the God-fearing women. The Jews had significant
influence over those particular women because they were the ones who worshipped in the synagogue. In Acts 16, Lydia, a seller of purple cloth, was worshipping outside the city of Philippi (which did not have a synagogue), and was open to Paul’s teaching about the Messiah, because she herself was already a God-fearing Gentile (Acts 16:14). At Thessalonica, Paul went into the synagogue and taught. Quite a few people believed, not only among the Jews, but of the God-fearing Gentiles as well, who were in the synagogue and heard Paul teach (Acts 17:1-4). In Athens, Paul went into the synagogue and talked with “the Jews and God-fearing Greeks” (Acts 17:17). In Corinth, Paul went into the house of Titus Justice, a God-fearing Gentile whose house was right next to the synagogue ( Acts 18:7). Once we know that the “God-fearing” Gentiles were not just “devout” as some versions say, but were actually committed to the God of Israel, we can better understand the verses that mention them. It would be possible for a Gentile to be “devout” to pagan gods without having any relationship to the God of Israel; however, that is clearly not the case with these Gentiles who were devoted to Yahweh.

13:45. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

“speaking defaming words.” Greek verb is blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημεω; pronounced blas-fay-meh'-ō). The Jews contradicted Paul, “blaspheming.” Blaspheming is a general word that means to defame someone, to hurt someone’s reputation (see commentary on Matt. 9:3). Although some versions say “insulting him” or “reviling him” (i.e. Paul), that is not in the text and is an assumption. Paul was preaching Christ, who the Jews took to be an impostor and now a dead criminal, so in the general use of “spoke defaming words,” we should realize that they were defaming, trying to destroy the reputation of, both Paul and Christ.

13:46. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.

“look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).


13:48. “as many as appointed themselves to life in the Age.” It is very important to properly understand this phrase. The verb is tasso (#5021 τάσσω), and the form of the verb in this verse can be either middle voice or passive voice (cp. Lenski; and Expositor’s Greek Testament; although the lexicons say it is passive, but note Friberg).

The verb tasso means, “to place in a certain order,…to arrange, to assign a place, to appoint...to consecrate (R. V. set) oneself to minister unto one, 1 Cor. 16:15...Middle [voice] (as often in Greek writings) properly, to appoint on one’s own responsibility or authority,” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon).

This verse is a great example of the importance of utilizing the scope of Scripture to help translate and understand a word. The translation and interpretation of the verse depends on whether the verb tasso is in the passive or middle voice. But in this case, both forms are the same, so that determination cannot be made from the Greek text itself, but from the context and scope of Scripture.

If the verb is in the passive voice in this verse, then versions such as the NASB properly represent the text: “and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed”
Of course, the theology that usually develops from that rendering is that God chooses, or “appoints,” who will be saved and who will not. This is clearly expressed in the NLT (New Living Translation), which reads, “and all who were chosen for eternal life became believers.” This is exactly what those who follow the theology set forth by Augustine, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards, teach, and it is the formal theology of denominations such as the Roman Catholics and Presbyterians. It also is the reason why denominations such as the Roman Catholics and Presbyterians do not have altar calls for salvation as a part of their church services. Their official doctrine is that people do not have the ability or power to decide whether to be saved or not. They assert that salvation God’s choice, not the individual’s, so any altar call would be pointless.

There are commentators who do not see the need to draw that conclusion, however, even though they take the verb to be in the passive voice: “There is no countenance here for the absolutum decretum [absolute decree] of the Calvinists, since ver. 46 had already shown that the Jews had acted through their own choice. …the Jews as a nation had been ordained to eternal life—they had rejected this election” (Expositor’s Greek Testament). In this theology, being “ordained” or “appointed” to everlasting life does not mean one has to accept the ordination. This is more correct than believing God only appoints some people to everlasting life, and all those who are appointed believe. However, on a practical note it seems to miss the point. First, because actually God appoints everyone to everlasting life. It is quite unthinkable that God would want all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), but then only appoint some to everlasting life. But if all who were appointed to life believed, all those present to hear Paul, both Jews and Greeks, would have believed. Secondly, if the verb is read as a passive, then the verse does in fact say that all those who were “appointed” to everlasting life believed, as if some were appointed and some were not. Yet it is clear from the scope of Scripture that God wants all people to be saved, but only some accept the invitation.

We assert that in this verse, the verb tasso is in the middle voice, and thus the meaning is reflexive. It is we humans who respond to God’s call and believe unto salvation. God’s desire is that all people would be saved, but only some will “appoint themselves” to everlasting life by answering the call. Many commentaries note that the context (v. 46) shows that the Jews “judged themselves” unworthy of life. We agree, and point out that in contrast to those Jews, the Gentiles “appointed themselves” to life in the Age to come. “The meaning of this word [tasso] must be determined by the context. The Jews had judged themselves unworthy of eternal life; the Gentiles, as many as were disposed to eternal life, believed” (Alford, The Greek Testament, cp. the translation, “as many as had set themselves for eternal life,” New International Biblical Commentary).

No doubt some people will take exception to our translation, “appoint themselves,” but we feel it is a good representation of both the Greek text and the scope of Scripture. God offers everlasting life to anyone who will accept it, and so we “appoint ourselves” for it, just as we might appoint ourselves to any other job or position. Especially since some very notable translations use the word “appointed” as a passive, our using “appointed themselves” (the middle voice) seems quite appropriate. Furthermore, it is exactly what happens when we decide to make Christ our personal Lord and savior. The Living Bible catches the sense of this, even though in our opinion their translation is too liberal a departure from the meaning of the Greek word tasso: “and
as many as wanted eternal life believed.” That translation expresses what happened in Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:14) some 2,000 years ago: Paul taught the Word of God in the Synagogue to the Jews and Greeks assembled there. The Jews judged themselves unworthy of eternal life by rejecting both the message and the messengers. However, the Gentiles wanted it and appointed themselves to everlasting life by believing.

The point of the verse is that each person has the opportunity to accept or reject God, and in this case, the Jews, by their actions, rejected life, but the Gentiles appointed themselves to everlasting life by accepting God’s call.

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.

13:50. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].


13:52. “filled with joy and holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

Chapter 14

14:2. “souls.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the person himself, so many versions have “minds” instead of “souls,” but properly understood, “souls” is more inclusive of the feelings and emotions as well as the thoughts. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of Soul’”.

14:3. “Therefore.” This important word shows that Paul and Barnabas stayed in Iconium because of the persecution by the Jews mentioned in verse 2. Paul and Barnabas were not ones to abandon their new converts to the pressures and persecutions of the Jews and unbelievers. They stayed “a long time,” and fought for them, “speaking boldly for the Lord.” The Lord Jesus honored their fearless, selfless commitment by energizing signs and wonders that further testified to the truth of what they were teaching. This verse teaches a wonderful lesson about how important it is to raise up new converts in the Lord, and help them grow in the faith.

14:12. “chief” is actually a participle, “leading speaker.”

14:15. “worthless things.” The Greek is mataios (#3152 ματαιος), and it means, devoid of truth, or force, or success; worthless, useless.

14:19. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

“having persuaded the multitude.” The Scripture does not elaborate as to how this was done. We surmise it was a combination of things. Lies and exaggerations as to what Paul and Barnabas were teaching, lies about how they had destroyed the peace of the
places they had recently been and divided the people, pointing out that they defamed
traditional worship and called the traditional gods “worthless,” and likely threw in that
since they were not gods come in the flesh, they healed by witchcraft, using names that
were not lawfully recognized.

“dragged.” The Greek is συρῶ (#4951 σύρω) to drag or to draw.

14:21. “returned to Lystra, and to Iconium, and to Antioch.” Paul and Barnabas had
just been driven out of Antioch (Acts 13:50); had to flee Iconium (Acts 14:6), and Paul
was stoned on Lystra (Acts 14:9), so how could they return to those cities so quickly?
Although some commentators have suggested that the leadership in those cities changed
even in that short time, that is unlikely, and besides, not everyone who was in leadership
and who had participated in getting rid of Paul and Barnabas would have been gone. The
answer is in Acts 14:22, which says that Paul and Barnabas strengthened the disciples. So
when the two missionaries returned to those cities they had just been ousted from, they
kept to themselves and just met quietly with the disciples, whereas on the earlier visit
they had openly proclaimed Christ in public places. Paul and Barnabas understood that if
the disciples were strong and felt supported, evangelism would continue, and they used
wisdom in the way they journeyed instead of acting with reckless bravado in the name of
Christ.


“It is unavoidable.” The Greek word is δεῖ (#1163 δεῖ; pronounced day). It
expresses compulsion, necessity, or inevitability (Friberg). The Greek text of this verse is
arranged in such a way it is hard to put literally into English and have a clear meaning.
The KJV follows the syntax of the Greek text fairly closely: “we must through much
tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God,” and the NIV follows that pattern in more
modern English: “We must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.” A
problem with literally following the syntax of the Greek text like those versions do is that
the verse can then be misinterpreted to mean that if we do not go through many
hardships, we cannot enter the Kingdom of God, which is not at all what the verse is
saying. The HCSB gets much of the sense of the verse well: “It is necessary to pass
through many troubles on our way into the Kingdom of God.”

Another problem with bringing the Greek into English is translating the Greek
word δεῖ. Saying that “it is necessary” to go through many hardships to enter the
Kingdom of God is not bringing the meaning of the Greek into English as clearly as
possible, because the Greek δεῖ refers to necessity, inevitability, or unavoidability, while
the English word “necessary” has a connotation of both need and even desirability
(Merriam Webster’s Dictionary of Synonyms). It is only “necessary” that we have
hardships because of the fallen nature of the world, our enemy the Devil, and our own sin
nature, not because of the will or plan of God.

Many versions say “we must” go through hardships to enter the Kingdom of God,
which is better than “it is necessary,” but “we must” makes it sound like something we
could avoid if we did not want to get into the Kingdom, which is not the message. “Much
hardship” is an unavoidable part of life whether a person is saved or not.

The REV could have used “inevitable,” and stayed with a definition of δεῖ that is
found in the lexicons, but “unavoidable” seems clearer and carries the sense in this
context. It is “unavoidable” that we experience “many hardships” on our way into the
Kingdom of God.
Chapter 15

15:2. “no small.” Figure of speech, Tapeinosis (demeaning, or understatement).
15:3. “sent.” The Greek word is propempō (#4311 προπέμψω), and it has two distinct meanings: “to send on ahead, send on one’s way;” and “to accompany or escort.” The KJV and the ASV of 1901 opted for the second definition, “to accompany.” However, that does not fit this particular context, which is why other versions opt for the first definition, “send on one’s way.” Verse 2 makes it clear that Paul, Barnabas, and a few others were appointed to travel from Antioch to Jerusalem. Since they were specifically appointed for the journey, it makes no sense that others in the congregation who were not appointed to go would go anyway, even part of the way.
15:5. “rose up.” Although this certainly refers to standing up, which is how many versions translate it, it may refer to more. It probably also refers to a “rising” of indignation, self-righteousness, etc. In that case, simply saying “stood up” is weak.
15:8. “testified on their behalf.” God “bore witness to” the Gentiles, that He had accepted them, by giving them the gift of holy spirit. “Bore witness to” is a good translation here, because it allows both that God bore witness to the Gentiles themselves, and that He also bore witness to the acceptance of the Gentiles to the Jews. The concrete evidence that the Gentiles had received holy spirit was that they spoke in tongues.
15:9. “by trust.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]
15:12. “as they were recounting.” See commentary on “related” in Luke 24:35.
15:14. “Simeon.” “Simeon” is the Hebrew form of Peter’s Jewish name. “Simon” (#4613 Σίμων) was considered the equivalent of the Hebrew patriarchal name Symeon (#4826 Συμεών), and was widely used by both Greeks and Jews. It is likely that Simon Peter acquired the name “Simon” due to the Greek influence in the Galilee and in his hometown, Bethsaida. It is noteworthy that his brother also has a Greek name. “Andrew” means “manly” in Greek. Peter is usually referred to as “Simon,” but here and in 2 Peter 1:1, Simeon is used instead of Simon. It is likely that James used “Simeon” to good effect on his Hebrew audience, anchoring Peter’s good Hebrew name to the perspective he had just given on the subject (vs. 7-11).
“a people.” Israel had been the “people” of God. Now God was making his “people” out of both Jews and Gentiles.
15:16-17. Quoted from Amos 9:11, 12.

15:17. “called, even over them—says the Lord.” The figure of speech anacoluthon, or non-sequence. A breaking off of the sequence of thought. See Bullinger, Figures.

The ending of the verse 17 and how it relates to verse 18, and what is the proper Greek text of verse 18, are debated by scholars. Verse 18 is almost certainly textually, “γνωστὰ ἀπ᾿ αἰῶνος” (“known from the ages,” i.e., “known from long ago.”) This short sentence was expanded in time to make the longer ending that appears in the Byzantine text (cp. KJV), and other longer textual variants were produced as well (cp. Metzger, Textual Commentary; and cp. the apparatus of NA-27 or UBS 4). The problem is that the quotation from Amos was well known, and ended with the Greek words “ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιῶν ταῦτα” (“God, who makes all this” or “God, who does all this” (the Greek word ποιῶν can be “do” or “make”). However, that makes verse 18 the short and disconnected sentence, “known from the ages.” The question is, when James quoted Amos, did he modify it, giving it a new ending, and making it end: “the Lord, who is making this known from long ago” (as per ESV, NASB, RSV), or would James have left the quotation from Amos intact, and then said something that is represented in the NT text with the figure of speech ellipsis, thus making the end of 17 and verse 18 read, “the Lord who had done all this. This has been known from long ago” (Metzger, Textual Commentary).

To us it makes more sense that James would quote Amos as it was known, and then add his point, that “This has been known from long ago.” James is arguing to make a point, and it would weaken his argument to misquote an OT verse, trying to make a point using his changed verse. We believe that James would correctly quote Amos (except he changed “God” to “Lord,”) and then add the fact that what he was saying had been known for a long time. The real confusion, then, is caused when Acts is written, and Luke (by revelation) uses the figure ellipsis in recording James’ words, leaving out “This has been.” The figure ellipsis emphasizes what is in the text, and de-emphasizes what is left out. To God, the fact that it was known for a long time that God would rebuild the tent of David is very important, so that gets emphasized.

15:18. “This has been known from of old.” See commentary on verse 17 above.

15:20. This verse has many textual variants, and there has been much theological discussion on what this Apostolic Decree means. Metzger (Textual Commentary) has a well written section on the most probable original text (represented in the REV).

“pollutions of idols.” This refers specifically to food sacrificed to idols, as verse 29 and 21:25 make clear. It would not refer to idolatry as such, because the Gentiles had forsaken their idols. This was a huge part of the decision to become a Christian in the first century, because other religions did not ask anyone to forsake idols. In the Roman religions, for example, if you worshipped one god you could and should still recognize other gods. What set Christianity and Judaism apart was that in those religions a person rejected other gods and exclusively recognized the God of the Bible. This was a major reason Jews and Christians were persecuted by pagans.

15:22. “decided.” This is an idiom used at the start of decrees (Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament). Lenski writes, “doko with the dative means that the assembly passed a formal resolution.” This was probably done by a show of hands as in 14:23.

15:23. “They wrote through them.” This is an anacoluthon, and the figure of speech idiom. The Greek is literally, “having written through their hand.” The anacoluthon is
“having written, and sending the letter through their hand.” The idiom is the use of “hand” as power or agency. “Through their hand” is a very Hebraic way of saying, through them, i.e., by their power.


15:26. “risked.” The Greek word is paradidomi (#3860 παραδίδωμι) and means “to hand over, give over, deliver, entrust.” Most of the commentators say it means “risk” in this context, but there is certainly the overtone that Paul had more than just “risked” his life. He had “given over” (Field says “pledged” see BDAG), fully to the Lord.

“lives.” The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psou-kay’), often translated “soul.” The Greek word psuchē has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. [For a more complete explanation of psuchē, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

15:28. “the Holy Spirit.” Here “the Holy Spirit” is a name or title of God. The use of “Holy Spirit” as an appellative for God is directly related to the subject at hand, which is the obedience of some of the parts of the Levitical Law by the Gentiles. They were directed to avoid food sacrificed to idols, sexual immorality, things strangled, and blood, which are all commandments mentioned in the OT, given by God. Obedience to these commandments would not be a factor in the salvation of the Gentiles, but in their holiness, and their ability to fellowship with Jewish Christians, who at this time in Acts were still keeping the Law. The emphasis on “Holy Spirit” would bring to mind statements such as “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy” (Lev. 19:2b). [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

15:34. “But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.” This verse should be omitted from the text. It was a late addition, and even so it has several variations. It was added to explain how Paul could have traveled with Silas if Silas went back to Jerusalem. However, Silas did go back to Jerusalem. First, it was “a necessary exigency of the commission which he had received” (Meyer). Silas would have to report back to Jerusalem about how things went in Antioch. Also, the fact that verse 33 says “they were sent off” makes it clear that Silas traveled back with Judas to Jerusalem. Thus the attempt of some scribe to explain the apparent contradiction in Acts actually creates a contradiction. Silas may have returned on his own to Antioch some time later, or Paul could have sent for him before starting his missionary journey.

15:39. “sharp disagreement.” The Greek is paroxusmos (#3948 παροξύσμος) and it has three distinct definitions: 1. A rousing to activity, stirring up, provoking. 2. A state of irritation expressed in argument, sharp disagreement. 3. A severe fit of a disease, attack of fever, esp. at its high point: convulsion (BDAG). Here it means a sharp disagreement, in Hebrews 10:24 it means to stir up to action.

Barnabas was a pastor, and a Jewish Levite. His original name was Joseph, which means “He will add,” but the apostles recognized his pastoral ministry and renamed him. Acts 4:36 says: “Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement).” Although Barnabas disappears from Acts here, it
does not necessarily mean he was wrong. He was a better judge of character than Paul in this case. Barnabas took John Mark and went to Cyprus (his home country) where he continued the work of the ministry. Paul later writes about Barnabas in 1 Corinthians 9:6, written later than this record in Acts. As for John Mark, he later became one of Paul’s helpers (Col. 4:10), and was very dear to Paul by the end of his life (2 Tim. 4:11). Mark was also with Peter (1 Pet. 5:13), who calls him a “son.” John Mark is best known for the Gospel of Mark, which he wrote.

Chapter 16

16:1. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

16:2. “spoken of.” The Greek is martureo (#3140 μαρτυρέω), to witness or testify to or about. Timothy was recommended by others, who gave a good testimony about him.

16:4. “decrees.” The Greek is dogma (#1378 δόγμα), a noun that occurs 5 times in the New Testament and means: a formal statement concerning rules or regulations that are to be observed; an imperial declaration, a decree; something that is taught as an established tenet or statement of belief, doctrine, dogma (BDAG). The English word “decree” means an order having the force of law; a religious ordinance enacted by a council. Hence, “decree” is a good translation here.

16:6. “by the Holy Spirit.” The Greek is hupo ho hagios pneuma (ὑπὸ τοῦ ἅγιου πνεύματος) with hupo being with a genitive (the holy), thus meaning “by.” Paul was either forbidden by “the Holy Spirit” (i.e., by God); or he was forbidden “by way of the holy spirit,” referring to the gift of holy spirit. In the Greek the verse can be read either way, and it is hard to tell which is the “primary” meaning, although if there is one, the context and scope of the Scripture would point to it being “God.”

In the first century, before the doctrine of the Trinity confused Christian doctrine by making “the Holy Spirit” a separate Person in the Trinity, the distinction between “the Holy Spirit” and “the holy spirit” was not often as critical as we think it is today. In fact, in many cases it actually could be somewhat helpful to leave the meaning slightly ambiguous. Most of the time when it comes to guiding Christians, God (“the Holy Spirit”) or Jesus direct us by way of the gift of holy spirit (“the holy spirit”). Thus just having the phrase “THE HOLY SPIRIT” (in all capital letters as the early Greek texts would be) enabled readers to see both meanings, the Giver and the Gift, in the same phrase.

The Greek here in Acts 16:6 is the same as in Acts 13:4, where Barnabas and Saul were sent out, “by the Holy Spirit.” In that verse, as here, the gift of holy spirit could have been meant, but the more probable meaning, especially given the early Greek text, was God [the Holy Spirit], who communicated via His gift [the holy spirit]. Supporting evidence that the best way to translate Acts 13:4 is “the Holy Spirit” is Acts 13:2, where, τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον [“the Spirit, the Holy’,” a more certain designation of God] spoke regarding Barnabas and Saul. Since God spoke in verse 2, that increases the likelihood that it is God being referred to in verse 4. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]
16:7. “the spirit of Jesus.” This is a very Hebraic way of saying the power and presence of Jesus Christ. It is very similar to Genesis 1:2, which states, “And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” [but “Spirit” should be “spirit,” with a lower case “s.”] In Genesis 1:2, the “spirit of God” the active power and presence of God, moved upon the water. Here, Jesus, in his active role as head of the Church, guided Paul.

It is possible, but less likely, that “the spirit of Jesus” refers to the gift of holy spirit that Jesus received from God and started pouring out into believers when the Church started on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:33). Although we today seem to have some major problems sorting out what is meant in the verses that mention “spirit,” the believers in the first century were less confused. They understood that God gave the gift of holy spirit to Jesus, who gave it to his Church (Acts 2:33). They also understood that God and the Lord Jesus communicate with people through the gift of holy spirit. As the gift that Jesus gave, and the gift through which he operates, calling the gift of holy spirit, “the spirit of Jesus” seemed very natural. It was the spirit promised by, and sent by, Jesus to his Church (John 16:13; Acts 1:5, 8, 33). It seems very awkward to us to think that “the Holy Spirit” in verse 6 is God, and “the spirit of Jesus” in verse 7 is the gift of holy spirit that Jesus gives us, but it was not as awkward for the early readers of the Greek text who would seamlessly see both God and the gift of holy spirit in verse 6 and Jesus working in concert with God and via the gift of holy spirit in verse 7.


16:11. “So.” The Western Text (see Stephen’s text) replaces the de (but, now, so, and) with oun (therefore). Later scribes changed the text in an obvious attempt to make Paul look better (cp. Metzger, Textual Commentary). There is no necessary immediacy in de, but there is much more so in oun. That is not to say that de cannot happen immediately, or on the basis of verse 11, but it is not demanded by the word, whereas oun directly
connects verses 10 and 11. This change is relatively small, but changing Scripture to make our heroes look better is bad business. Besides, as we stated earlier, the “so” does not preclude Paul’s immediate attention to the task at hand.

“ran a straight course.” Paul would have been in a sailing ship, not one driven by oars, and it is common in sailing to speak of “running before the wind.”

16:12. “Neapolis.” Neapolis (neos = new; polis = city; “New City”) was a port city of the Roman province of Macedonia (before the Roman conquest it had been a Greek city of Thrace) on the western side of the Aegean Sea. It is about 10 miles (16 km) southeast of Philippi. Neapolis has the honor of being the first city in Europe ever reached by the Apostle Paul. Besides being a port city, it was on the Egnation Way, which was one of the major roads of the Roman Empire. The Appian Way (“Way” = Road) and the Egnation Way were land and sea roads/routes. These two major routes joined together to form the Great East Road, which connected the Roman Empire and the Middle East.

The Appian Way began in Rome at the miliarium aureum, i.e., the “Golden Milestone” (many major Roman roads were marked by milestones, allowing travelers to tell how far they had traveled or how far they had to travel). From the Golden Milestone it went south along the Italian coast, eventually cutting east across the Italian peninsula to Brundisium. East bound travelers then had to decide to cross the Adriatic Sea to either Dyrachium or Apollonia, cities in Macedonia (northern Greece), both of which were on branches of the Egnation Way (the road was called the Egnation Way as it crossed Greece). From the Adriatic coast of Greece, the Egnation Way went east across the Balkan Mountains to Thessalonica. From Thessalonica there were two routes heading east that travelers could take. They could go east through Macedonia into Thrace and to the strait of the Bosphorus, or they could go south, hugging the Grecian coastline and heading down into Achaia (usually Athens or Corinth), and then travel east to the Roman province of Asia and the rest of what is now Turkey.

The Appian Way was started in 312 B.C. by the Roman Caesar Claudius, who thought it would help Rome to establish trade with the Mediterranean cultures, and knew a paved, well-maintained road made it easier for people and goods (and armies) to travel through the empire. The Appian Way and Egnation Way took generations to build, but provided easy and usually safe east-west travel by the time of the Apostle Paul.

16:13. “habitually used for prayer” (International Commentary, Acts, F.F. Bruce). The word “nomizo” relates to law, custom, habit. We translate it “assume” many times in our version because people make assumptions based on what is done by law or custom. However, in this case, Paul did not “assume” there was prayer by the riverside. He would have asked in Philippi, and been told that prayer was made “by custom” at the riverside, thus the translation “habitually.”


“whose heart the Lord opened.” The Lord Jesus cannot make someone believe, but he can work, in the person or through the circumstances, to open people to pay attention to the message of the Word. The Bible does not say specifically how he did that with Lydia to the end that she paid attention to Paul, but he did. Part of our prayers for “everyone” (1 Tim. 2:1) should be that the Lord opens their hearts to pay attention to the things of God, and then go on from that point to salvation and living the Christian life.

“pay attention to.” The Greek is prosechō (#4337 προσέχω), and according to BDAG, has three basic definitions: 1) to be in a state of alert, i.e., be concerned about,
care for, take care; 2) to pay close attention to something, i.e., pay attention to, give heed to, follow; 3) to continue in close attention to something, i.e., occupy oneself with, devote or apply oneself to. As with any word with multiple meanings, the meaning in any given verse must be determined by the context and the scope of the subject. Since we know that the Lord always honors a person’s free will, he cannot open a person’s heart to “respond” to the message, as some versions translate the verse, instead, he must wait for the person to believe. However, many theologians (Calvinists, etc.) teach that a person cannot believe in God unless God first gives them the power to believe, and so according to that theology, “respond” would be an accurate translation of prosechō here, although we assert that kind of Calvinist theology is in error.

16:16. “slave-girl.” The Greek word can mean a servant-girl or a slave-girl. The context determines which is more likely. Here, the woman was owned, so slave-girl is correct.

“spirit of divination.” The Greek reads pneuma puthoma, “spirit of python.” The python spirit was the spirit that was reputed to possess the oracle of Delphi, the most famous oracle in ancient Greece. According to legend, a serpent, Python, lived in Phocis, a district of ancient Greece. Python was killed by Apollo, whose followers built a city and Temple to honor Apollo on the southern side of a limestone mountain called Parnassus. The city was called Pytho at first, and Delphi later. A natural cave in the mountain, called Pythium, was part of the Temple. Over the roof of the cave was placed a tripod throne, on which the priestess of Delphi sat. A hole in the roof of the cave and beneath the tripod supposedly brought the breath of Apollo up to the priestess, who then spoke at the inspiration of Apollo (hence the saying, ex tripodē, used of obscure sentences spoken dogmatically). When the demon took control of the priestess, “Her face changed color, a shudder ran through her limbs, and her mouth. This excitement soon turned to fury. Her eyes sparkled, her mouth foamed, her hair stood on end, and almost suffocated by the ascending vapor, the priests were obliged to retain the priestess on her seat by force; then she began, with dreadful howlings, to pour forth detached words, which the priests collected with care, arranged them, and delivered them in writing to the inquirer… [The oracle] enjoyed the reputation of infallibility for a long time;…” (Encyclopedia Americana, 1947, p. 626, 627). The designation “python spirit” was later used of anyone who revealed the future, then it eventually degenerated to refer to ventriloquists as well. This slave girl had a python spirit, and was delivered of it.

16:18. “in the name of Jesus Christ.” This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority. [For more on the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6].

16:19. “had gone out.” The owners of the slave girl were not Christian, but they clearly understood that their slave had the power she had because of an indwelling demon. They were very angry when Paul commanded it to leave in the name of Jesus. This is a good example of how ignorance and greed can be very hurtful to people. The owners did not care about the woman, and actually probably thought that the demon was a blessing of some sort, bringing her notoriety.

“agora.” The Greek word is agora (#58 ἀγορά; pronounced ā-go-rā’ (not, ā-gor’- ā)), and the Greek word is simply transliterated into English. Agora is an interesting word to
translate because it has two distinct meanings in the Bible: an oriental marketplace and a Greek or Roman agora.

When it is used in the Gospels, *agora* refers to the oriental marketplace, or bazaar. In the oriental marketplace there were rows upon rows of shops, all crowded together, or else there were narrow streets lined with shops. Thus “marketplace” is a good translation of “agora” in the Gospels.

In contrast, in a Greek or Roman city, the “agora” was the name of a specific part of the city (the Latin word is *forum*, from which we get our English “forum.” It is related to the word *foris*, meaning “outside,” because it was an outside area). The agora was the center of town and public life. It was an open area surrounded by shops. In larger towns it could be an acre or more in size. The open area usually had an altar (for divining the will of the gods by sacrificing an animal and looking at its liver, or some other similar ritual), statues of the gods or prominent people, a judgment seat or place for a tribunal (which is why the people dragged Paul to an agora to be judged; Acts 16:19).

Like our “malls” today, the agora in a Greek or Roman city was more than a place to shop. It was a place to meet people, hang out, get the news, see what the local government was doing, eat, and, of course, shop. Translating *agora* as “marketplace” in Acts does not accurately communicate the meaning of the word, because it gives a wrong impression. Since “agora” referred to a specific place in town, we should learn what it is and what usually happened there. One final note: although it is true that Herod the Great did try to model some Jewish cities after Roman cities and build agoras in them, those cities were few, and the nature of the Jewish religion, being against pagan sacrifice, divining, and statues, made the Jewish agoras more like the oriental marketplaces than the agoras in Greek and Roman cities.

In the REV there are a number of verses in which *agora* is translated as “marketplace,” reflecting the oriental marketplace or bazaar of the typically eastern city (Matt. 11:16; 20:3; 23:7; Mark 6:56; 7:4; 12:38; Luke 7:32; 11:43; 20:46), and there are also verses in which *agora* was left untranslated, reflecting the Greek agora or Roman forum which was in those cities (Acts 16:19; 17:17; and Acts 17:5, which mentions the *agoraios*, those who loiter at the agora. For more information on the agora, see: *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*; *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; *Holman Bible Dictionary*).

16:30. **“what must I do to be saved?”** In the Greek this is a purpose-result clause with *hina* and the subjunctive mood. See Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.” The man was asking, “What must I do for the *purpose* of getting saved, which *results* my salvation?” There is both the sense of purpose and result in the jailor’s question.

16:34. **“because.”** The participle is sometimes causal, and that is the case here. The jailor rejoiced, “because he had believed.” Belief in Christ should bring us great joy. The NIV gets the sense of the participle: “he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God.”

**Chapter 17**
17:1. “Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia.” Both cities were on the Egnation Way, the great Roman road that connected Rome with the Eastern Empire, but the reason Paul did not stop to evangelize there is clear from the last half of the verse and the first part of Acts 17:2. Apparently, neither city had a synagogue. Paul’s custom was to go into synagogues in cities he visited, because that is where he could be most immediately effective. He had a common background with the Jewish people; the God fearing Greeks who were there would have already been looking to the Law for truth, and his credentials of being from Jerusalem and even being trained by the well-known and greatly respected Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) would have given him some credibility.

17:3. “explaining and setting before them that it was necessary…” Paul worked hard to get the people in the places he visited saved; born again. This verse records him teaching in the synagogue in Thessalonica, and his message contains both elements of what it takes to be saved according to Romans 10:9: that Christ is Lord, and that God raised Jesus from the dead. That Jesus was lord is not explicitly stated in the verse because it did not need to be in the context of a first-century synagogue. The first century Jews to whom Paul was speaking knew very well from many verses in the Old Testament that the Messiah (the Christ) would be “lord” and would rule over God’s creation (cp. Ps. 2:7-12; 110:1; Isa. 9:6-8; 11:1-5; Dan. 7:13, 14; Micah 5:2-5). What they needed to know was that the man named Jesus was in fact their Messiah, that the Messiah had to suffer and die (many Jews did not know this about the Messiah; cp. Matt. 16:22; John 12:34) and that God had raised Jesus from the dead. Paul specifically taught all those things.

“out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among the dead.”


“not a few.” Figure of speech; Tapeinosis (demeaning, or understatement). The number of prominent women who believed Paul is understated to magnify it.

“prominent women.” Women may not have had an outwardly prominent place, such as a seat in the senate, but as always, they had great influence. Not unexpectedly, some scribes had a problem with that and altered the text to “wives of prominent men.” (Ehrman, Misquoting Jesus). The alteration is easily dismissed, but is shows that there has been a bias against women in the Church.

17:5. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

“those who loitered at the agora.” The Greek is agoraios (#60 ἀγοραῖος), and means those who stood idle at the market, those fellows who have nothing to do but to hang around waiting for daily work, or to cause trouble. For a study of the Agora see commentary on Acts 16:19.

17:6. “dragged.” The Greek word is surō (#4951 σύρω), and means to “drag, drag away, pull, or draw.” The Jews fomented a mob which was angry and dangerous, and “assaulted” (“to come near with the intention of harm; attack” BDAG) the house of Jason. When they could not find Paul, they grabbed the disciples they could find and dragged them to the agora (where the Jews got the rabble in the first place) before the rulers. There is every indication the “dragging” was literal. Although we today use “drag” as a hyperbole to indicate we did not want to go (“I got dragged to the mall by my
sister”), there is no indication that it was used that way in the first century, especially in this context.


17:9. “had taken money as a security.” Literally, the words mean “had taken enough.” The Greek word *ikanos* (#2425 ἱκανός; pronounced *hi-ka-nos*) means “enough, sufficient, adequate, considerable,” but the phrase, λαβόντες τὸ ἱκανὸν, is an idiom in the Greek, and referred to the sufficient amount of money that had to be given for a bond, bail, or security. Idioms in any language do not usually make good sense when translated literally, so it is the meaning of the idiom in the original language must be translated into the receptor language.

In this instance, the Jews had incited a mob against Paul and his companions, who could not be found at the time, so the mob brought Jason to the rulers. Especially since Thessalonica was the largest city in Macedonia and the Roman capital of the province, the rulers did not want any trouble with Rome, especially when Paul was, according to the speakers of the mob, promoting that there was another king besides Caesar, one Jesus. The rulers of the city took a large sum of money from Jason to assure (or secure) that nothing would happen, which meant that Paul’s activities in the city would have to stop. This put both Paul and Jason in a bind, because if Paul did defy the rulers and continue to preach, Jason would lose a sizeable amount of money. Paul had to leave Thessalonica at night to protect both himself and Jason (Acts 17:10), and it may also explain why Paul wrote that he was “orphaned” from the Thessalonian believers, as if he had been forcibly torn from them (1 Thess. 2:17 and 18). The literal meaning of *aporphanizo* (#642 ἀπορφανίζω) in 1 Thessalonians 2:17 is to be separated by becoming an orphan.

17:12. “along with many of the Greek women of high standing.” The adjective “many” is pulled forward from the previous clause, which says many of the Jews believed, which is immediately followed by kai (“also,” “along with”), indicating many of them also. Then the text shows that men believed also, “not a few.”

This is one of the many verses that were altered by scribes and copyists because of the anti-feminine bias that entered the early Church from the culture around them. The original text read καὶ τῶν Ἑλληνίδων γυναικῶν τῶν εὐσχημόνων καὶ ἀνδρῶν οὐκ ὀλίγοι. (also many of the prominent Greek women, and of the men, not a few”). In codex Bezae, a fifth century manuscript, the text was altered to καὶ τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ τῶν εὐσχημόνων ἄνδρες καὶ γυναῖκες ἱκανοὶ ἐπίστευσαν (“and many of the Greeks and men and women of high standing believed;” See Metzger; Textual Commentary on the Greek NT). This shows us that by the 400’s AD it was offensive enough to some scribes that the woman were referred to as “prominent” and were placed before the men, that they would change the text so that the men and women were both of high standing and the men came before the women. The NT dramatically elevated the position of women in the family, the Church, and society. [For more about women’s position, see commentary on Acts 18:26; Rom. 16:7; 1 Cor. 7:2; 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12; 3:2; 5:14; and 1 Pet. 3:7. Also, see Appendix 12: “The Role of Women in the Church”].

17:15. “Athens.” Athens was the largest city in Greece, and controlled a region called Attica, which was very fertile and also had rich mineral deposits of silver, lead and marble. The most well-known building in Athens is the Parthenon on the Acropolis. Inside the Parthenon stood a huge statue of the city’s protector-goddess Athena, who was the goddess of wisdom, the arts, courage, inspiration, civilization, law and justice,
mathematics, strength, strategy, and crafts. She was a warrior goddess, but for righteous warfare; the defense of home and society.


17:18. “foreign divinities.” The word for “divinities” is daimonion (#1140 δαίμονιον), which for the New Testament authors meant demons. However, here it must be understood from the viewpoint of the Athenians, who would not have used the term to refer to demonic forces but standard divinities (Lenski; cp. Barnes’ Notes). “This is the only place in the NT where daimonia has the neutral Greek sense ‘divine beings’ rather than the normal NT sense of ‘evil spirits’” (Oxford Bible Commentary). The Athenians were so lost in polytheism that they assumed Paul was just preaching about another set of gods.

“Jesus and the resurrection.” It is likely that the Athenians thought “the Resurrection” was a foreign god (IVP Bible Background Commentary; Lenski; Barnes’ Notes). The Greek word anastasis (#386 ἀνάστασις) was also a female name and the Greeks were accustomed to turning concepts, such as Fate, into female gods. They had no conception of the one true God, and believed that other lands each had their own peculiar divinities. This is why they used the plural, “foreign divinities;” they thought Paul was preaching two gods, Jesus and Anastasis.

17:22. “very religious.” The Greek is deisidaimonesteros (#1174 δείσιδαιμονέστερος; from deidō (δείδω) to fear, and daimōn (δαίμων) deity, or in the New Testament “demon” (although to the Greeks it just referred to a god)). It is used both in a good sense as “very devout” or “very religious”, and in a bad sense as “too superstitious.” Paul was trying to win the hearts of the people, so in this context it should be “very god-fearing,” “very devout,” “very religious,” etc. The Greeks would have already been suspicious of Paul, who was both a Jew and from out of town, so if he started his speech to them by insulting them, they would have ignored him completely. Instead, he pointed out to them that they were “very devout,” something they were proud of, and something which would have gotten their attention.

The Athenians were indeed “very god-fearing.” The Roman Petronius said that it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens, and Pausanias, a traveler and geographer from the second century, said there were more images in Athens than in the rest of Greece combined. Wiersbe correctly says, “He [Paul] began politely by saying, “I see that you are very religious” (not “too superstitious” as in KJV). He called attention to an altar dedicated “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD,” and he used this object to preach to them the True God about whom they were ignorant.” Paul would then continue to show these Athenians that he was worthy of their attention and thinking soundly by quoting one of their own poets.

17:24. “shrines.” This is the same Greek word usually translated “sanctuary,” naos (#3485 ναός). However, because the context deals with pagan worship, “shrine” is a better translation: the word “can be understood in the more restricted sense shrine, where the image of the goddess stood” (BDAG).

17:29. “Divine One.” The Greek word is a substantive, an adjective being used as a noun. See, F. F. Bruce, Acts.

17:31. “justly judge.” The phrasing in Greek is in the dative case; it is the preposition en and the word usually translated “righteousness,” dikaiosune (#1343 δικαιοσύνη). This usage is most likely a dative of manner, meaning, “God will judge the world in a manner
that is righteousness, or righteously” (Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax*). The dative of manner is meant to answer the question, “how will God judge the world?” He will judge it justly. “out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among those who are dead.”

**Chapter 18**

18:5. “wholly occupied.” The word is *sunecho* (#4912 συνέχο) and in this context means “to occupy someone’s attention intensely; to be occupied with or absorbed in” (BDAG). It can also mean to “impel to action; direct; or urge on.” Even though Paul was working with Aquila and Priscilla (18:3), he was nevertheless wholly absorbed with the message and preaching of the word. It seems a misunderstanding of this verb led to a textual corruption, reading “impelled by the spirit” (Cp. KJV) rather than “absorbed in the word” (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*).

18:6. “defaming words.” The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφηµέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].


18:12. “Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see commentary on John 1:19].

18:22. “And when he had landed at Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the congregation.” Verses such as this one require the reader to be familiar with the geography of the Mediterranean. Paul sailed from Ephesus, which at his time had its own harbor not far from the city, eastward to the major port city of Israel, which is Caesarea. From there “he went up and greeted the church.” Going east and uphill from the coast, Paul would have traveled to Jerusalem, the headquarters of the Christian Church, and where some of the apostles, especially James, were located. From Jerusalem, he traveled back “down” (not “south” as in our English, for he went north but downhill) to Antioch, where he had begun his second itinerary journey a couple years earlier. Robertson gets it correctly (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*): “He went up and saluted the church (anabas kai aspasamenos tên ekklêsian). The language could refer to the church in Caesarea where Paul had just landed, except for several things. The going up (anabas, second aorist active participle of anabainō) is the common way of speaking of going to Jerusalem which was up from every direction save from Hebron. It was the capital of Palestine as people in England today speaking of going up to London. Besides ‘he went down to Antioch’ (katebê eis Antiocheian, second aorist active indicative of katabainō) which language suits better leaving Jerusalem than Caesarea. Moreover, there was no special reason for this trip to Caesarea, but to Jerusalem it was different. Here Paul saluted the church in the fourth of his five visits after his conversion (9:26; 11:30; 15:4; 18:22; 21:17). The apostles may or may not have been in the city, but Paul had friends in Jerusalem now. Apparently he did not tarry long, but returned to Antioch to make a report of his second mission tour as he had done at the close of the first when he and Barnabas came back (14:26-28). He had started on this tour with Silas and had picked up Timothy and Luke, but came back alone. He had a great story to tell.”
18:26. “Priscilla and Aquila.” This is the reading of the earliest and best manuscripts, not “Aquila and Priscilla,” as some later texts and the KJV have. Metzger writes: “Apparently the Western reviser desired to reduce the prominence of Priscilla” (Metzger: Textual Commentary). As the Church developed, the attitude about women, that they were inferior to men, came back into the accepted doctrine of the Church, so it is not unusual that a later scribe would “adjust” the text so that the man came first in the list. That God put Priscilla first here is very important in understanding that in the New Testament, God elevated the status of women so that men and women were “one” in Christ (Gal. 3:28). Priscilla (this is the diminutive of her proper name, Prisca, which Paul used) and Aquila are always mentioned together, and four of the six times they are mentioned, her name precedes his. Although the Bible does not say why Priscilla is usually named first, the two most common explanations are that she was of higher rank in Roman society or she was more prominent in the Church than he was.

This verse is also important because it gives good evidence that women were not forbidden to instruct men, as is often taught in the Church today. The sentence in Acts not only shows Priscilla instructing Apollos, but can even mean she took a leading role in doing so: “But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and expounded to him the way of God more accurately” (cp. commentary 1 Tim. 2:11, 12).

Chapter 19

19:2. “receive holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

19:3. “Then with what kind of baptism were you baptized?” This sentence is hard to translate without giving the wrong idea, and the words are packed with meaning. The sentence is more literally, “Into what, then, were you baptized,” but the Greek word eis, “into,” (#1519 εἰς; pronounced “ace”), is being used in the “static sense” and here means “in connection with” or “in relation to,” not “into” as if motion was being indicated (cp. R. C. H. Lenski, “The Interpretation of Acts;” also commentary on Romans 6:3]. That would make the literal translation the very awkward: “In connection with what, then, were you baptized?” Paul was not asking, “How were you baptized,” as many versions say, as if he was asking whether or not they were baptized in water. Actually, as Newman and Nida write: “he was asking them what was the meaning or significance of their baptism. And the answer that they give to the question is ‘the baptism of John,’ by which they indicate that the meaning of their baptism was the same as that which John the Baptist had proclaimed” (Newman and Nida, A Translator’s Handbook on the Acts of the Apostles). Lenski adds, “And ‘what’ (neuter gender) show that Paul had in mind, ‘in connection with what name?’ This explains why the disciples answered, literally, “In connection with (eis) John’s baptism,” giving the name of John. For ease of reading we just have, “With John’s baptism.” We might say more fully, “It had to do with John’s baptism.”

The Greek sentence is hard to translate in a way that gives us the correct meaning in English. That is due in part to the difficulty of the sentence construction and that the words are pregnant with meaning, but it is also due to our general misunderstanding of baptism. If we translate the sentence, “Into what then were you baptized,” the automatic
answer we give is “water.” If we translate the phrase “How were you baptized,” again, we think “water.” Even if we are a little closer to the Greek meaning and translate, “What kind of baptism did you receive,” we still tend to think the answer to the question is “water.” But the disciples did not answer saying “water;” they understood the question and answered that they were baptized in connection with John’s baptism, which, while the element was water, the baptism was a “baptism of repentance” (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 13:24; 19:4).

John baptized with a “baptism of repentance,” which is a genitive of relation, meaning a baptism related to repentance, specifically a baptism that symbolized repentance. John’s baptism was a symbolic act that portrayed and symbolized in a visible way the invisible cleansing that had occurred in God’s sight when the person repented (cp. John Schoenhheit, Baptist the History and Significance of Christian Baptism). Thus, if we were to paraphrase and expand the meaning of Paul’s sentence, we might say something like: “In connection with what name were you baptized, and what did it mean?” The answer, “In connection with John’s baptism” was enough, because Paul knew that John’s baptism was a baptism that symbolized repentance.

Paul was genuinely shocked when the disciples said they had not heard about holy spirit, because as long before that as the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38), Peter had taught about the coming of holy spirit. But here at Ephesus were disciples who had not heard that the gift of holy spirit had been given. It is possible that they were some of John’s disciples who moved to Ephesus before Pentecost, or perhaps they had been evangelized by one of John’s disciples who left Judea before Pentecost (perhaps after John was killed) and had not heard of the coming of holy spirit (they had almost certainly heard John, or one of John’s disciples, tell that the holy spirit was going to come, after all, the prophets had been saying that for centuries, but they meant they had not heard that it had already come).

This verse shows that in the opening decades of the Christian Church, believing in Christ was associated with “being baptized in holy spirit,” otherwise known as receiving holy spirit. People who genuinely believed in Christ’s death and resurrection were baptized in holy spirit, and the proof of that was that they then manifested the gift of holy spirit, certainly most usually by speaking in tongues, but also by interpretation and prophecy. And that is exactly what we see here in Acts 19. The disciples had confessed their sins in association with being baptized in John’s baptism. But confessing sins does not get a person saved in the Grace Administration [for more information on the Grace Administration, see commentary on Ephesians 3:2]. What gets people “born again,” i.e., “baptized in holy spirit,” in the Grace Administration is believing Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9).

19:5. “baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.” The word “into” is the word eis, and is being used in the static sense (see commentary on Acts 19:3). Literally, they were baptized “in connection with the name of Jesus Christ,” or “in association with the name of Jesus Christ,” and that baptism was the baptism in holy spirit.

19:6. “the holy spirit came on them.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”]

“spoke in tongues.” For more on speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5.
19:9. “the Way.” This was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, formal designations of the Christian Faith, and it is used in Acts 9:2, 19:9; 22:4; 24:14, 22. [For more information, see commentary on Acts 9:2].

“Tyrannus.” The Greek means “tyrant,” and Turannos (also sometimes spelled Turannios) was a common masculine name, although some scholars have mused that it may have been a designation given to him by the way he taught in his school. However, it may have also become the name of the school and not the personal name of the man who ran it at that time.

19:18. “Many also of those who had believed.” The verb tenses in the Greek text make it clear that the people had believed in the past, so they were already Christians. This event occurred during Paul’s third missionary journey, which started in Acts 18:23. However, he had been to Ephesus before, on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19), and also Apollos had been teaching there, as well as Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:24-26). Thus it is no surprise that when Paul came to Ephesus on his third missionary journey, there were already disciples there (Acts 19:1). However, Ephesus was a center of the practice of magic. The statue of the goddess Artemis, in the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus, which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, had magical inscriptions on it that were reported to be very powerful (John Polhill, The New American Commentary: Acts). Just from the culture around them, these disciples had been steeped in magic and apparently did not give it up when they got born again. This is similar to Christians who get saved but continue to consult their horoscope; use “charms” to supposedly ward off evil; or dabble with séances, palm readers, or psychics. A person can be saved and still participate in evil. Under the teaching ministry of Paul, these Christians in Ephesus finally came forward and confessed their practices, and renounced them. The fact that this is recorded in Acts is clearly more than a historical notation. It is an example to follow. Christians everywhere should renounce astrology, witchcraft of all types, “psychic” involvement, charms and other “protective” superstitions and practices that supposedly bring “good luck,” and any other practice that relies on things other than God for help, information, blessings, and protection.

“were coming.” The Greek verb is in the imperfect tense, so “kept coming” (as the NASB) is better than just “came,” particularly in this context. Those who had believed kept coming forward, little by little, confessing their deeds. Some had the courage to come forth immediately, others did as they saw other believers go before them. This is the value of public confession and repentance: there are some who draw their courage to go forward from seeing others go forward first.

“divulging their practices.” The Greek word for “practices” is praxis (#4234 πρᾶξις). It is difficult to translate in this context because it has both a general definition and a technical definition, and both likely apply here. The general definition is an action or deed, which in this context would be an evil deed, and some versions, such as the NIV, even say “evil deeds.” However, ancient Greek sources reveal that praxis was also used in a technical sense for the practices of magic, including spells. Thus, F. F. Bruce translates the verse, “Many of those who believed also came and made confession, divulging their spells” (New International Commentary on the New Testament). Also, the New Jerusalem Bible has: “Some believers, too, came forward to admit in detail how they had used spells.” No doubt both the general and technical definitions apply. Some of the believers in Ephesus simply came forward and described the evil they had been
involved with, while others came forward and specifically described the magic and witchcraft they had been involved with, including the casting of spells. We decided that, because the general definition of “evil deeds” included the specific definition of involvement with magic and witchcraft, that it would be best to put the general definition in the REV, and let the reader learn about the more specific meaning from the commentary.

19:19. **“50,000 pieces of silver.”** The piece of silver was the silver argurion (#694 ἀργύριον), which in Ephesus at that time was almost certainly the coin known as the Attic silver drachma (“Attic” referred to the fact that it came southern Greece, most principally, Athens). The silver drachma could buy one sheep at that time, so we could value the scrolls as 50,000 sheep, but sheep are more expensive today than they were then, so that valuation would give an inaccurate rendering. A more accurate way to value the coin was by realizing that it was a day’s wage for a laborer (or back then, a soldier). So if a laborer makes $8 per hour, or $64 in a work day, then $64 times 50,000 is over three million dollars. This shows the growth of the Christian population in the area at the time.

19:21. **“resolved in the spirit.”** This is one of the times when “spirit” (pneuma) refers to a person’s attitudes, thoughts and desires. The phrase is equivalent to “resolved in himself.” The NAB translates the phrase, “made up his mind” and the NIV translates the whole phrase simply by the word “decided.” Other verses that use “spirit” as a product of the mind include: “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Matt 5:3); “The spirit is willing, but the body is weak” (Matt. 26:41 NIV); and, “…how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you” (2 Cor. 7:13 NIV). This cannot be the instrumental use of the Greek word “in” (en), making the phrase read, “resolved by the spirit” as if Paul was being guided by the Lord via the gift of holy spirit. The reason it cannot be that this verse is referring to Paul’s being guided by the Lord is that it says Paul resolved to go to Jerusalem. Yet it is clear from the scope of Scripture that the Lord did not want Paul to go to Jerusalem (20:22; 21:4, 10-12). The Lord cannot direct Paul to go to Jerusalem and also tell him not to go. It was Paul’s decision to go to Jerusalem, and the Lord tried very hard to dissuade him, but was not successful. Paul went, and spent the next several years of his life in jail because of it, first in Caesarea, then in Rome.

19:23. **“the Way.”** This was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, formal designations of the Christian Faith. [For more information, see commentary on Acts 9:2].


19:31. **“Asiarchs.”** The title “Asiarch” was the designation given to a man from the wealthy class who was a delegate from a city of Asia to a council of men that helped defray the cost of public games and events, and to regulate the worship of Rome and the emperor in the province. The evidence is that there were ten Asiarchs each year (cp. Lenski). Some of them may have been priests of various religions. Ordinarily they would not have been together in Ephesus, so it is likely that some game or festival was happening in Ephesus at the time. We have no information about how Paul became friends with some of these powerful men. We can see that, like true leaders, they acted quickly and decisively when it seemed as though Paul was going to go into the theater, and they sent to warn him not to.

19:37. **“defamers.”** The Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημέω) is transliterated (not translated) from the Greek into English as “blasphemy.” However, “blasphemy” in
English has a different meaning than blasphēmeō does in Greek. In English, “blasphemy” is only used in reference to God. It is insulting God or a god, insulting something considered sacred (like defacing a cross or statue of Jesus), or claiming to be God or a god in some way. However, in Greek, blasphēmeō and blasphēmia (the noun) did not have to refer to God or a god, although they could, but were common words that were used of someone speaking against another. The primary meanings were showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

In this situation Demetrius the silversmith, who feared for his livelihood, and the Town-clerk, who no doubt feared the wrath of Rome if there were a riot, had different agendas. Demetrius was correct that even though Paul may not have been in the Temple of Artemis speaking directly against her, he was saying that man-made images were not gods, and in that sense he was indeed defaming, or hurting the reputation of Artemis and every other Roman “god.” Demetrius, who correctly was concerned about his income, saw clearly that if what Paul was preaching was accepted by the people, their livelihood would be in jeopardy. The town clerk, on the other hand, correctly assessed that there was a right way to get things done, and a riot would not go well with Rome.

19:40. “in danger of being charged with rioting.” The Roman emperor and senate highly valued peaceful conditions, and rewarded them. In this case, Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia (now western Turkey), and had given it quite a few privileges. Now, because of this riot, those privileges were in jeopardy, including its degree of self-government (there is no record of a Senatorial governor being present there). This case involving Demetrius the silversmith is a mini-vignette of how demons and demonized people promise one thing but actually deliver another. The whole episode started with Demetrius saying how the tradesmen were “in danger” of losing their wealth, and thus started the riot that ostensibly would have somehow maintained the greatness of Artemis and the city of Ephesus. In fact however, the riot put Ephesus “in danger” of losing its privileges.

Chapter 20

20:2. “Greece.” Particularly Corinth. Paul had founded the Church at Corinth (Acts 18), and it was from there that he penned the Epistle to the Romans. He was going to sail from Corinth to Syria (likely Antioch, his home base and where he had started his third missionary journey; Acts 18:23), but decided to take the land route through Macedonia, then across the Aegean Sea and stop briefly at a few cities, eventually sailing to Caesarea, the port of Jerusalem (Acts 21:8).


20:12. “not a little comforted.” This is the figure of speech tapeinosis, or demeaning. It is the deliberate demeaning, or lessening of something in order to elevate or increase it. It often comes in the form of an understatement. We are aware that sometimes the most
powerful way to emphasize something is to understate it. “Not a little comforted?!?” The believers probably threw quite a party. The understatement in the text causes the reader to add emphasis that is greater than a plain statement of fact could provide. Thus versions such as the NIV and NASB, which just say, “were greatly comforted,” not only eliminate the beautiful figure *tapeinosis*, but eliminate the emotion that the reader adds to the biblical text.

20:22. **“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

20:23. **“the Holy Spirit.”** “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”]

“warns.” The Greek is *diamarturomai* (#1263 διαμαρτύρομαι) and means to solemnly testify or earnestly charge, and can mean “warn” as it does here and in Luke 16:28. This is the first time the Book of Acts tells us that Paul was being directed not to go to Jerusalem. He should have let others carry the financial gift that had been collected for the believers there. Although this is the first mention that Paul was not to go that is written in Acts, the verse does tell us he had been being warned “in every city.” Paul had left Achaia (Corinth) with money for the poor believers in Jerusalem and traveled by land north back through Macedonia (he had come to Corinth by way of Macedonia), then sailed east toward Caesarea, the port city of Jerusalem. Thus he had passed through many cities before reaching where he was, Miletus, a port city of Ephesus (Acts 20:17). [For more on Paul’s travel to Jerusalem and its consequences, see commentary on Acts 21:12, 14.]

20:24. **“life.”** The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here *psuchē* refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. This is one of the many verses that shows that *psuchē*, soul, is not immortal and is not the reason people can live forever. Paul would never say that he did not count his everlasting life valuable, but he would say he did not count his earthly life valuable, because he knew he would be raised from the dead. [For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

20:25. **“listen.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!). In this context, “listen” seemed more polite than “look.”

20:28. **“the Holy Spirit.”** “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see “ 6: Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

“the blood of his own” refers to the blood of his own son, Jesus. See Graeser, Lynn & Schoenheit, *One God and One Lord.*

20:32. **“have been made holy.”** The Greek is *hagiazo* (#37 ἁγιάζω), “to be sanctified,” but it is a perfect tense participle in the passive voice. The Christian is sanctified the moment he becomes born again, by the presence of the holy spirit. Most commentators
do not understand it, and have “are” sanctified, but this verse refers to the one-time event in the life of the believer when he or she gets saved. Interestingly, Lenski realizes this is referring to a one-time event in the past, so he has it refer to the dead Christian being in heaven.

20:35. “the words of the Lord Jesus.” This quotation, “it is more blessed to give than to receive” is not recorded in the gospels. It is what is known as an agrapha (a—not, graphe—writing). It is clear that the Lord spoke much more than what is recorded in the gospels, for the totality of Jesus’ speech can be read aloud in just several hours. John was clear that not every thing about Jesus’ life is recorded in scripture (John 21:25). People would have remembered other things that he taught and preserved them as well.

The actual quotation itself is the figure of speech chreia, a quotation that gives the author’s name (cp. Bullinger, Figures of Speech).

Chapter 21

21:4. “not set foot in Jerusalem.” This is the second time the Word of God reveals that Paul was not to go to Jerusalem, and this is the clearest warning, because the disciples in Tyre told Paul “through the spirit” not to go to Jerusalem. This clearly reveals the will of God. These disciples were not speaking from emotion, they were speaking by revelation. Paul had made up his mind to take the financial offering of the Gentiles on to Jerusalem, and was so set in his mind about it that he did not listen to the voice of God concerning the situation. (See commentary on Acts 21:12, 14).

21:11. “the Holy Spirit says.” “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

21:12. “not to go up to Jerusalem.” During Paul’s third missionary journey, Paul gathered an offering from the Gentiles to take to Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26; cp. 2 Cor. 8 and 9). When he was still in Ephesus and wrote 1 Corinthians, he wrote to the Church at Corinth to start taking collections of money that could then be taken as a gift to Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-3). At that time he was unclear about whether he would take the money to Jerusalem himself or if someone else would take the money and bring along personal letters from him (1 Cor. 16:3, 4). By the time Paul traveled westward across the Aegean Sea and wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia (it is possible he wrote from either Philippi or Thessalonica, both towns with established churches) he had made up his mind to travel with the financial gift himself (2 Cor. 8:19). He confirmed this shortly thereafter in the Epistle to the Romans, which he wrote when he reached Corinth (Rom. 15:28; cp. 2 Cor. 8:20). At first he was going to sail from Corinth to Syria (Acts 20:3), but he decided to take the land route back to Macedonia, and then he sailed from there for Syria and Jerusalem, but he made a number of stops along the way. Although he touched land in Syria, he never returned to Antioch, his home base and the city from which he had started his missionary journey.

At some point on that journey from Corinth to Jerusalem with the money that had been collected for the believers at Jerusalem, God started telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem. The first account of this is Acts 20:23 when Paul was in Miletus, the port of
Ephesus, speaking to the elders from the Church at Ephesus. By that time he reported that God warned him “in every city” about going to Jerusalem. Thus, it is possible that as early as when he left Corinth with the money, he was already getting revelation not to go to Jerusalem himself, but let others take the gift. When Paul landed at Tyre, the disciples there told Paul “through the spirit” that he was “not to set foot in Jerusalem” (Acts 21:4). This makes the will of God crystal clear, because the believers at Tyre did not speak on their own initiative, or from their emotion or love for Paul, but “through the spirit.” Then, in Caesarea, the daughters of Philip the Evangelist prophesied to Paul, and the context is that he should not go to Jerusalem (Acts 21:9). Then, Agabus, a recognized prophet in the Church, spoke to Paul about the consequences of going to Jerusalem, and all the disciples begged him not to go (Acts 21:10-12). Paul ignored the warnings from God, went to Jerusalem, and spent more than 4 years as a prisoner as a result. More than two years in Caesarea (Acts 24:27), months traveling to Rome (Acts 27:9; 28:11), and at least two years under arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30). Paul disobeyed the will of God and went to Jerusalem, and his ministry was severely curtailed as a result.

The Day of Pentecost was the summer of 28 AD. When Paul left Corinth and went through Macedonia, it was approximately the Feast of Passover in 57 AD (cp. Acts 20:5). He wanted to be in Jerusalem by Pentecost (June) (Acts 20:15). If he was in Jerusalem in June of 57, and arrested shortly after, he spent more than two years in jail in Caesarea (Acts 24:27). Then he traveled by boat to Rome, leaving in the late summer of 59 AD. This trip took at least 4 months, and perhaps 6. He sailed late in the year, and after “much time had been lost” (Acts 27:9), came to port on the island of Crete. The ship sailed from Crete after the Day of Atonement (Acts 27:9; late September to early October). After the shipwreck and wintering on the island of Malta, Paul sailed for Rome. It would now be late winter or early spring of 60 AD. When Paul got to Rome, he was “two whole years” under house arrest (Acts 28:30). This would have been from the spring of 60 to the spring/summer of 62. These dates are generally agreed upon by scholars, although sometimes they differ by a year or so earlier or later.

Understanding the chronology helps us put the magnitude of Paul’s imprisonment in perspective. Although he had met the Lord and become a believer years earlier, he did not start his powerful public ministry until he was called to Antioch, likely 45 AD (cp. Acts 11:26). If Paul was arrested in 57, he had only spent 12 or 13 years in public ministry, which also involved three missionary journeys. Then he was under arrest for almost 5 years. If his ministry had come under attack while he was free and working hard to teach and preach, and out among the people doing healings and miracles (cp. 1 Cor. 2:3-5), it was much more seriously attacked, and never really recovered from, the time he spent in as a prisoner. By the time he wrote 2 Timothy, he said, “all who are in Asia turned away from me” (2 Tim. 1:15). That is amazing, because the Roman province of Asia, which we today know as western Turkey, was where Paul spent more than two years (Acts 19:8-10) teaching the Word of God. If Paul got out of jail in Rome in 62, he was likely martyred by 66 or 67, a mere 4 or 5 years later, not enough time to rebuild the foundation of his church. This is especially true since the great fire of Rome was June of 64 AD, and after that the Emperor Nero engineered a much more severe persecution against Christianity than had existed before, and the free movement of the Word was more difficult.
Most Bible preachers take the one phrase, “The will of the Lord be done” (Acts 21:14), and say that Paul’s going to Jerusalem was the will of God. However, that idea is incorrect for many reasons. First and foremost, there is no verse anywhere that says Paul was going to Jerusalem by revelation or according to the will of God. While he was in Ephesus he was not even sure he would go (1 Cor. 16:3, 4). So at some point he decided to go, but there is no verse that says that decision of his was the will of God. Second, God does not contradict Himself. If the revelation from God in Acts 21:4 was not to go, and that flow continued uninterrupted from then to Acts 21:14, why would anyone decide the will of God was for him to go? On what basis? Thirdly, although sometimes people doing God’s will suffer hardship, often it is a consequence of disobedience. In this case, had Paul heeded God’s warning, he could have sent other people to Jerusalem with the money, and he himself left for Rome on his way to Spain, just as he had a longing to do (Rom. 15:22-24).

21:14. “The will of the Lord be done.” This verse does not mean that it was the will of God for Paul to go to Jerusalem, even though that is what almost every Bible teacher says it means. In this context it was a phrase used in surrender to the freewill of man, and the disciples used it, indicating their hope that perhaps God might be able to redeem a bad situation—in this case, Paul’s unwise decision to go to Jerusalem. Why would anyone think that these disciples in Caesarea thought that Paul’s going to Jerusalem was the will of God? They were doing their absolute best to talk Paul out of going. They “pleaded” with him not to go (Acts 21:12). Would they have really done that if they thought it was the will of God for him to go? Were these disciples so immature that they knew it was God’s will for Paul to go to Jerusalem, but let their emotions rule their actions until Paul stood firm and rebuked them saying “What are you doing, crying and breaking my heart” (21:13), at which point each of them sheepishly admitted that going to Jerusalem was the will of God after all? Certainly not. These were well established believers. Philip the Evangelist, in whose house they were staying (Acts 21:8), had been one of original seven men chosen to work with the Church in Jerusalem under the direction of the Peter, James, John, and the other apostles (Acts 6:5). These were not new converts, or neophytes who let their emotions rule. God had told Paul in city after city not to go to Jerusalem. However, Paul was so emotionally attached to the Jews, and so convinced that he could win them to Christ and also help strengthen relations between the Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians, that he was not hearing the voice of God. For more details on Paul disobeying God and going to Jerusalem see commentary on Acts 21:12.

There are some Bible teachers who know that it was God’s will not to go to Jerusalem, and using the KJV, get around the “problem” of this verse by changing the punctuation. The KJV reads: “And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, ‘The will of the Lord be done.’” Changing the commas makes it read, “And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased saying ‘The will of the Lord be done.’” This punctuation makes the verse say that the disciples stopped saying to Paul, “The will of the Lord be done,” but the Greek text does not allow the phrases and punctuation to be changed that way. When Paul would not listen to the revelation from God, the disciples, in giving up trying to persuade him, said, “The will of the Lord be done,” i.e., God, somehow work your will in this. God gave mankind freedom of will, and when someone does not do the will of God, the rest of us can only pray that somehow or other God can get His will done in the situation.
21:28. “Place.” The word “place” was a designation of the Temple, see commentary on topos in Matthew 24:15.
21:39. “no insignificant city.” Paul could have said that Tarsus was a “great” city, or an “important” city, but perhaps the Roman officer would have argued with him (national prejudices can run deep). This is the figure of speech, tapeinosis, or demeaning. It is the deliberate demeaning, or lessening of something in order to elevate or increase it. It often comes in the form of an understatement. We are aware that sometimes the most powerful way to emphasize something is to understate it. By understating the fact, and saying that Tarsus was “no insignificant city,” the Roman could hardly argue the point, and still got the message that Paul was therefore traveled and educated.

Chapter 22

22:4. “the Way.” This was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, formal designations of the Christian Faith, and it is used in Acts 9:2, 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22. [For more information, see commentary on Acts 9:2].
22:9. “understand.” This is one of the meanings of the Greek word, which is akouo (#191 ἀκοοω). By comparing Acts 9:7 and 22:9, we learn that the men with Paul heard the sound of Jesus’ voice, but did not understand what he said. See commentary note on Acts 9:7.
22:12. “deeply religious.” The Greek is eulabes (#2126 εὐλαβής); see commentary on “godly man” in Acts 10:2.
22:22. “for he should not have even been allowed to live this long.” A Greek idiom for an obligation that has existed from the past and is still unfulfilled at the present. Cp. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament; Lenski’s commentary. The Jews are so offended that they are saying that he should have already been executed for his beliefs and actions.

Chapter 23

23:12. “bound themselves under a curse.” The curse was that they would not eat or drink until they killed Paul. They had an out, of course. The Rabbis could dissolve the curse, and we can be sure that none of these men starved to death.
23:23. “third hour of the night.” This is about our 9 PM. Ordinarily the night was broken into watches, but sometimes a more accurate measurement was needed. [For the hours of the day and the watches of the night, see commentary on Mark 6:48].
23:31. “Antipatris.” A city about 40 miles (64 km) northwest of Jerusalem, and about 25 miles (40 km) from Caesarea. This is the only place this city is mentioned in the New Testament. It was built, or built up, by Herod the Great in 9 BC., and named after his father, Antipater. It had been the Old Testament site of Aphek (Josh. 12:1; 1 Sam. 4:1; 29:1; 1 Kings 20:26ff; 2 Kings 13:17; etc.).
Chapter 24

24:4. “clemency.” Greek is *epieikeia* (#1932), “consideration springing from a recognition of the danger that ever lurks upon the assertion of legal rights lest they be pushed to immoral limits. The virtue that rectifies and redresses the severity of a sentence” (Zodhiates, *Word Study Dictionary*). See commentary on “reasonable,” 1 Timothy 3:3. “Clemency” is a disposition to be merciful, and especially to moderate the harshness of judgment. It falls within the semantic range of *epieikeia*, and given the governmental context, is a good translation.

24:6b-8a. Most modern versions leave this out, recognizing from the textual evidence that is almost certainly a later addition (see Metzger, *Textual Commentary*; Lenski; Kistemaker). If left in, this addition changes “from whom” Felix would learn; it makes Felix learn about Paul by examining the Jews who accused him.

24:14. “as a follower of.” The Greek used the preposition, *kata* (#2596 κατά), which is often translated “according to,” or “in accord with,” but has many meanings (cp. BDAG Greek-English lexicon). A very clear rendering of the Greek *kata* in this context, while not being strictly literal, is “as a follower of” (cp. NIV84; NLT; New English Bible; The Source NT).

“the Way.” This was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, formal designations of the Christian Faith, and it is used in Acts 9:2, 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22. [For more information, see commentary on Acts 9:2].

24:15. “a resurrection of both the righteous and unrighteous.” Although the resurrection of the righteous and the resurrection of the unrighteous are separated by 1,000 years (Cp. Revelation 20:4-13), this verse mentions them both without paying attention to the time separation. Until the Church Epistles stated that the Christian Church would be taken up to heaven from the earth in an event theologians refer to as “the Rapture,” (1 Thess. 4:16-18), the Bible had only revealed that there would be two resurrections. The first resurrection is called, “The first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5, 6); “the resurrection of life” (John 5:29); and “the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15). The first resurrection will occur at the beginning of the 1000 year Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah. It will occur soon after the Battle of Armageddon right at the start of the Millennial Kingdom, which is Christ’s kingdom on earth [see Appendix 3: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”]. The first resurrection will include all the righteous people from Genesis through the Battle of Armageddon, with the exception of the Christian Church, because Christians will have been Raptured into heaven before the Tribulation started [see commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:17].

The second resurrection is called “the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29), and “the resurrection of the unrighteous” (Acts 24:15), because most of the people who are raised at that time will be judged to be unjust. This second resurrection will occur after the 1000 year Millennial Kingdom is over (Rev. 20:4-13). Since all the righteous people who ever lived before the Millennial Kingdom had already been raised from the dead, it is a fair question to ask who in the “resurrection of the unrighteous” was left to be declared righteous and granted everlasting life? To answer that question we must remember that the Millennial Kingdom will last 1000 years, and the “natural people” in it
will live and die in that time. Those natural people who lived righteous lives will be raised at the last resurrection, the resurrection of the unrighteous, but will be granted everlasting life.

The only two resurrections mentioned in the Old Testament and Gospels are the resurrection of the righteous and the resurrection of the unrighteous. The Rapture was not revealed until the Church Epistles were written. There are some verses in the Bible that refer to both of these resurrections in the same verse or context, and these include: Daniel 12:2; John 5:29; Acts 24:15; and Revelation 20:4-13.

That there would be a resurrection from the dead should have been well known from the Old Testament. Job said that even though his flesh was destroyed in the grave, in his flesh he would see God (Job 19:25-27). Isaiah 26:19 says the earth will give birth to the dead. Ezekiel 37:12-14 is very clear about the resurrection. Daniel 12:2 and 13 both speak of the resurrection, as does Hosea 13:14.

The end times events will occur in the following order: The Christian Church will be Raptured into heaven and there will be seven years of Tribulation on earth. The Tribulation will end when Christ comes down from heaven and fights the Battle of Armageddon and conquers the earth (Rev. 19:11ff). Then the Devil and his demons will be imprisoned (Rev. 20:1-3). Then, close together, Christ will judge those people on earth who survived the Tribulation and Armageddon; this judgment is called the Sheep and Goat Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46), and also the first resurrection will occur (Rev. 20:4-6). Then there will be the 1000 year Millennial Kingdom of Christ [see Appendix 3: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”]. Then the Devil and his demons will be loosed and there will be another war (Rev. 20:7-10). Then there will be the second resurrection, the Resurrection of the Unrighteous (Rev. 20:11-15). Then God will establish a new heaven and earth (Rev. 21 and 22).

24:22. “the Way.” This was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, formal designations of the Christian Faith, and it is used in Acts 9:2, 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22. [For more information, see commentary on Acts 9:2].

Chapter 25

25:6. “judgment seat.” The Greek word is bēma (#968 βήμα; pronounced bay’-ma), and it was a term that originally meant the space which a foot covers (a foot-length) or a place for the foot. Then it came to mean a raised place mounted by steps, and thus often a platform or the official seat of a judge or ruler, and thus the place from which awards and rewards were given and punishment meted out.

25:13. “Agrippa the King.” This is Herod Agrippa II. He was the great grandson of Herod the Great through his favorite wife, Miriamne, He was living in and incestuous relationship with his sister, Bernice. The territory ruled by Agrippa II was quite large. Claudius gave him then more, t then Nero expanded the territory over which he ruled.

Chapter 26
26:11. “I tried to force them.” The Greek word is *anagkazō* (#315 ἀναγκάζω), to force or compel, and in this verse it is a conative imperfect active (Robertson; *Word Pictures in the New Testament*), expressing what Paul tried to get the Christians to do. Sometimes he would have been successful, sometimes not.

“defame.” The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

26:18. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

26:23. “first.” There is some controversy as to whether the word “first” goes with rising from the dead (REV, ESV, NIV, etc.) or proclaiming the light (NASB). The natural word order in the Greek tends to make first go with resurrection from the dead, which is certainly the case: Jesus was the first person and only person who was raised from the dead and never died again. The verse becomes somewhat more ambiguous if “first” goes with “proclaim.” Being raised is not a prerequisite for proclaiming truth, and there were others before him who proclaimed truth.

“the People.” A term the Jews used of themselves. In the Jewish mindset, there were “the people” (the Jews) and everyone else, “the Gentiles.”


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**Chapter 27**

27:1. “we.” This verse starts the third and last “we” section of Acts, when Luke joins Paul on his travels. The three “we” sections are: Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; and 27:1-28:16.

27:2. “embarking in a ship.” There were many things about traveling by ship that were challenging. First, there were no passenger ships until modern times. With the exception of ships that specifically carried imperial persons, every ship was a working vessel or a military ship. Anyone wanting to travel by ship had to first find a ship going in the direction they wanted, then haggle for lodging space, which was most often just a small place on the deck.

There were no food or provisions for passengers; any passenger had to bring his own food and wine, though some ships provided water. Especially the larger ships had the equivalent of a galley where meals could be cooked, and although the crew would always have first dibs, passengers would be allowed to cook meals during off times. Travelers also had to bring anything comfortable they wanted to sleep on, and their own covering for warmth and in case of rain. They were usually allowed to pitch a little tent-like covering at night and take it down during the day.

Also, ships had no set sailing schedule. They had to wait for the right tide, the right wind, and for the omens to be right as well. As bad omen would cancel sailing.
Furthermore, there were days that were considered bad to start a trip (like our Friday the 13th). No skipper would leave port on days such as August 24th, October 5th, November 8th, etc.

Almost always the ships would travel in sight of land. Instruments like the sextant had not been invented, and it was easy to get way off course in the open ocean, so skirting the land was usually the best course of action for ships. The exception was usually some of the large grain ships that plied the ocean and ran, for example, the trip from Alexandria Egypt to Rome.


27:10. “lives.” The Greek word is psuchē, often translated “soul.” Paul was in no way saying that people’s everlasting souls were in danger from the storm. He was using “soul” of the natural life of the body. See commentary on Acts 20:24.

27:14. “northeaster.” The Greek is eurakulon (Εὐρακύλων), which is a hybrid sailor’s word from the Greek euros, east wind, and the Latin aquilo, north wind. Gales from the NE are not uncommon in the Mediterranean.


27:24. “see!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

27:27. “drifting across.” The Greek, diapherō (#1308 διαφέρω), in this case refers to drifting across, although we know from the record in Acts that the wind was actually blowing them steadily. There is no reason to translate the text as “to and fro,” “up and down,” etc. The wind was in a steady direction. They were being blown across, (or “through,” cp. Lenski) the sea. Cp. BDAG Greek-English lexicon; F. F. Bruce, The New International Commentary on the New Testament: Acts.

“Adriatic.” This could well be confusing to the modern reader. In Roman times the Adriatic Sea extended to the middle of what we know as the Mediterranean Sea, but today geographers limit it to the sea between Italy and Greece. The ship Paul was on was in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, between Crete and Malta. It was not in the modern Adriatic Sea.


27:38. “grain.” The Greek word is sitos (#4621 σίτος), which means “wheat,” or “grain” in general. Here is most likely means grain in general. It is not likely that the only grain on board was wheat, even though wheat was the most desirable grain. At that time of year, all of the grain harvests were over.

Chapter 28

28:4. “Justice herself.” Cp. NET translation, “Justice herself has not allowed him to live!” Justice comes from the Greek dikē (#1349 δίκη, pronounced dee-kay’), which BDAG defines in this verse as “Justice personified as a deity.” The pagans conceived of Justice as a female deity who ensured that proper punishment was given to criminals: “A goddess who personifies justice in seeking out and punishing the guilty—‘the goddess Justice.’ … Although a number of modern English translations have rendered dikē (δίκη) “justice,” preferring to use an abstraction, in the original setting it is almost certainly a reference to a pagan deity” (NET Translation Note, Acts 28:4). Kistemaker writes: “The
natives conclude that their goddess Justice is meting out divine punishment on an evildoer” (New Testament Commentary: Acts). Thus we have added “herself” in italics to make clear that a personified deity was intended.


28:25. “the Holy Spirit rightly spoke.” “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. Here it refers to a prophetic word inferred to Isaiah in roughly 700 BC. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

28:26, 27. Quoted from Isaiah 6:9, 10.

28:27. “grown dull.” The Greek is pachunō (#3975 παχύνω), and means “to make thick, to make fat, to fatten,” and it is used metaphorically for making someone stupid or dull.

28:28. “this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles.” The theology known as “ultradispensationalism” starts a new administration with this verse [For information on the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Ephesians 3:2]. E. W. Bullinger, in his book, The Foundations of Dispensational Truth, tries to explain why. The essence of Bullinger’s argument is that up until this point the parousia, the personal coming of Christ, was presented to Israel if they would repent, but after this the parousia is not mentioned again. Thus it is at this point a new administration starts which is primarily to the Gentiles, and is set forth in the later epistles such as Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians.

We do not agree that a new administration should start with this verse. For one thing, there is no genuinely clear evidence for the change of dispensation in Acts 28. There is nothing like the expulsion from Eden, the giving of the Law, or the pouring out of the gift of holy spirit on the Day Pentecost. Furthermore, there are not major doctrinal changes, which are always a huge part of any change in administration (a point we will expand upon shortly). Furthermore, the fact that Paul said that the Gospel would be sent to the Gentiles was not new. In fact, carefully reading Acts 28:28 shows it does not ever say that it was new, just that the Good News would go to Gentiles who would listen rather than Jews who would not. This qualifies as a genuine prophecy, but not the start of a new administration.

If the inclusion of the Gentiles were going to start a new administration, then it seems that Acts 10, where the Gentiles were clearly included in the Church, would qualify better than Acts 28. The Acts 10 record would then have been further confirmed by Acts 11:26, when many Gentiles were added to the Church and believers were first called “Christians,” a term including both Jews and Gentiles. The inclusion of the Gentiles would have been even further confirmed by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 (likely 49 AD). Then, highlighting that the Gentiles were now the major converts to the Church would have been Romans 11:28, written less than a decade after the Counsel (likely 57 AD) which says that the Jews were enemies of the Gospel. Although Paul was still actively trying to win Jews through his three itinerary journeys, it is clear that his greatest successes were among the Gentiles, something that can be easily seen by reading Acts.

As to the ultradispensational position that the offer of the parousia has somehow been withdrawn because the Jews rejected Jesus, we find it untenable (cp. Bullinger,
Foundations, p. 179, 180). Although the word “parousia” is not used in the later epistles of Ephesians-Colossians, the concept of the parousia certainly is. Furthermore, it is in 1 John 2:28, which we would argue is later than Acts 28. The parousia relates to the coming and presence of Christ, which is in all the Epistles, and is the heart of the book of Revelation. The parousia was not withdrawn simply because the Jews rejected it. They just will not get to enjoy Christ’s return.

A primary motivation that ultra-dispensationalists have for making a new administration starting in Acts 28 is that it gets rid of the manifestations of holy spirit such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing. Most ultradispensationalists do agree that God still heals, but not as a manifestation of holy spirit like Peter, Paul, and others operated, but rather just as something that God occasionally does by fiat for His own glory. But the manifestations of holy spirit cannot be done away with without getting rid of holy spirit. By definition, if you have holy spirit, you have manifestations. That lesson goes back to Numbers 11 when the 70 who got the spirit immediately began the manifestation of prophecy. But Ephesians and the later epistles clearly mention the holy spirit. Ephesians explains the whole process of receiving holy spirit: we hear, then we believe, then we are sealed with holy spirit (Eph. 1:13, 14). But for ultradispensationalism to work, Christians must have the gift of holy spirit but not have the manifestations of holy spirit. That is not possible. The manifestations are inherent with the gift of holy spirit. Ephesians, for example, mentions prophets in the Church, but prophecies are a manifestation of the gift of holy spirit. Also, the manifestations of the spirit are clearly in the book of Revelation, because prophecy is mentioned a few different times. It makes no sense that the manifestations of holy spirit would be given to the early church and to the people in the book of Revelation, but not given to the Church today.

Considering the evidence, there is just no valid reason for starting a new administration in Acts 28.

28:29. Verse omitted in REV. The textual evidence shows that this verse is a late addition to the Western text, and from there it was copied into some Byzantine texts (from which it came into the KJV). The addition was possibly made because of the abrupt transition in the language from what is now verse 28 to verse 30. Other versions omit this verse, including the NIV, ESV, and RSV.
1:1. "servant." The Greek is *doulos* (#1401 δοῦλος), and it means "servant" or "slave." *Doulos* is a word that has been misunderstood by Christians. Many Christians compare *doulos* to the "bondservant" of the Old Testament (cp. Exod. 21:5 and 6), but the two are totally different. The Old Testament commanded that slaves who were fellow Israelites be released every seven years (Deut. 15:12). If a slave did not want to be freed, he became a bondservant, a slave serving willingly. This was unique to Israel, and the rest of the world treated slaves differently. In all countries but Israel, a slave was a slave for life unless freed by the master.

In the Greek language, *doulos* was the standard word for "slave," but it was also used of servants, whereas technically, the position of "servant" was also described by some other Greek words. When it comes to slaves, many of them suffered miserably and had no recourse for humane treatment. However, many slaves were loved by their owners and treated so well they were more like servants than what we think of as slaves. Also there were many slaves, particularly in the realm of public works, that had authority over non-slaves. For example, it is estimated that an emperor of Rome might have some 20,000 slaves (Jerome Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, p. 70), and his slaves oversaw much of the daily running of the empire, especially public works projects such as buildings and sewers. These slaves bossed around the workers, many of whom would have been free citizens--some even of rank in the Empire (who complained about it bitterly).

When it comes to the "servants," the Roman Empire was full of servants, who, while technically "freemen," were in debt and treated like slaves, blurring the distinction between "servant" and "slave." Given the social situation in the Greco-Romans empire, it is easy to see how the word *doulos* was used to refer to both slaves and servants, but this makes it very hard to translate the New Testament. Each use of *doulos* has to be examined individually to see if "slave" or "servant" is a better fit, and sometimes there is not enough context to make a good decision. Whether a person was a servant or slave is very important to us today, because in our culture there is a huge difference between the two positions. However, that was not a big problem when the Greek NT was written, because as was stated above, when the word *doulos* was used, the people had a more instinctive grip on the situation of the one being called a *doulos* and the technicalities of the position were not nearly as important.

"called." The Greek is *klētos* (#2822 κλητός), an adjective, not a verb. In the Gospels, "called" referred to an invitation; such as in the man called people to a banquet. In the Epistles, the word *klētos* has a different meaning. In the Epistles, "called," or "the called," refers to those who have accepted the invitation. This makes it awkward to translate accurately for the beginning student. Translating it just "called" leaves a steep learning curve for the beginning reader, while translating it "one who has accepted the call" seems far to lengthy and awkward. Romans 1:1 is saying that Paul is "one who accepted God’s call and is an apostle."
In that light, Romans 1:7 does not mean, “To all who are loved by God in Rome, invited to be holy ones,” it means, “To all who are loved by God in Rome who have accepted God’s call and are now holy ones.” Similarly, Romans 8:28 does not mean, “Now we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, even to those who are invited, in accordance with his purpose.” It means, “Now we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, even to those who have accepted God’s call, in accordance with his purpose.

Every human is “called,” invited, to salvation (as the word is used in the Gospels), but not every person accepts the call. In the Epistles, everyone who is “called” has accepted the call and is saved. Every Christian has accepted the call, and every Christian has a ministry, a service, in the Body of Christ. God sets the members in the Body as it pleases Him (1 Cor. 12:18), and each member has a different job to do (Rom. 12:4-6). Paul accepted God’s call and was placed in the Body as an apostle, thus he is “a called apostle.”

Although some translations say, “called to be an apostle,” that is not quite correct. It is not as if God called Paul “to be” an apostle. God called Paul to be saved, but the way “called” is used in the Epistles, the word klētos is saying that Paul accepted God’s call and was appointed as an apostle. Similarly, saying Paul was “called as an apostle” is not quite correct either; that could mean he was an apostle when he was called. Although Paul certainly had the potential to be an apostle when he was invited to be saved, he did not have the ministry of an apostle until the Lord had sent him. [For more on “called,” see commentary on Romans 8:28].

“appointed.” This is from the Greek word aphorizo (#873 ἀφορίζω), which has two basic meanings, (1) “to remove one party from other parties so as to discourage or eliminate contact, separate, take away” and (2) “to select one person out of a group for a purpose, set apart, appoint” (BDAG). The meaning in this context is (2); definition (1) obviously does not apply—Paul was certainly not separated away from other parties and discouraged to make contact when he was set apart for the Gospel. For this reason we have avoided the translation “separated” (cp. KJV; ASV), and chosen “appointed” to communicate the meaning of the Greek word. Paul was appointed; he was selected for a purpose, namely, to bring about the obedience of faith among the nations (v. 5).

“Good News.” The Greek word euaggelion (#2098 εὐαγγέλιον; pronounced eu-an-ge-lee-on, the double g is pronounced as an “ng”), from the prefix “eu,” which means “good” (and is used in such words as “euphemism: good speech; eulogy: “a good word;” and euthanasia: “a good death”), and from aggelos (pronounced “an-ge-loss”), which means “message,” and from which we get “angel,” or messenger. It is the good message, or more colloquially, the Good News.

Many versions have “the Gospel of God.” The phrase “Gospel (or Good News) of God” occurs 8 times in the NT. As “the Good News of God,” care must be taken to read the context to determine what the “Good News” is, which Good News is being referred to in the context. In Mark 1:14, it is clear “the Gospel of the Kingdom,” is the “Good News” being referred to. The other 7 uses of the phrase “Good News of God” appear in the writings to the Christian Church. In this case in Romans, the Good News is a general statement about Jesus Christ. There is no definite article in the Greek text, so it is not “THE good news of God” but rather “a good message from God,” which He promised before through His prophets...concerning His Son Jesus Christ. This does not refer to the
Good News of the Grace of God, because that was not promised beforehand, but was a secret hidden in God (Eph. 3:2-10). There are cases, such as in 1 Thessalonians 2:2, 8, and 9, where the Good News of God that Paul is referring to is the message he taught and preached, which was the Good News about the Grace of God (“the Good News of the Grace of God,” Acts 20:24).

1:3. “in respect to the flesh.” In the sense that it is used here, the flesh declared, if you will, or revealed, that Jesus was the Son of David. Both his mother, Mary, and his adopted father, Joseph, were from the line of David (Matt. 1 and Luke 3, respectively). There is a parallel between verse 3 and verse 4 in that the flesh revealed that he was the Son of David, and God revealed that he was the Messiah, something He declared when He raised him from among the dead.

1:4. “the Son of God in power” Jesus was declared to be “the Son of God with power” by the resurrection. He had been the Son of God since his conception, and even demonstrated some power in his life on earth. However, his resurrection showed beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was indeed, “the Son of God with power.” The phrase “with power” could be conflated to add clarity to “the Son of God invested with power.”

“in respect to the spirit of holiness.” The “Spirit of Holiness” is God. Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power when he was raised, and this was “according to” God. God had placed in His Word some references to the death and resurrection of His Son (Ps. 16:10, Acts 2:31; Ps. 2:7, Acts 13:33; Isa. 53:11, 12). We have to remember that through all ages there have been false Messiahs. How are we to know who is the real Messiah? God had said in his Word that He would raise the Messiah from the dead. So when Jesus got up from the dead, he was, by that fact, declared to be the Son of God, and this was according to God (the Spirit of Holiness), i.e., according to what God had said. We use the same general expression today when we say, “According to so and so,...” when we mean, according to what the person had said. There are commentators who believe that the spirit of holiness is Christ’s new spiritual body or spiritual nature. Lenski does a good job of discussing that and showing that it really does not fit in this instance. For one thing, the phrase “the Spirit of Holiness” would not be something that most people would assume would be Jesus’ new body, while on the other hand, the unusual word for “holiness” here, hagiosune (ἁγιωσύνη), occurs 4 times in the Septuagint, all of them referring to an attribute of God. By referring to God as the Spirit of Holiness there is an emphasis on His unique holiness, which is then juxtaposed with the unique power he has invested in His Son.

1:5. “through whom.” The translation “through whom” is the proper way to translate the Greek preposition dia (#1223 διά; pronounced dee-ah'). This emphasizes the role of Jesus as the mediator between God and mankind. We have to remember how natural it was for people in Paul’s time to see Jesus as the mediator between God and mankind, and that to get to God, a person had to go through Jesus. In the biblical world it was customary that people did not get to see an important person without going through some kind of mediator. So, for example, when some Greeks wanted to see Jesus, they went to Phillip, one of the apostles (John 12:21). The centurion who wanted his servant healed sent a delegation of Jews to Jesus, rather than come himself (Luke 7:3-5). R. C. H. Lenski (The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans) writes:

Back of these acts concerning Jesus was God, and so God is equally back of this our reception of grace and apostleship ‘through’ Jesus Christ, our
Lord. *Dia* is exactly right, for by making Jesus the medium it leaves the connection with God as the ultimate agent.

“we.” This is a literary plural, also known as the plural of majesty. Paul means only himself (cp. Kistemaker; John Murray, “Epistle to the Romans,” *New International Commentary on the New Testament*). This is the same use of the plural in Genesis 1:26: “let us make man in our image.” For another example of the literary plural, see Ezra 4:18.

“obedience of trust.” This is the genitive of production: Paul is speaking of the obedience produced by faith. Lenski, who calls this a subjective genitive, explains the phrase, “faith renders obedience.” He also provides a good list of other possibilities that he rules out: Attributive genitive: obedience marked by faith; objective genitive: obedience to the faith; appositional genitive: obedience which is faith. [For more on the genitive of production, see Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 104ff].

“all for the sake of his name.” Lenski has shown that this phrase refers to the whole verse, including the receiving of the grace of apostleship and the great commission. By adding the word “all,” we see that the phrase refers to more than the bringing of obedience that is done for his name’s sake.

1:6. “Jesus Christ’s called ones.” The Greek has “Jesus Christ” in the genitive case, the called ones “of Jesus Christ,” but the genitive is possessive, so “Jesus Christ’s called ones” makes the sentence read easy. For more on “called,” see commentary on Romans 1:1.

1:7. “called ones, holy ones.” This phrase has been understood many different ways, which can be seen by reading different versions. This is in part due to the fact that there are three adjectives in a short phrase, and in Greek an adjective can be used in many ways, including a predicate nominative when a verb is not actually present but supplied, which is where we get the common reading, “called to be saints.” In this verse “beloved,” “called,” and “holy” are all dative masculine plural adjectives modifying the same subject: “All” [who are in Rome]. The rendering “called to be saints” (NIV, KJV, ESV) takes the Greek adjective “called” (kletos, #2822 κλητός) as if it were a verb, and then takes the Greek adjective hagios (#40 ἅγιος) and translates it as a predicate nominative modifying “called.” However, this seems incorrect. The straightforward reading of the Greek seems to treat all the adjectives in the verse attributively. (See: Dana and Mantey p. 118). Lenski agrees that “called to be saints” is not correct (as does Meyer). However, he says that “called” is used as an adjective modifying “holy,” which is using “holy” as a noun (holy ones), not an adjective, so he notes the phrase is saying “saints because called.”

The NASB reads, “called as holy,” which seems better than “called to be holy,” but the problem is that it still makes “called” a verb in the sentence, which seems incorrect. One of the problems we have in English is that “called” seems automatically to be a verb, which it is not in the Greek. The book of Romans emphasizes salvation by faith and who we are in Christ as God’s saved Church. Thus it seems appropriate that God would open the epistle by stating and thus emphasizing what each Christian is: “beloved,” “called ones,” and “holy ones,” and the Greek can easily and naturally be read that way.
When it comes to the word “called” (klētos), in the Gospels it referred to an invitation, but in the Epistles it refers to those who have accepted the invitation and are saved [For more on “called,” see commentary on Romans 1:1 and Romans 8:28].

Although the scope of Scripture shows us the dominant meaning of this verse is that we are “called ones” (those who have accepted God’s call), and “holy ones” (those who are holy in God’s sight), it is an undertone in the verse that we have been “called to be holy.” There is no question that God has called us to live a holy life, and Christians are commanded to “be holy” (Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:15, 16). Thus there are undertones of the figure of speech amphibologia (double entendre) in this verse, with God both telling us what we are and also how we should live. Fittingly, God can say that we are holy, and we are to be holy, in one phrase. However, for the translation, it seems the dominant meaning in Romans (and 1 Cor. 1:2) is that God has made us holy.

1:9. “in my spirit.” This phrase has been interpreted many different ways. In the Bible, the word “spirit” can refer to a large number of different things. These include, God (the “Spirit” in John 3:8); Jesus, who is referred to as “the Spirit” after his resurrection (2 Cor. 3:17); the gift of God known as holy spirit (Acts 2:38; 8:15; 10:44; 19:2); angels, who are “ministering spirits” (Heb. 1:14); demons (Matt. 8:16; Luke 9:39); “breath” or “life,” as when the girl’s pneuma, breath or life, returned when Jesus raised her from the dead (Luke 8:55); wind (John 3:8); and attitude or thoughts, as when Christ said, “The spirit [attitude] is willing, but the body is weak” (Matt. 26:41b).

In this case, the fact that Paul refers to this as “my spirit” makes it clear that this verse is referring to the gift of God that he received when he was born again [For an understanding of the “gift of holy spirit” in contrast to “the Holy Spirit,” see, The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to Be Like Christ, by Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit]. Many commentators think that the use of “in my spirit” is roughly equivalent to “with my whole heart.” However that is because Trinitarian commentators are not used to thinking in terms of “spirit” as a reference to the gift of holy spirit that a person receives when he is born again. They are used to thinking that “spirit” refers to “the Holy Spirit,” the third person of the Trinity. However that cannot be the case in this verse because Paul speaks of “my spirit,” in the sense of his personal ownership. While personal ownership certainly does not apply to God in any way, it is true of the gift of holy spirit that God gives when a Christian gets born again. The gift of holy spirit that a Christian receives when he is born again is very much “his” spirit. Paul does more than just serve God with his whole heart, something he makes clear through the entire Epistle, he serves God “in” his spirit, i.e., in connection with, and in relation to, his spirit (cp. note on “in,” Eph. 1:3).

To really serve God, the Christian must not only serve God with his whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, in the flesh, but he must walk by the spirit of God and thus by revelation and divine guidance. That is what Paul is emphasizing here.

1:10. “succeed.” The Greek verb is euodonō (#2137 εὐοδῶ), which is a compound word from the noun hodos, “road,” and the prefix eu, “good.” Often translated “to prosper,” this word literally means to “have a good road,” i.e., have an easy, successful path ahead of you. Although it can apply to financial prosperity (1 Cor. 16:2), it is not restricted to such; the term is much broader than that. It is used in Romans 1:10 in the context of things working out well, so the Apostle Paul could visit the Romans. See commentary on “go well with you” in 3 John 1:2.
1:12. “in other words.” The Greek pronoun *touto*, like most pronouns, has a wide range of meanings, depending on the context. As the BDAG lexicon points out, in this case it naturally means, “that is,” or “that means.” It seems very unclear to translate *touto* as “that is,” because it makes what Paul is saying in this verse equal to what he said in verse 11. Paul is explaining and expanding in verse 12 what he had said in the previous verses, which the phrase “in other words,” captures very well. Other versions that use the phrase “in other words” include The New Testament in the Language of the People by Charles Williams and God’s New Covenant by Heinz Cassirer.

1:14. “non-Greeks.” The Greek word is *barbaros* (#915 βάρβαρος). To the Greeks, any foreigner who did not speak Greek sounded as though all he could say was “bar, bar, bar,” so a non-Greek was referred to as a *barbaros*. From this word we get the English “barbarian,” which most translations employ in this verse. But the English word barbarian is perhaps too harsh; for it carries either the connotation of evil, harsh people or that of warriors wearing animal skins and bearing large swords. Neither is intended by the Apostle Paul. Rather the sense of the word as he uses it refers simply to people the Romans considered foreigners, both in the language aspect (non-Greek speakers) and culture aspect (non-Hellenists). By using the phrase “Greeks and non-Greeks” the Apostle means, essentially, everyone. “In Rom. 1:14-15 Paul is describing the universality of his apostolic commitment (cf. 1:5) he is to preach to barbarians as well as Hellenes… [he] describes the whole non-Jewish world by the formula” (TDNT).


1:18. “is being revealed.” The Greek verb is *apokaluptō* (#601 ἀποκαλύπτω) and it means to be revealed, disclosed, or brought to light. The noun form of the word, *apokalupsis* (#602 ἀποκάλυψις), is translated “revelation,” and is the name of the last book of the Bible, Revelation, which reveals the end times and Jesus Christ. Romans 1:17 and 18 use the same word, *apokaluptō*, in the same form: present tense and active voice. Thus it means, “is being revealed,” i.e., it is being revealed at this present time, and the phrase “is being revealed” is clearer in English than just “is revealed.” Verse 17 refers to God’s righteousness that is currently being revealed, and verse 18 refers to God’s wrath that is being revealed.

Although it is certainly true that God’s wrath will be revealed in a very clear and powerful way in the future, and completely so on the Day of Judgment, His wrath is also being revealed now, in different ways. For example, He resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). There are people who openly defy God, and God does stand against those people in certain ways to protect and bless His people. A good example of this is Acts 13:10 when Elymas the sorcerer was stricken with blindness. However, there are much more subtle ways God’s wrath is revealed, from simply not helping people and giving them over to the often terrible consequences of their evil acts (cp. Rom. 1:24), to not, or not being able to, intervene to protect them from direct attacks of the Adversary. That is one reason that evil people get worse and worse in their behavior (cp. 2 Tim. 2:16; 3:13). What makes all this hard for us to fully understand is that although some evil people obviously seem to have terrible things happen to them, other evil people seem to do quite well. We do not see all the invisible workings of God, and so often what we do see seems confusing.

“hinder.” The Greek word is *katecho* (# 2722 κατέχω), and it means to hold back, hinder, prevent, restrain, suppress. In the war between truth and error, the Devil is
constantly working to suppress, hinder, or stop if possible, the work of God. He often succeeds. Sadly, sometimes it is because of too little effort on the part of God’s people. For example, we are told to pray without ceasing, and one of the things we are to pray for is that “the word of the Lord may continue to run swiftly and be glorified” (2 Thess. 3:1). If Christians do not pray for the spread of the Gospel, it will not spread as efficaciously as it could have. In many cases, however, the Devil marshals his demons and those people who oppose God, and directly hinders God’s purposes. For example, Paul wanted to go to Thessalonica and support the believers there, “but Satan prevented us” (1 Thess. 2:18). This verse is very solid evidence that not everything that happens is the will of God, for surely it is not ever God’s will that truth be hindered. Scholars who think that “God is in control” or that everything that happens is God’s will take the word “hinder” in a conative sense, the sense of “trying to prevent.” In general, they argue that God’s truth always prevails, so all man can do is “try” to suppress it. While it is true that God’s truth cannot ever be completely stopped because God Himself is behind it, it is also true that Satan’s forces and evil people can indeed actually hinder, and sometimes, in some situations for a period of time, stop God’s truth.

It is often the case that the people who hinder God’s truth are in positions of authority in government. They pass laws forbidding prayer in public schools, or demanding evolution be taught in school while forbidding the teaching of creation, or forbidding evangelism. Such things are good reasons for godly people to seek positions of earthly authority. God wants righteousness to prevail on earth (1 Tim. 2:2), and He is in favor of supporting earthly governments (Rom. 13; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13, 14), but it does not seem logical that He would expect righteous laws to be enacted and enforced by unbelievers. The things of God are foolishness to those who are unsaved (1 Cor. 2:14). One of the ministries God calls people to is leadership and administration (Rom. 12:8), and not all of the people with those ministries are called to serve in the Church. Some should lead in the government. Then they will be in a good position to enact and enforce laws that support truth and do not hinder it.

One thing that Romans 1:18 makes clear is that God is not “in control” of everything that happens and that His will is not always done. If everything that happens is God’s will, then by definition there is no such thing as hindering the truth. Anything we would think of as hindering would actually be part of God’s plan. However, there is no reason to think this verse is not clear and literal. There are people who “hinder” the truth, and that is precisely because not everything that happens is God’s will. It is the responsibility of people who believe God to stop people who do not. Although there is a measure of God’s wrath that is coming from heaven now, as this verse says, it is not enough to stop evil. If evil people are going to be stopped from hindering the truth, it is the godly people who must stop them and control society such that the truth can be freely proclaimed.

In the spiritual battle for the minds and lives of people, lies and confusion are some of the Devil’s main weapons. Anyone who has studied history or theology knows there are at least two sides to every story and two interpretations to every verse. In part this comes from ignorance—often we do not know the truth, and although we are honestly trying to attain it, we have differences of opinion. However, when it comes to the confusion that exists in Christianity, we dare not dismiss the fact that life is a spiritual battle and the Devil uses his people to introduce confusion into theology and Christianity.
in general. In the Old Testament, the false prophets confused people about the truth that the true prophets were speaking. A good example is Jeremiah versus the false prophet Hananiah (Jer. 28). Jeremiah was saying the Judeans would be captive to Babylon for 70 years (Jer. 25:11). Hananiah said two years (Jer. 28:3). Another example of evil people causing confusion and suppressing the truth occurred just after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The soldiers told the truth about the resurrection of Jesus to the religious leaders, but they were so blinded by their hate for Jesus and their love of power and position that they denied it and perverted it for their own goals. They bribed the guards to say the disciples came and stole the body of Christ (Matt. 28:11-15). There is not much argument about what happened to Jesus’ body today, but there was in the early years of the Church, and many Jews denied the resurrection because they believed what they had heard about Jesus’ body. Matthew 28:15 says that many Jews still believed the invented story at the time Matthew was written, which was likely written in the 50’s to early 60’s AD, 20 to 30 years after Jesus died. Today there are many things that confuse people about Christianity, and it is the responsibility of each one of us to study the written Word of God and find the truth God is revealing through it. Modern “orthodox” Christianity is a blend of many things. There is some truth, such as the resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, there are some beliefs that are the result of pagan practices that have survived in Christianity. One example of this is the supposed date of Christ's birth on December 25. Another example is the belief that when a person dies, his “soul” lives on after the body dies (cp. Is There Death After Life by Spirit & Truth Fellowship International). Some of the Jews believed that during the time of Christ, but had gotten it from the Greeks after Alexander the Great conquered Israel (332 BC), and later, when many Greeks were being converted to Christianity, they too brought the belief of life after death into Christianity.

There are some beliefs in some denominations of Christianity that came much later than the early Christians. For example, the belief of some denominations that Christian ministers should not marry was inculcated into the Christian Faith in the fourth century AD, but the motivation behind the celibacy was a pagan dualism that separated flesh from spirit in a non-biblical way. We must also keep in mind that denominations differ about the truth of something based on their own perspective. For example, a group that does not allow women in ministry might say that the Cult of Isis that was prevalent in the Roman Empire introduced women to ministry but the Church Fathers caught the error and dismissed them. In contrast to that, we would say that the early Church obeyed the revelation of God and brought women into ministry, but the Church Fathers stifled the work of God, a stifling that is still in large part occurring today.

Truth is still being suppressed in many ways today, and each Christian has the personal responsibility to discover the truth and then live it. Doing nothing for the Lord because “No one can seem to agree about it” is falling right into the Devil’s trap and why he caused the confusion in the first place, while saying, “I believe this because my pastor does” is not valid now any more than it would have been to say, “I do not believe that Jesus is the Christ because my synagogue leaders say he is not.”

1:19. “plain to them.” The phrase occurs twice in the verse. The Greek uses the preposition en (#1722 ἐν), “in,” which can be treated as a dative “to,” or it can mean “plain within them” (cp. NASB), or “plain among them” (HCSB). The clearest English is “plain to them,” but the en can also refer pluralistically to the group of those who reject
God and suppress the truth, because through the collective knowledge of mankind much of what can be known about God is very evident. The knowledge of God is plain to them and plain among them.

1:20. “his invisible attributes…are clearly seen.” At first glance this is an oxymoron, and it is designed to grab our attention, but it is explained by the fact that his invisible attributes are seen by looking at what He has made.

“divine nature.” The Greek word is theiotes (#2305 θειότης pronounced thay-ah'-tais), and it means “the quality or characteristic(s) pert. to deity, divinity, divine nature, divineness” (BDAG lexicon). It only occurs here in the Greek NT, and is a rare word. Our only secular documentation occurs after the 4th century. As BDAG says, it pertains to the quality or characteristics pertaining to God, so when we see what God has made, we learn about His character. Of course, this is to be taken in the scope of the whole Bible, because there are certainly things about creation that are due to the Devil and the Fall, not to God.

The KJV translates the word theiotes as “Godhead,” but no modern version does. It must be remembered that in 1611 the Greek manuscripts that allow us to properly understand the word had not been discovered. “Godhead” is an inaccurate translation. Besides the fact that God is not a Trinity, there is nothing in nature that points to any such thing. Nothing in nature is three separate things and one thing at the same time, especially nothing that could have been known as such thousands of years before Christ.

“through the things he has made.” This includes all the things God has made. Psalm 19:1 tells us the heavens declare the glory (which in the Greek also connotes power) of God. Nature and the world around us declare the power and “divine nature” of God. Since the power and divine nature of God could easily be seen “from the creation of the world,” no one needed a microscope or telescope to see it. Even looking at mankind itself shows God’s power. Humans are definitely “remarkably and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14 HCSB). Despite the fact that God’s power and divine nature can be seen with the naked eye in the world around us, in the last couple decades our advanced science is revealing quite conclusively that the complex nature of life could not have originated by chance and via a purely “mechanistic” model (cp. Signature in the Cell by Stephen Meyer). Thus, at every level God’s power and handiwork is being demonstrated.

“so that they are without excuse.” One of the mental faculties of mankind is the basic ability to discern good from bad and truth from error. God made this clear in Genesis 3:22, when God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.” When we combine that with God’s promise that if we seek we will find, we realize that God will lead anyone who really wants to know the truth into a basic knowledge of it. The great scientists of the past, including Copernicus, Kepler, Fay, Linnaeus, Curvier, Agassiz, Boyle, Newton, Kelvin, Faraday, Rutherford, etc., all recognized that the design they saw in the world around them was the work of a Higher Power, and Johannes Kepler said that scientists have the job of “thinking God’s thoughts after Him.” Despite their best efforts, scientists cannot explain how life came from non-life, and how “chance” and mutations produced the life in the world around us.

1:26. “females.” The Greek word is not “women” (γυνῆ; #1135 pronounced goonay) but “female” (θηλυς; #2338 θηλυς), which in this context is more degrading. See commentary on 1:27, “males… females… males with males.”
1:27. “males… females… males with males.” In this context of unnatural sexual behavior, Paul does not use the usual terms “man” and “woman,” but rather “male” and “female.” This serves two purposes. First, because the subject at hand is the proper correspondence between the sexes, using the words for “male,” arren (#730 ἄρρην), and “female,” thelus (#2338 θήλυς), draws appropriate attention to the issue of biology and what is natural. Second, as Lenski has pointed out, in this context such language is somewhat degrading, portraying the people as “nothing but creatures of sex.”

“burned with intense desire” The Greek phrase is ekkaiomai en te orexei (ἐκκαίομαι ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει), and the lexicon by Louw-Nida points out that this phrase is “an idiom, literally ‘to burn with intense desire’; ‘to have a strong, intense desire for something’; ‘to be inflamed with passion, to have a strong lust for, to be inflamed with lust.’ In some languages the equivalent idiom is ‘to boil with desire,’ ‘to feel hot in the genitals,’….” Both the word “burn” and the word “desire” are used only here in the New Testament.

1:28. “they did not approve.” This is very difficult to translate. The verb here is dokimazō (#1381 δοκιμάζω), which is used of the testing of metals or coins, which were tested then approved (or disapproved) based on the results of the test. See Commentary on Romans 12:2, “test and approve” the will of God. In this case, these immoral people “tested, then disapproved (or saw no value in) holding God in a way that fully recognized Him” (see commentary on 2:18, which also uses dokimazō.)

“fully acknowledging.” The Greek is epignosis (#1922 ἐπίγνωσις), a full and accurate knowledge or acknowledgment. This is really important, but not well represented in most translations. Cp. the following translations:

ESV: “And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God,…”
KJV: “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge,…”
NIV: “Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God,…”

In contrast to those above versions, Williams gets the sense correctly: “…as they did not approve of fully recognizing God…” The phrase, “fully recognizing” cannot be underestimated. Many people who do not obey God recognize Him to some degree, and obey Him to some degree. God wants people to fully obey Him, not just to believe and act on the things about God that they want to.

1:29. “mean-spiritedness.” This comes from the Greek word kakoetheia (#2550 κακοήθεια). BDAG’s definition is very insightful: a basic defect in character that leads one to be hurtful to others, thus, mean-spiritedness, malice, malignity, craftiness. The translation “malignity” (e.g., KJV) does not express the sense of the word as well as “mean-spiritedness.

1:31. “family affection.” See commentary on Romans 12:10 and John 21:15. The Greek word is astorgos (#794 ἀστόργος), which is made up of the prefix –a, “not, no,” and storgē, which is familial love. The term however can be used in extension beyond just familial love, to be applied to others in a general sense. Louw-Nida explains the word as “pertaining to a lack of love or affection for close associates or family—‘without normal human affection, without love for others.’”

Chapter 2
2:1. “Therefore.” The Greek conjunction διό (Luke 1352 διό) means “therefore, wherefore, on account of.” At first seems confusing, because a surface reading seems to be saying that because of the vices of the evil people who have been given over to shameful acts and evil behavior, “therefore,” everyone else is without excuse if they judge anyone. Hendrickson writes: “Many are puzzled by the word ‘Therefore.’ It must be admitted that the meaning is not immediately clear.” Lenski is correct when he states that the “Therefore” connects, not just the closing verses with chapter 2, but the entire previous section, 1:18-32. Also, Paul is not writing a blanket condemnation of judging. We must judge others, and judge on a daily basis, in order to obey the commands of God. Jesus said, “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment” (John 7:24). Paul warned us to “…watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them” (Rom. 16:17), and we cannot keep that command unless we make judgments about people. Paul also wrote many instructions to Timothy, including who to avoid and who to select for leadership based on behavior and qualifications, which is impossible to do without making a judgment about people. To fully understand the “therefore,” we must realize it refers back to the whole previous section of Romans, and points forward to those who judge but “practice the same things” (2:1).

“in those things in which.” The point is not, in that you judge, which would simply deride the act of judging. The Greek is more specific. Paul speaks of in that which you judge—in other words, the very act that you judge, this act you are doing. Paul is not deriding being judgmental in this case, but hypocrisy.

2:4. “kindness.” The Greek word is χρηστότης (Strong’s #5544 χρηστότης), and most modern English versions read “kindness.” Kindness is a fruit of the spirit and an essential ingredient to being godly. The Devil is continuing in what has been a very successful campaign to elevate the importance of people “being authentic” and “expressing how I really feel,” and downplaying kindness. Thankfully, God is kind and tolerant toward people, and it is His kindness that finally works in them and opens their eyes to the truth and leads them to repentance. If we are going to be like God, we have to learn to be kind to others even when we do not feel like being kind. (See commentary on Galatians 5:22, “kindness”).

“Forbearance.” The Greek word is ἀνοχή (a noun: Strong’s #463 ἀνοχή), and most Greek lexicons define it as forbearance, tolerance, clemency, and patience. It refers to enduring, being patient, and holding oneself back. Richard Trench writes that it “signifies, for the most part, a truce or suspension of arms” (Trench’s Synonyms of the New Testament). The noun ἀνοχή is related to the verb ἀνεχό, “to endure, put up with, bear with.” Jesus said, “You unbelieving generation! …How long must I put up with [anēchō] you?” (Mark 9:19 HCSB).

Studying the English words “tolerate” and “forbear” shows us why the English translations differ as to how they translate ἀνοχή. To “tolerate” usually refers to what you allow; what you do not forbid. In contrast, “forbear” usually places the emphasis on self-restraint and what you hold yourself back from. The Greek word ἀνοχή contains both meanings, but in Christian circles “tolerate” usually has a bad connotation, so most versions avoid it. Sadly, most of the time we use the word “tolerate,” we use it as something we do even though we are “really bothered” by the situation and are actually
just waiting for the chance to do something about it. That is the world’s way of tolerating, but it is not God’s way.

God’s way of forbearing or tolerating is the way He tolerates us: He knows He has given us free will, and so even when we are ignorant or in sin, He loves us, is kind to us, and “declares a truce” with us until we wake up to our error. If God and Christ can do that with us and others, and allow us all to live our own lives in spite of our error or sin, then we can do that too. We do not have to “tolerate” people while seething in anger, pouting, or “just waiting for the chance to straighten them out.” If we want to bring people to repentance the way God does, we have to learn to be forbearing and tolerant in a kind and loving way. It is unfortunate that the word “tolerate” has gotten such a bad reputation in Christian circles, because godly tolerance is a very important part of winning people to Christ.

Tolerance is the neutral zone between grace and truth. We are forbearing or tolerant in those times when we are with people who do not want to change their disobedient ways. Most of the time we are with such people we do not teach, reprove, or correct them with truth, nor do we act like what they are doing is fine with God. Forbearance or tolerance is not “grace.” Grace is “undeserved,” but everyone deserves kindness and tolerance. Grace is that special undeserved favor that helps people walk with God, while tolerance is the “truce” that we have with people who have not yet decided to walk with God. If we confuse tolerance for grace, then we never have genuine grace.

“longsuffering.” The Greek word is *makrothumia* (Strong’s #3115 μακροθυμία), and it refers to being longsuffering with people. It is a compound word from *makros*, long, and *thumos*, wrath or anger, and it refers to putting up with people for a long time before taking any action. Thayer’s Greek-English lexicon says it is “slowness in avenging wrongs.” Generally the older versions of the English Bible such as the King James, Young’s Literal Translation, Darby, and Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible, use the word “longsuffering,” while most modern versions avoid it because it is not a common English word and is considered archaic, and use “patience” instead. That actually creates a problem because “patience” is the best way to translate the word *hupomonē* (#5281 ὑπομονή) which refers to the quality that does not surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial. Although today we speak of being patient with things and with people, the fact that the Greek has a word that specifically refers to holding back one’s response to other people is important, and it seems clear that “longsuffering” communicates a concept that should remain clearly distinguished in Christian vocabulary and in the Bible. [For more on longsuffering, see commentary on Galatians 5:22, “longsuffering”].

“is intended to lead you to repentance.” Williams’ translation has the note: “implied in the genitive present.” What is implied is the idea that this grace is meant to lead you to repentance, which is how many versions read (e.g., ESV; NRSV; HCSB).

2:5. “But corresponding to your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart…” The teaching of this verse and verse 6 is that God’s judgment is just, and that a sinner’s punishment is in proportion to the crime committed. The amount of wrath a person stores up for himself corresponds to the amount he hardens his heart. This is similar to the truth taught in Matthew 7:2, “With the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you” (ESV); and Matthew 6:14-15, “For if
you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

“corresponding to your stubbornness.” The word “corresponding” comes from κατά (#2596 κατά), which in this context serves as a “marker of norm of similarity or homogeneity, according to, in accordance with, in conformity with, according to” (BDAG, def. 5). This is the same meaning as in Romans 2:2: God’s judgment is “according to truth,” i.e., God’s judgment corresponds to what is truly deserved. The translation “because,” (as many English versions have), does not capture the sense of the Greek at all. This misses the symmetry being promised by the word κατά; it makes the hardening simply the cause for future wrath without noting how the cause proportionally affects the amount of wrath being stored up. The verse is not asking, “Why will the person receive wrath?” This question would be answered with “because of the hardness of his heart.” The question being asked in the verse is “How much wrath will a person receive?” The answer is, as much as he deserves. In other words, the wrath that any person receives is “in accordance with” (in proportion to) his own hardness, and the unrepentance of his own heart. This is hard to understand by some orthodox Christians who think that all the unsaved burn forever (thus equal punishment) and all the saved are in the presence of Christ forever (thus equal reward).

The truth is that the unsaved are thrown into Gehenna and are burned up, but the time they spend being punished before they are consumed is different from person to person. This can be seen in examples such as when Jesus spoke of the people of Capernaum, where he had set up his ministry after leaving Nazareth. Jesus said that on the Day of Judgment it would be “more tolerable” for Sodom than for Capernaum. Yet the people of Sodom were not righteous in the sight of God, and the destruction of Sodom is a picture of the future destruction of the wicked in the fire (2 Pet. 2:6). Therefore, Jesus’ statement that it would be “more tolerable” for Sodom than Capernaum is a very strong reproach indeed (Matt. 11:20), and reflects that the people of Capernaum will be punished more severely than even the people of Sodom before they are annihilated.

The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), but we must be careful not to take that one verse out from the context of the whole Bible. Romans 6:23 never says that the wages of sin is immediate death. Before people die in Gehenna, the lake of fire, they are punished in proportion to their sin. The Bible says in many different places that people will be repaid for what they have done on earth (cp. Job 34:11; Psalm 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8). This is one reason the Bible says that for the wicked there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).

As encouragement for Christians, just as punishments differ for the wicked, so the rewards Christians will receive in the future kingdom are different from person to person and are based on the works each one has done. (Cp. John Schoenheit, The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul).

“hardness.” The Greek is σκληρότης (#4643 σκληρότης), and it is a noun, meaning “hardness, stubbornness.” It is from σκληρός, which means “dried,” “stiff,” “rough,” or “hard.” It is the picture of a branch that has dried out and is hardened and stiff. It is a noun, standing on its own, not an adjective describing heart. Too many people are “hard” in their lives, being stiff, rough, unchanging, unyielding, and unrepentant towards God.
“unrepentant.” The Greek is ametanoetos (#279 ἀμετανόητος), and refers to not being repentant (the Greek verb “repent” is metanoeo.) Thus it is unrepentant, not turning to God, refusing to turn to God. Louw-Nida’s lexicon states, “In a number of languages it is difficult to speak of ‘a hard and unrepentant heart.’ A more satisfactory equivalent of this expression in Romans 2:5 may be ‘but you are stubborn and refuse to repent’ or ‘refuse to turn to God.’” Some versions read “impenitent” instead of “unrepentant,” but that does not seem as accurate here because impenitent means, “not penitent, without shame, regret, or remorse.” While it is true that those who do not repent usually have no shame, regret, or remorse, the primary meaning here is that the people have hearts that refuse to repent, i.e., they will not change their ways and turn to God.

“treasuring up.” The Greek verb is thesaurizo (#2343 θησαυρίζω), and it means to gather and store up, to heap up, to treasure up (Liddell and Scott), to accumulate riches. The noun form of the verb is thesaurus (#2344 θησαυρός) and is a treasury or storehouse, or the treasure that is put there (Cp. Matt. 6:19, 20 “treasure”). This phrase makes the verse contain the figure of speech irony, for who would store, as a treasure for themselves, wrath? Yet this is the picture being presented them. As a greedy man stores up wealth for himself, these hard and unrepentant people store up more and more wrath for themselves, which they will receive at the Day of Judgment.

“The Day of Wrath, when…righteous judgment.” The day of wrath and the righteous judgment are not two separate events. The day of wrath is the day “when” the righteous judgment of God is revealed. The Greek kai (usually “and”) can be understood as a “when” occasionally when it connects an expression of time with something that occurs in that time (BDAG; cp. Matt. 26:45; Mark 15:25). In this verse, the wrath of God and the “righteous” judgment of God are intertwined. The wrath of God is not unrighteous. It is not “a necessary evil.” Rather, it is part of the righteous nature of God to honor mankind’s freewill and give people the judgment that they have asked for via their words and behavior. The genitives (“of wrath;” “of the righteous judgment;” “of God”) without the definite articles emphasize the quality of the noun (Cp. Lenski; Meyer), but we put them in our version for clarity.


2:7. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].

2:8. “selfishly ambitious.” The Greek is eritheia (#2052 ἐριθεία). Spicq (Theological Lexicon) says, “…eritheia is used seven times in NT, including twice in the sin lists (2 Cor. 12:20, Gal. 5:20), along with eris [strife], which indicates that the former does not have the same meaning as the latter and is not derived from it. …it was formed from eritheuomai, “work for hire.” The erithos is a day laborer; the term is used especially for weavers and spinners. As a result, the term eritheia (paid work) originally had a positive sense, but it came to mean that which is done solely for interested motives (“What’s in it for me?”). Hence the meaning: contrive to gain a position…not in order to serve the state, but to gain honor and wealth. From that developed two other meanings: 1) dispute or intrigue to gain advantages; or 2) personal ambition, the exclusive pursuit of one’s own interest. These connotations of intrigue, disputations, and chicanery appear in all the NT texts.” Aristotle used the word of those who seek political office by unfair means, and Philo wrote, “The only stable government is one in which there is no strife and no
intrigue [eritheia]” (Spicq, Vol. II, p. 70). “The idea is “base self-seeking,” the “baseness” that cannot shift its gaze to higher things” (TDNT). It is a complex word that takes on different meanings in different contexts, so attention to the context is important. Meanings include selfishness, selfish ambition, rivalry, base self-seeking, and the use of dishonest means to get personal gain (particularly in political circles).

2:9. “soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is used more broadly of the individual himself while including his thoughts and emotions. Thus, while the verse could read something such as, “tribulation and anguish on every person” (cp. HCSB; ESV; NIT; NIV), the inclusion of the word “soul” points us to the fact that the thoughts, feelings, and emotions are important. The evil we do is certainly related to our thoughts and emotions, and we are responsible before God to control our thoughts and emotions (2 Cor. 10:5). [This use of “soul” is similar to the one in 2 Peter 2:14. For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

2:14. “are the law to themselves.” After the Day of Pentecost, there are only two categories of people: those who are born again of God’s gift of holy spirit, and those who are not. The New Birth comes through making Christ “Lord” (Rom. 10:9; Eph. 1:13, 14). People who are not born again did not believe in Jesus, so they either rejected him when they heard about him, or they never heard enough about him to believe. The Jews who heard about Jesus but rejected him are like those who persecuted Paul, they are “enemies” of God (Rom. 11:28).

As for people who did not hear enough about Jesus to believe, whether Jew or Gentile, they are judged on whether or not they did, by their nature, the works of the Law (Rom. 2:13-15). If there really was a Jew who tried to keep the Law but did not hear enough about Jesus to believe, then he or she could be judged righteous at the White Throne Judgment after the Second Resurrection (Rev. 20:11-15).

2:15. “also bearing witness.” The Greek is summartureo (#4828 συμμαρτυρέω), and means to bear joint witness. Their works demonstrate what is in their hearts, and their conscience bears a joint witness to that as well.

“reasonings.” The Greek is logismos (#3053 λογισμός) and is a “reasoning,” not just a “thought.”

“one another.” Most translations treat this as if it is the person’s thoughts that vary back and forth between accusing and excusing, and this could be the case, but the Greek is not clear. Meyer argues that it does not refer to that, but refers to the people excusing and accusing one another. Lenski admits that the Greek can be read either way. There seems to be more evidence in the context that the people act individually according to their heart and conscience, and that action then either excuses or accuses others. It is of course the case that people can be double minded, but that does not seem to be the emphasis here, although it can apply. It is best to translate the verse in a way that allows for both possibilities. A more literal reading of the Greek phrase would be, “and their reasonings accusing or else excusing between one another.”

2:16. “through Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ stands at the right hand of God and in true oriental fashion is the agent through whom God acts. Just as Pharaoh ruled Egypt through Joseph (“Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt’” Gen. 41:44) so God rules and judges through Jesus Christ.
Jesus knew this was going to be the case even before his death and resurrection, so he said, “...the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22).

“will judge.” The Greek verb, though translated as future (“will”), is actually in the present tense. This is known as the futuristic present (cp. Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax*, pp. 535-37), which is the figure of speech *heterosis*, a switching of tenses for effect. Most versions, as we do, simply translate the verb according to its future tense meaning rather than its present tense form.

“what people have kept secret.” The Greek is more literally, “the secret things of people” since “secret” is an adjective. The genitive is a genitive of possession, i.e., the secret things held by people. It is prideful and futile to have secrets, a “secret life,” or to do things “behind closed doors.” God sees all and will judge all—this is promised. For the righteous, God’s exposure of evil is a great hope, because so much that happens in life must surely be the result of deliberate deception and threats and back room deals done by evil people. For the evil person, the idea that God will expose and punish evil should shake them to the core of their being, but they will not come to the light and be reformed. They await their punishment.

“just as my Good News declares.” The Greek is more literally translated “according to [or in accord with] my Good News.” However, that construction can be misunderstood to mean that Paul’s “Good News” is the standard by which God judges, which is not the case. Lenski notes the possible confusion and writes: “This is not saying that the gospel or “my gospel” will be the norm (κατά) of the final judgment; the norm is God’s own righteousness.” God judges by His righteous standard, which is what Paul’s Good News states and consists of. The NIV translation has picked up on the problem and made a translation that avoids it. “This will take place on the day when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.” This verse is a good example of when the usual way of translating κατά into English, which is “according to” or “in accord with,” can cause confusion and an alternate translation that expresses the meaning of the Greek should be sought.

2:18 “determine the things that are best.” In the Greek, the word for determine is dokimazō (#1381 δοκιμάζω). It means to put something to the test with the hope of recognizing it as genuine, or worthy; to prove something in order to approve of it (Trench; Thayer). It was used by the Greeks in the context of metallurgy (Thayer). Here it is applied to ta diapheronta, literally, “the things that differ,” from diapherō (#1308 διαφέρω). The differing things are that which are good and evil, which carry (phero) in different directions. The sense of the Greek is that you examine the difference between good and evil, approving of the good things that pass the test. In English, “determine” shows that you examine and arrive at a judgment, while “things that are best” captures the sense of difference and approval (see dokimazō in Rom. 1:28).

2:20 “the unlearned.” The Greek is nēpios (#3516 νηπίος; pronounced nay’-pee-os), and it literally means an infant, a little child, but it was used metaphorically for those who were unlearned or immature. In the older versions, such as the King James, it was traditionally rendered “babes,” but today “babes” is used figuratively of beautiful women and we refer to infants as “babies.” In this verse it refers to people who are unlearned or immature.

“formulation.” Cp. NAB translation. The Greek word is morphosis (#3446 μορφώσις), used only here and in 2 Timothy 3:5. This word refers to “the state of being...
formally structured” (BDAG). Hence, the law was the formulation of knowledge and truth, structured and brought together in one work. In this sense, it could alternately be translated the “embodiment” of knowledge and truth (cp. ESV; NIV; NASB).

2:22. “do you rob temples?” What does this question mean in relation to abhorring idols? It is not simply a remark against stealing, for the apostle already addressed this in verse 21 with the question, “do you steal?” Rather, this phrase is meant to call out hypocrisy and compromise. Rome, along with the entire Roman Empire, was crowded with temples, which were filled with idolatrous images and artifacts. Such artifacts were often very costly, made of gold and silver. Also, some temples were used as banks, in which people’s money was kept. In fact, our English word “money” comes from “Moneta,” the name of a goddess who had a temple in Rome in which money was both minted and stored. Since ancient Temples did not have particularly good security, temple robbery was somewhat common in ancient times. Paul raises the question, “You say you hate idols, but do you get dishonest gain by robbing temples?” Paul thus brings up the commands of Deuteronomy 7:25: “The images of their gods you are to burn in the fire. Do not covet the silver and gold on them, and do not take it for yourselves, or you will be ensnared by it, for it is detestable to the LORD your God” (NIV). As Lenski writes, “It is the violation of the first principle of Judaism itself, its abhorrence of all idols. To snatch some jewel, gold, or silver, or other valuable from an idol temple, to buy it from another, to work it up into something else, to sell it yea, even to touch it and in any way to possess it, really destroyed a Jew’s Judaism.”

2:23. “You who boast in the law, you dishonor God by your transgression of the law.” This verse is a statement and not a question. Compare the ESV and NET translations. It is a verdict paralleling vs. 17, as Lenski says, “What, then, is the verdict? ‘Thou art dishonoring God!’” If this verse was meant as a question, it would hardly be worth asking, because of course one dishonors God by transgressing the law!

2:24. “For just as it is written.” The reference is taken from the Septuagint versions of Isaiah 52:5, which differs somewhat from the Hebrew text. “defamed.” The Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφηµέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

2:25. “to be sure… but.” Cp. NAB. This is a common Greek construction where two sides of a matter are presented. It is often translated as “on the one… on the other hand.” The translation “to be sure” is from the Greek word men (#3303 μέν), which here is “introducing a concessive clause… to be sure” (BDAG). This word works in conjunction with the word de (#1161 δὲ), which gives the other fuller side of the matter. The apostle Paul concedes that (“on the one hand”) circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law, but what he gives with one hand he takes away with the other, for he immediately adds that (“on the other hand”) if you break the law your circumcision is useless. This is important because the apostle will affirm in the next chapter that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23), and so circumcision of the flesh is not profitable for justification, for no one can keep the whole law.

2:27. “in spite of.” The Greek dia refers to things passing through, which may be favorable or hostile. Here it is hostile, and has the sense of “in spite of.” (See Lenski).

2:29. “On the contrary.” The Greek is the strong “but,” alla (#235 αλλά), which means “but, nevertheless, notwithstanding, etc.,” and sets in contrast that which comes before
from the new thought being introduced. Especially after a negation (“not” and “nor” in verse 28), “on the contrary” is a good and clear translation (Cp. Holman Christian Standard Bible; Lenski).

“inwardly.” The Greek is kruptos (#2927 κρυπτός), meaning “hidden” or “secret.” Paul says a true Jew is one who is a Jew in the secret, hidden parts of the soul. In this sense, the translation “inwardly” is good.

“in spirit.” The Greek is “in spirit,” en pneuma (#4151 πνεῦμα). It refers to being “in spirit” or perhaps more understandably, “in union with the spirit of God,” which means in relation to God via the spirit of God which a Christian receives when he is born again. The Greek en is always in the dative case, and can be instrumental, so many Trinitarian translators understand this phrase to mean, “by the Spirit,” meaning that it is the Person of the Holy Spirit who circumcises a person’s heart at the time he believes, but that is not what this verse is referring to. Neither does this use of the word “spirit” refer to our “attitude.” If that were the case, the verse would read something such as: “true circumcision is of the heart, in the attitude, not by the written code…” Although there are verses where “spirit” does refer to an activity of the mind and can mean “attitude,” that is not its meaning here. Even if a person was a Jew who had a wonderful attitude about obeying God’s laws, he could not be righteous in God’s sight except through Christ. The Christian, whether Jew or Greek in background, was part of the “true circumcision” only by virtue of being born again of the spirit of God. Thus, true circumcision is always “in union with,” or “in connection with,” the spirit [For more on “in” as “in connection with,” see commentary on Eph. 1:3].

Chapter 3

3:2. “First of all…” This short verse reveals the feelings of the Jews (and rightfully so) toward the Law. Christians have been influenced by the writings to the Christian Church (Acts-Jude) to see the Law as a yoke of bondage, a burden, and weak through the flesh. Thus it seems that all we can say about it is that we are glad we did not live under the Law. The Jew, on the other hand, considered the Law one of God’s greatest gifts to them as a nation. The Law (meaning the Tanakh, the entire Old Testament), was God’s guidance that showed them how to live, how to run a just society, and how to be holy before God. Indeed, Jewish life would not be Jewish life were it not for the Law.

It also helps us to see the wonderful attitude the Jews had toward the Law when we recognize that other nations did not have anything like it. It is truly a gift of God’s grace that He gave the Law and in doing so revealed Himself, His love, His righteousness, what He expected from mankind, and how to live prosperous and blessed lives. The gods of other nations gave no such gift. There is no “Word of God” in the pagan religions. Poets and authors such as Homer wrote about the gods, but what did they reveal? First, the stories themselves were contradictory in many ways. And the gods they revealed were often worse than any good human would be. They were jealous, vengeful, capricious, and often delighted in causing trouble. Furthermore, unlike the Law of Moses, which told people exactly what God wanted, pagans never quite knew how to please their gods, or if they were angry (something the people assessed by bad fortune such as sickness, losing a war, a famine, pestilence, etc.), they did not know exactly how to
appease them. No wonder the Jews loved the Law and considered it a gift. Compared to our freedom in Christ, it was very restrictive, but how many of the commands of God to the Church are in the Law in one form or another? Many! Romans 7:12 will tell us that the Law is holy, just, and good. The Law, and the Christ, and the New Testament, are a true and unique witness of the love that our true God has for mankind. He not only wants a relationship with us, He wants to make sure that we know how to live such that life is a blessing and joy.

“words.” The Greek word is logion (#3051 λόγιον; pronounced log’-ee-on), and it is the diminutive of logos, “word” or “message.” Literally, it is “little words.” See commentary on Acts 7:38.

3:3. “some were without trust.” This is the figure of speech, tapeinosis, or understatement. “Some?!” Oh if that were only the case, that “some” did not believe, but “most” did. Sadly, for most of Israel’s history, only “some” believed, while the majority lived in unbelief. Yet those who believed had such a huge impact that it could surely seem like only some did not trust God.


3:5. “when he is inflicting.” The Greek verb is epipherō (#2018 ἐπιφέρω), and it means to bring upon, inflict, impose. In this verse the verb is in the present tense, indicating that God’s wrath can be a present thing, not only reserved for the future. Thus this verse confirms 1:18, that the wrath of God “is being revealed from heaven” against people for their sin. It is sometimes taught that God will only act in wrath against humans in the Tribulation period, when the seven seals are broken, the seven trumpets blow, etc., and there are mighty plagues on the earth. In fact, God has often acted in wrath, especially to protect His people. Examples include: the Flood of Noah; the Tower of Babel; the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; the plagues on Egypt; the death of Korah and his fellow rebels (Num. 16:1-33); and the hailstones on the Canaanites (Josh. 10:11). An example of God’s wrath in the New Testament is the blindness of Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13:11).

“wrath.” The Greek word for “wrath” is orgē (#3709 ὀργή pronounced, or-gay’), and it refers to wrath or anger. In this verse it is “the wrath,” referring to “the” wrath that is promised when people disobey God or rebel against Him. However, since in Christian jargon, “the wrath” generally refers to the wrath of God that will be poured out in the Book of Revelation, we thought it best to just say “wrath” here, rather than give the wrong impression.

“I am speaking from a human standpoint.” The verse starts out by saying that “our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God,” and if that is the case, then by some twisted human logic our unrighteousness should be a good thing, because it more clearly shows the righteousness of God. So why would God inflict us with his wrath if what we are doing is a good thing? That is the “human standpoint,” and the failure of human logic. God does not need us to be unrighteous to show off His righteousness, even though our unrighteousness makes His righteousness very clear. Furthermore, He does not inflict people with wrath to show off His righteousness. It does that, of course, but it does so many other things as well: it serves as an example and warning to others so they will not take God lightly and live in sin; in serving as a warning to sinners, it helps assure that society will be godly and peaceful for mankind; it proves that God will keep His
promises to punish evil; and it righteously recompenses people for what they have done in life, and thus repays them for their thoughts and deeds.

3:8. “slanderously.” The Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. This is a good example of the word blasphēmeō being used of a person, not God or a god. [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

“righteous judgment.” The Greek word is the adjective endikos (#1738 ἔνδικος), meaning “according to right, according to what is right, righteous,” from dīke (right). The people who says, “Let us do evil so that good may come” will receive a righteous judgment—they will be condemned.


3:19. “the law.” This use of “law” is the general use of the word that refers to the whole Old Testament, not just the Torah, or Mosaic Law (Genesis-Deuteronomy). We know this because not one of the quotations in the earlier verses is from the Torah, they are all from the Psalms, writings, and prophetic books.

“the whole world.” It is fair to ask how, since “the law” was given to Israel, the “whole world” becomes guilty because of what “the law” says. Although the law was spoken in general to Israel, and there are certainly things in it that refer only to Israel, there is much of the “Old Testament” that applies to, or even was written to, the Gentiles. Considering that “the law” in the verse refers to the entire Old Testament, and not just the Torah, we can see that what is said in the verses quoted it true of both Jews and Gentiles.

3:20. “declared righteous.” R. C. H. Lenski (St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans) correctly notes:

“The word [dikaioo, #1344 δικαιώ] is not ethical (middle in force): ‘becomes righteous,’ but everywhere forensic (a straight passive): ‘declared righteous.’

The difference between, “becomes righteous” (or “is made righteous”) and “is declared righteous” is subtle but important. The Christian is declared righteous by God based upon the cleansing sacrifice of Christ. God declares that we are righteous while we are still in our flesh and still sinners and sinning. It is not as if we are “made righteous,” as if we were now no longer sinners. Romans 7:14-25 shows that is not the case. In a judicial decision, God declares us righteous due to the effect of the work of Christ in spite of the sin that lives in us. If a thief is arrested and goes to court, but makes such an impassioned plea to the judge that he will live an honest life from then on, the judge may decide to “declare him righteous.” He is still a thief, but in the eyes of the law he is “righteous,” and without guilt. Similarly, we are sinners, but in the eyes of the law of God, because we accepted Christ’s payment for our sin, we are “declared righteous,” and no longer will suffer God’s penalty of death.

We have an obligation to try to live sinless lives, but as Paul discovered, no amount of human effort will attain that goal. We are wretched sinners, but thank God that He simply declared us to be righteous (see commentary on 3:22, “righteous”).

“comes only the full knowledge of sin.” The context says that no flesh will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the Law. Then it says why: “for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.” The context implies that making people know sin is all the Law does, it cannot make one righteous in God’s sight. Thus adding
the implied word “only” clarifies the argument. A number of versions translate the concept into the verse: “all that the Law does is to tell us what is sinful” (NJB); “The law simply shows us how sinful we are” (NLT); “For all the law can do is to make men conscious of sin” (Williams).

“full knowledge.” The Greek is epignōsis (#1922 ἐπίγνωσις) and does not just refer to “knowledge,” but rather a full or complete knowledge or realization. When the Law came, “sin increased” (Rom. 5:20). People did not just know about sin, they fully knew sin because they experienced it, and its dreadful consequences, for themselves.

3:21. “righteousness from God.” This is the genitive of origin (cp. NIV). “Although the law and the prophets are bearing witness to it” is similar to RSV and ESV. “Witness” is a present participle. Even now they bear witness to the principle (law) of faith.


3:22. “righteousness.” Righteousness is such a vital topic in Romans (indeed, in the New Testament!) that we must take some time to try to understand it. The book of Romans clearly establishes that a Christian becomes righteous, or “in right standing,” before God by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:22, 26, 28; 4:5, 13; 5:1; 9:30; 10:6).

Complicating our understanding of “righteousness,” however, is that almost every English version of the New Testament uses both “righteousness” (“righteous,” etc.), and “justification” (“justify,” etc.). Understandably, most people think these two different English words are translated from two different Greek words, but that is not the case. The same Greek root word underlies both the translation “righteousness” and the translation “justification.” That is the major reason why, when we compare different English versions of the New Testament, they do not agree as to when to use “righteousness” and when to use “justification.”

The reason both “righteousness” and “justification” are used even though the Greek is the same is that, in general, scholars have agreed to translate the attributes of God as “righteous,” while translating what God has done for men as “justification.” D. W. Diehl writes:

“Even though there is no distinction between righteousness and justice in the biblical vocabulary [the Greek words], theologians often use the former to refer to the attribute of God in himself and the latter to refer to the actions of God with respect to his creation.” (Walter Elwell, editor, Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, p. 953, “Righteousness.”)

We believe that translating the same Greek words both as “righteousness” and “justification” causes more problems than it solves. First and most obvious, the English words “righteousness” and “justification,” while related in meaning, do not mean the same thing. In English, “righteousness” means “to act in accord with divine or moral law,” while “justification” relates to a judicial pronouncement that the person has been found innocent or absolved from guilt, ostensibly on the basis of the facts of the case. That scholars cannot decide on exactly when the Greek words have those separate meanings is clear from the fact that, as we have said above, different English versions differ as to when they use “righteous,” and when they use “just.”

A second major problem with translating the same Greek words both as “righteousness” and “justification” is that the internal consistency of the Church Epistles, especially in Romans and Galatians, is lost. If “righteous,” “righteousness,” etc., appear all the way through the New Testament, then the reader can see the consistent message
that God is giving us in His Word. However, if in versions such as the NIV and ESV, we see “righteousness...through faith” in Romans 3:22, but “justified by faith” in Romans 5:1, although we may get the general meaning of the verses, we lose the consistency of what God is saying.

A third problem with translating the same Greek words both as “righteousness” and “justification,” is that the flow of the pattern of salvation is not clearly maintained from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The idea of salvation, which is quite often communicated by the word “saved” (Greek: σώζω) in the New Testament, was generally communicated by the word “righteousness” in the Old Testament. (In spite of that, it would be wrong to say that in the Old Testament, “righteous” equaled “saved.” It would be better to understand the Old Testament concept that a person was righteous by his faith and fidelity to the covenant, and that God honored that and gave everlasting life to those faith-full individuals). If we read in the Old Testament that the “righteous” will live forever, and then we read in the New Testament that we have “righteousness” with God because of our faith, we can easily make the connection. But if we read, “righteousness” in the Old Testament and “justified” in the New Testament, we can easily miss the connection.

We can clearly see that in the Old Testament, “righteous,” “righteousness,” etc., often had the connotation of salvation by reading the verses that use those words and substituting “saved” or “salvation.” The list of verses relating righteousness to being acceptable to God and having everlasting life is far too large and too varied to include here, but here is a small sampling. The Israelites would be “righteous” if they were careful to obey the Law (Deut. 6:25). The righteous will stand (i.e., do well) in the Day of Judgment, but the wicked will not (Ps. 1:3-6). The righteous are the ones who will dwell on the earth forever (Ps. 37:29). The righteous will not be moved (i.e., taken from the earth; Ps. 55:22; 112:6), and Proverbs 10:30 and 12:3 expand that to say although the righteous will not be moved, the wicked will not dwell in the land. The righteous have a reward, referring to an everlasting reward (Ps. 58:11). The righteous are enrolled in the book of life (Ps. 69:28). The righteous flourish and are planted in the house of Yahweh (Ps. 92:12, 13). Righteousness delivers from death, meaning everlasting death (Prov. 10:2). The righteous person who does not sin will live forever (Ezek. 3:21). At the Day of Judgment people will see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, and the wicked will be burned up while the righteous will be healed (Malachi 3:17-4:2).

Righteousness has always been by faith. This was clear at the time of Abraham, continued during the administration of the Law, and is still true today, in the Church Age. However, when the Christian Church started on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), God made a change. On the Day of Pentecost God started the Administration of Grace (Eph. 3:2; see commentary there). Up until Pentecost in Acts 2, people were saved by faith, which was exhibited in their righteous acts, and their faith had to be maintained. That is why Ezekiel 33:12-20 is very clear that if a “righteous” person becomes unrighteous he will “die” (i.e., “die” on the Day of Judgment), while if a wicked person repents and becomes righteous he will “live,” (i.e., live forever). It is why Habakkuk says that righteous will live by their faithfulness (Hab. 2:4).

In the Administration of Grace, people are saved by their faith in Christ quite apart from their faith being demonstrated by the works of the Law, or their “righteous” actions. The thing that singularly made the difference between salvation in the Old
Testament, which involved continued faith, and salvation in the New Testament, which is based on one-time faith, is that in the Administration of Grace (Eph. 3:2), salvation involves “birth.” From the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) onward, a saved person is one who is “born again,” and his or her salvation is guaranteed. Thus, unlike the Old Testament when a righteous person could start being wicked and then be told he would “die,” i.e., die forever, in the Administration of Grace, when a person is born again, his or her salvation is assured and the person will absolutely have everlasting life (see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:23). The New Birth, like any birth, is permanent, which is why words such as “guarantee” or “nothing can separate us” are used in the Church Epistles. Christian salvation is not attained by good works, and it cannot be lost by not doing good works or by doing evil works.

The Greek words in the New Testament that relate to righteousness, and are all from the root δική, “right,” are: δικαιος (adjective); δικαιοσύνη (substantive: adjective used as a noun); δικαίον (verb); δικαίος (adverb); and δικαιοσύνη (noun). We will now take the time to define these, but to do that we have to combine concepts found in Greek lexicons, such as BDAG and Thayer’s Greek-English lexicons, with Hebrew concepts of righteousness. It is absolutely vital that we remember that the New Testament concept of righteousness is anchored in the Old Testament concept of righteousness. We must keep in mind that in the Gospels when Jesus spoke of righteousness (cp. Matt. 5:6, 20), he was speaking in Hebrew and Aramaic, the language of the Old Testament. By using those languages, he brought the Hebrew meaning of “righteousness” into what he said. This important fact is obscured by the fact that the four Gospels are written in Greek as if Jesus spoke Greek words with purely Greek meanings. He did not.

What Jesus said and did was intimately connected with the Old Testament, and he used the language and concepts of the Old Testament when he taught. This would be much easier to see if the page in the Bible that is traditionally placed between Malachi and Matthew, and says in huge letters, “The New Testament,” was placed between the Gospel of John and the book of Acts. When we think about it, “the New Covenant” (“New Testament”) was inaugurated in Christ’s blood, with his death (Matt. 26:28), which is at the end of the Gospels, not at the beginning. Until the time of Jesus’ death, people were still living under the Old Covenant, and in the Gospels Jesus spoke the language of the Old Covenant, which were Hebrew and Aramaic. If the page that says, “The New Testament” was placed between the Gospel of John and the book of Acts, we would be able to better understand two things: first, that Jesus spoke and taught as an Old Testament prophet, fulfilling the Law, and second, that the New Covenant was inaugurated at the end of his life. Historically, the reason the page “The New Testament” is placed between Malachi and Matthew has nothing to do with the subject matter of the Bible at all. It was placed where it is because the books before it were in Hebrew, and the books after it were in Greek. That, however, is a terrible, and very misleading, reason to put the page where it is, because the average Christian just assumes that “the New Covenant” somehow started with the Gospels, when it did not.

Paul and the other apostles continued using “righteousness” in a way that certainly had overtones of the Hebrew meaning. The righteousness that Jesus spoke about, and the righteousness that Paul and the other apostles spoke about, did not change just because it was talked about in different languages. Perhaps this illustration will be clear: the righteousness that Paul spoke about when he used his native language and
spoke to Jews, and the righteousness he spoke about when he spoke in Greek in cities like Thessalonica or Corinth, was the same righteousness. In fact, it is specifically because the concept of righteousness in the Epistles is the same as it is in the Old Testament that the Church Epistles can legitimately spend so much time referring to people such as Abraham and David, and that they were righteous by faith.

In summary, the overtones of “righteousness” that are part of the Old Testament and clearly part of the meaning of the Hebrew word, are also brought into the Greek words used in the writings of Paul, and we must be aware of those overtones if we are going to understand the Epistles and the message of the New Testament. We would expect this anyway, because Paul is not inventing a new Gospel, or a new salvation, or a new way of right-standing in the sight of God.

The meaning of the Hebrew adjective tsaddiq, “righteous” (#6662 צַדִּיק), the noun tsedeq, “righteousness” (#6664 צֶדֶק), and the related Hebrew words for aspects of righteousness all relate to the same basic concepts. Of course “righteousness” in Hebrew and Greek has a range of definitions, just as it has in English, but a central meaning is “conformity to a norm.” When we are speaking of God’s righteousness, then, we are speaking of God’s keeping the norms that He Himself has established; for example, His covenant and His promises. We can see this in verses such as 2 Chronicles 12:6, where the people said, “Yahweh is righteous.” In that context, God had just told the people through a prophet that they had abandoned Him, so He was going to abandon them. They responded “Yahweh is righteous,” because they understood that God’s actions were in conformity with His norm, after all, God had said in the Law that if they forsook Him, He would forsake them. It is common that we use “righteous” as being conformity to a norm, and when we speak of people being “righteous,” or performing “righteous acts,” we are generally thinking in terms of those people’s actions being “right” in accordance with some external standard. In other words, one aspect of “righteousness” is integrally related to our actions in relation to a norm.

There is another, quite different meaning to “righteous,” however. Integrally part of the meaning of the Hebrew words for “righteous” is the concept of being vindicated in a court of law. It is vitally important to understand this part of “righteousness,” because being “declared righteous” in a court of law is very different from being “made righteous,” or “acting in a righteous manner.”

N. T. Wright expresses this well when he says, “‘Righteousness’ within the lawcourt setting...denotes the status that someone has when the court has found in their favor” (Justification, p. 90, special emphasis added). “Righteousness” in the law court does not mean that the person is actually morally upright and “right” in God’s eyes by virtue of his wonderful moral behavior. Nor does it mean the person acts in a righteous way. It means the person’s status as far as the court is concerned is “righteous.” Because Jesus died for us, we can be “declared righteous” in the heavenly court even though we are not upstanding Christian citizens. Thank God for that! We also need to know that, in declaring us to be righteous in His eyes, God does not “make us righteous.” Because we are declared righteous, we get to have everlasting life. However, there is a “but” we need to be aware of.

Our salvation, or everlasting life, is by grace, and since we are declared righteous, we get to live forever. But there is the matter of rewards. Rewards are not by grace, they are by works [For more on rewards, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10]. The Christian is
declared righteous,” not “made righteous.” Augustine (and his followers) missed this point. This is no doubt in part because he did not understand what happens when we die, the way the future will unfold with the Messianic Kingdom coming to earth and rewards in that kingdom, and it is also due to his not believing in genuine free will. Augustine believed that the Christian was actually “made righteous,” that God imputed righteousness to the person. That theology is in part responsible for the translations “justify” and “justified” in so many versions, as if the person was actually made “just.” We are not, we are only judicially declared to be righteous; just because we have faith in Christ, we are not actually morally righteous. It is our status in the eyes of God that is changed when we become a Christian, not our character.

To be clear then, there are times when “righteous” refers to our actions, and there are times when it refers to the status we have in the sight of God in spite of our actions. Matthew 6:1 is a good example of “righteousness” referring to our actions and doing what is right: “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them.” Another example is in 2 Timothy 3:16, where Scripture is profitable for “training in righteousness,” meaning, training in what righteous things to do. An example of “righteous” referring to Christians’ righteous status in the sight of God, apart from our actions or how we live, is Romans 5:1, “Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God.” Another example is Romans 3:21, “But now a righteousness from God apart from the law has been revealed.”

It has always been people’s duty to live righteously, that is, according to God’s standards. The Old Testament made it clear that for God it was more acceptable for a person to live righteously than to perform sacrifices (Prov. 21:3), and righteousness was the plumb line by which God measured a person’s actions (Isa. 28:17). However, no one could ever perfectly uphold the righteousness demanded by the Law. Therefore it was people’s faithfulness to try to keep the Law or do what was righteous, and their trust that God would reward them for it, that God counted to them as righteousness, and saw their status as “righteous” in His sight. The New English Bible does an excellent job of translating Habakkuk 2:4, “…the righteous man will live by being faithful.” In this verse, like many others in the Old Testament, the word “live” referred to living forever. Thus, we could expand Habakkuk to read, “…the righteous man will live [forever] by being faithful.” In many contexts, the concept of living righteously often included being faithful year after year.

1. 

Dikaios (Adjective. Strong’s #1342, δίκαιος). “Observant of what is right (dikē).” “Righteous, observing divine and human laws; one who is such as he ought to be.” (The neuter denotes that which is obligatory in view of certain requirements of justice, right, fair, equitable). In a broad sense, “upright, righteous, virtuous.” Keeping the commands of God; used of Old Testament people noted for piety. In a narrower sense, rendering to each his due; and that in a judicial sense, passing just judgment on others, whether expressed in words or shown by the manner of dealing with them. In a context that has a negative idea predominating, “innocent, faultless, guiltless.” When dikaios describes a believer’s status in the sight of God, it is harkening back to God’s courtroom declaration that the person is “right,” in His eyes. In that case, the person can be a “righteous” person but not act righteously in his life.
2. *Dikaiosunē* (Substantive: an adjective used as a noun. Strong’s #1343, δίκαιοςνη). The virtue or quality or state of one who is *dikaios* (righteous). In the broad sense, the state or status of the one who is “righteous” in the eyes of God. The condition of being acceptable to God. Thus, in the writings of Paul, *dikaiosunē* has a peculiar meaning, opposed to the views of the Jews and Jewish Christians who were still zealous for the Law, that *dikaiosunē* denotes the state and status of being acceptable to God which becomes a sinner’s possession through faith in Jesus Christ. *Dikaiosunē* is also used in the narrower sense of justice, or the virtue which gives each one his due; thus, the quality, state, or practice of judicial responsibility with focus on fairness, justice, equitableness.

3. *Dikaiōō* (Verb. Strong’s #1417, δικαίω). To declare or pronounce someone to be righteous, just, or such as he ought to be. To declare and treat someone as righteous. To be better understood, *dikaiōō* should be compared to *hosioō* and *axioō*, which do not mean “to make holy” or “to make worthy,” but rather to “declare, judge, or treat” as holy or worthy. The emphasis of the verb is not that God “makes” us righteous, but rather that God “declares” us righteous, and thus that is how we are in His sight in spite of our sins and shortcomings. The glory goes to God, who declared sinners to be righteous. *Dikaiōō* is especially used as “declare to be righteous,” in the technical phraseology of Paul, respecting God who judges and declares such men as put faith in Christ to be righteous and acceptable to Him. In contexts where the negative idea is predominant, it means “to declare guiltless.” The passive voice is used reflexively, “to show oneself to be righteous.”

4. *Dikaiōma* (Noun. Strong’s #1345, δικαίωμα). Universally, of an appointment of God having the force of law; a regulation relating to just or right action, what has been established and ordained by law: thus, a regulation, requirement, commandment or ordinance. A judicial decision or sentence, either the favorable judgment which acquits, or the unfavorable one that is a sentence of condemnation; even sometimes extending to mean a punishment. Also, *dikaiōma* is used of a righteous act or deed.

5. *Dikaiōs* (Adverb. Strong’s # 1346 δικαιως). “Righteously” (EDNT), justly, properly, uprightly. As is right, agreeable with what is right.

6. *Dikaiōsis* (Noun. Strong’s #1347 δικαιοσίας). “Righteousness, justification, vindication, acquittal.” It is both the process and state of being. It is the act of God's declaring men free from guilt and acceptable to him; adjudging them to be righteous; it is also the righteousness we have as a result of that action. (Rom. 4:25).

**“trust in Jesus Christ.”** This verse is a genitive phrase in Greek; literally, “trust of Jesus Christ.” As is typical of genitive phrases, this one can be translated many different ways, and people disagree about what it means and how it should be translated. As always, therefore, the context of the verse and the scope of Scripture are necessary for arriving at the proper translation of the phrase and the meaning God intended the phrase to communicate.

The whole book of Romans is about the change that God instituted due to the sacrifice of Christ. Salvation is no longer a matter of doing the works of the Law, but rather of having trust [or “faith”] in Jesus Christ. God says in many verses in the NT,
which are worded many different ways, that today a person is saved through trust in Jesus Christ. Because of that, we can see that this verse is an objective genitive, where Jesus Christ is the object of our trust. Thus, “trust in Christ” is the correct translation in this context. This verse contrasts the revelation of the Church Epistles, which say salvation comes through trust in Jesus Christ, with the revelation of Old Testament, which says the works of the Law are also necessary (Deut. 6:25). This verse and many others like it in Romans, Galatians, etc., make it clear that our righteousness in the sight of God comes by having trust in Jesus Christ. There is, however, a possible sub-current in the verse that we should pay attention to.

It is also grammatically possible to translate the Greek phrase as a subjective genitive, in which case it would mean, “Jesus Christ’s faithfulness.” There is a huge debate among theologians today as to whether the Greek phrase means, “trust in Christ” or “the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.” We do not feel “the faithfulness of Jesus Christ” is the primary meaning in this verse. For one thing, if our righteousness came by Jesus Christ’s faithfulness then everyone would be righteous. There has to be something we do, some part we play in being righteous, or everyone would be righteous, and that part is to have trust. Also, and importantly, the next chapter, Romans 4, expands on the teaching of righteousness by trust. Chapter 4 says Abraham “found” the principle of being declared righteous by trust when he trusted God. It is clear that chapter 4 is saying that Abraham was declared righteous by God when he trusted God. So for chapter 4 to be an expansion and clarification of chapter 3, then chapter 3 has to be saying that we are declared righteous when we have trust. If chapter 3 was saying we are righteous by Christ’s faithfulness, then chapter 4 would have to be saying that Abraham was righteous because of God’s faithfulness, but that is clearly not what it is saying. Chapters 3 and 4 reinforce a single point: that righteousness can come through our trust—Abraham trusted God and we have trust in Christ.

The debate rages because the Greek phrase can have two different meanings, and it is also clear that God could have had the text worded in such a way that there was only one clear meaning. Because of that, it seems that in wording the phrase the way He did, God is setting forth a primary meaning, and then another meaning as well, a secondary meaning. In that case the secondary meaning is that righteousness is only available because of the faithfulness of Christ. Had Christ not been faithful, everlasting life would not be available, but it is only procured by a believer by his or her faith in Christ.

“to all those who believe.” This phrase is not “redundant” as some people believe, but what scholars call “repetitive emphasis” (Most people who say it is “redundant” are trying to prove that the phrase we translate as “faith in Christ” should be “faithfulness of Christ”).

Given the animosity that existed between Jews and Gentiles, and the belief by many Jews that Gentiles could not be saved without becoming proselytes and keeping the Law, there was a need to state that salvation came by faith in Christ and then specifically emphasize that that was true for ALL who believed, not just the Jews. The stubbornness of the Jews when it came to rejecting Gentiles and hanging on to their Law is well documented, and shows up graphically in the book of Acts. The books of Romans and Galatians are especially clear about salvation by faith, that Christ was the fulfillment of the Law, and that there is no difference between Jews and Greeks. But even years after those books were written, Acts 21:20-25 shows us that James, the leader of the Christians
in Jerusalem, was still teaching that there was a difference between Jews and Greeks, and he never said a word about salvation by faith. History teaches us that many of the Jewish Christians never did accept the writings of Paul on many points, and one of them was that there is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ.

“between Jews and Greeks.” This supplied prepositional phrase is carried forward from verse 9 only for the sake of clarity. The people to whom Paul was writing were very sensitive to the differences between Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews), and the claims that being Jewish entitled one to everlasting life. Thus, in that culture when Paul wrote, “there is no distinction,” everyone knew precisely that Paul was saying that there was no difference between Jew and Gentile, and that all of them had sinned. Today, however, especially since the subject of Jews and Gentile was as far back as verse 9, that meaning can become lost.

3:23. “have sinned” is aorist, because we have sinned in the past. But “fall” is present. We have not just “fallen” (past) short of the glory of God, we “fall” (present) short of it on a regular basis. There was a temptation to translate this verse, “…all have sinned, and even now fall short of the glory of God.”

3:24. “accomplished in Christ Jesus.” The Greek phrase uses the word en, which can mean “by,” or “in” with the idea of “in connection with” (cp. note on Eph. 1:3; Lenski; Hendrickson). Some scholars would expand that to mean the redemption that is embodied by Christ. Scholars who support the translation, “in connection with” correctly note that God is the author of the plan of redemption and is referred to as the Redeemer throughout the Old Testament. It is God who set forth Christ as the atoning sacrifice in the context (3:25), thus our redemption is “in connection with” Jesus Christ. However, we must note that the concept of “by” is clearly in the Greek word “en.” The NIV, uses “by,” and scholars such as Boice (cp. Romans: Justification by Faith by James Boice) prefer “by” for several reasons. First, it is a legitimate translation of the Greek. Second, it is clear to English readers and fits with the scope of Scripture. Our redemption was paid for by Jesus Christ, as many Scriptures attest. It was Christ who gave himself for us (Titus 2:14), and redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Gal. 3:13). Third, it fits with the Old Testament concept of the “kinsman-redeemer,” the close family member who could redeem a person or piece of property. The best example of the kinsman-redeemer in the Old Testament is Boaz, who appears in the book of Ruth. To be a kinsman-redeemer a person had to be a close relative, be willing to take the responsibility upon himself, and be able to pay the price. Jesus Christ is the ultimate kinsman-redeemer. He was a close relative, a member of mankind. He was willing to die for our sins even when we did not deserve to have our sins forgiven, and he, and he alone of all mankind, was able to pay the price for the sins of mankind since he alone was sinless.

In spite of all that, “by” offers a somewhat limited view of the meaning of the verse, which seems to be saying more than just that our redemption came by Jesus Christ. The fullness of our redemption was not just “by” him, in a very real sense it was “in” him (in connection with him) because it “was” him. He was the fulfillment of the promise of a seed of a woman, a lamb from the flock, a lion from the tribe of Judah, a sinless sacrifice, a perfect offering with no bones broken, and so much more. But how do we get both the “by” and “in” into the same verse in English, when it is so easy in Greek? Cranfield has a translation that comes very close “the redemption accomplished in Christ Jesus” (C. E. B. Cranfield, Romans). God is the great Redeemer, and Jesus Christ was His way of
redeeming mankind, nay, much more than that, the fallen world itself, which Jesus Christ participated in by offering himself, and thus being the de facto redeemer.

3:25. “put him forth.” The Greek is protithemai (#4388 προτίθημα) and it has two important meanings that are relevant to this verse. 1) to set forth, put forward publicly, present, offer; 2) literally, to set before oneself; hence to plan, purpose, or intend. Historically, scholars and commentators have been divided as to which meaning fits in Romans 3:25. In favor of “planned” or “purposed” is the fact that protithemai only occurs three times in the New Testament (Rom. 1:13; 3:25; and Eph. 1:9), and the other two times it refers to “plan” or “purpose.” Also, there is no doubt that God “planned” for Jesus Christ to be the atoning sacrifice for the sins of mankind. On the other hand, “set forth” is the overwhelming meaning of protithemai in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and thus the believers in Rome would have been accustomed to hearing about the sacrifices and offerings that were “set forth” by God (Exod. 40:4, 23; Lev. 24:8; Ps. 101:3). And Romans 3:25 is in the context of Jesus being an atoning sacrifice. From a larger perspective, however, there is no doubt that in the context of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, both “planned” and “set forth” apply well, and this could be an example of the figure of speech amphibologia (double entendre), where one thing is said but two things are meant. God both planned, and set forth, Jesus, as an atoning sacrifice.

“atonning sacrifice.” The Greek is hilastērion (#2435 ἱλαστήριον). It has two distinct meanings, both of which are significant in this verse. The first meaning is: A sin offering; a sacrifice to atone; an appeasement necessitated by sin. In this first definition there is a “focus on the means by which sins are forgiven; having atoning power, bringing about reconciliation” (Friberg). The second meaning of hilastērion is: The place where the expiation occurred. The majority of translators and commentators believe that the idea of an offering or payment for sin is the primary emphasis in this verse, and thus translate hilastērion as “sacrifice of atonement” (NIV; NRSV), “sacrifice for reconciliation” (NJB; cp. Williams); “expiation” (RSV; Cassirer), and “propitiation” (ESV; HCSB; KJV; NASB). Although “propitiation” is used by a lot of translators, we agree with Louw & Nida that it misses the point. They write:

> Though some traditional translations render ἱλαστήριον [hilastērion] as ‘propitiation,’ this involves a wrong interpretation of the term in question. Propitiation is essentially a process by which one does a favor to a person in order to make him or her favorably disposed, but in the NT God is never the object of propitiation since he is already on the side of people. ἱλασμός [hilasmos] and ἱλαστήριον [hilastērion] denote the means of forgiveness and not propitiation.

> Although one of the results of Christ’s sacrifice was the withholding of the wrath of God, a wrath we deserved, we believe it is wrong to translate this verse in such a way as it presents Christ’s death as “appeasing” God. The sacrifice of Jesus did not placate God, but rather was a provision that our loving God made for mankind so that we would be acceptable to Him even though we had sinned against Him. This is a case where we really do have to pay attention to the theme of the Bible, and not just look at the way the Greek word was used in Greek culture.

> The Greek gods were angry, jealous gods who did not have any particular love for mankind. They often acted immorally, and were sometimes offended by things, such as
being spurned at love, that they should not have been offended at. Much of the ritual and sacrifice in the pagan world was to appease these gods, and *hilasterion* is accurately translated “propitiation,” a sacrifice that appeases the wrath of the gods, in the context of these pagan deities. However, when it comes to our God, He has always loved people, and His wrath is a function of His justice and righteousness, not any immoral nature or actions. Before mankind had ever sinned, in the Garden of Eden, God warned that sin would result in death (Gen. 2:17) and since that time people have continually sinned against God. Sacrifices, including the death of Christ, were not made to “appease” God, as if He were angry because people were breaking His laws. Instead, the sacrifices pay the legitimate debt we incur when we sin, and thus they allow God to withhold any judgment and wrath and yet still be righteous in His judgments. Thus, translations such as “sacrifice of atonement,” “sacrifice for reconciliation,” or “expiation,” are much better than “propitiation.”

Now we turn to the second definition of *hilasterion*, which, in biblical contexts, refers to the “mercy seat.” *Hilasterion* is the word the Septuagint used for the “mercy seat,” the solid gold lid on the Ark of the Covenant that was sprinkled with the blood of the sin-offering on the Day of Atonement (Ex 25:17; Lev. 16:14-16). Although some commentaries and translations have “mercy seat” in Romans 3:25, we do not see that as the primary meaning here. The mercy seat received the blood of the sacrifice, but it did not itself bleed or die. There had to be a shedding of blood in order for there to be remission of sin (Heb. 9:22). God had decreed that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), and there had to be the death of a sinless sacrifice if people’s sin was to be atoned for. Jesus Christ died in our place, and it is his atoning sacrifice that we appropriate to ourselves by having faith in his blood. Did the children of Israel have faith in the blood on the mercy seat? Yes, but it was in connection with the entire ceremony on the Day of Atonement. They would not have had faith in blood being on the mercy seat if that blood was not from an animal that had only been cut and wounded, but had not died. There had to be the death of a sacrifice of atonement for God to forgive people and declare them righteous, and that is the point Romans 3:25 and 26 are making.

There is merit, however, in recognizing the subtle double meaning in *hilasterion* in this verse. The verse says that God showed His righteousness by passing over “the sins previously committed,” i.e., the sins of those people who lived before Christ. The idea being communicated is that God passed over the sins of the people who lived before Christ died, but when Christ died his sacrifice atoned for the sins of those Old Testament people too. Thus, in a way Christ is like the Mercy Seat, which one day each year is sprinkled with blood to atone for the sins Israel has committed. When the people of Israel sinned, their sin was not immediately atoned for, but awaited the Day of Atonement. On that day, the tenth day of Tishri (the seventh month), the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies and atoned for all the sin of the people. Thus individuals often waited many months for atonement for their sin. In the same way, God passed over the sin of the people before Christ, and did not judge them for it. Then, many years later when Christ died, his death atoned for their sin. “What actually took away the sins of the Old Testament saints was Christ’s blood” (Lenski: *Romans*). “The merits of the cross reach backward as well as forward” (Hendrickson: *Romans*).
“sacrifice.” People often wonder why God required animal sacrifices in the Old Testament and the sacrifice of Christ in the New Testament as an atonement for sins. However, God had some very good reasons for doing this.

First, the sacrifices that God commanded showed His love for us. People do not usually think of sacrifice as a demonstration of love, but it is. People are sinners and “the wages of sin is death.” However, God so loved people that He set things up such that a substitute could die in the place of the sinner, thus sparing the sinner of deserved death. The sacrifice of animals, and then Jesus, demonstrated that our God is a God of love and mercy by not requiring people to receive the full consequence for their sin. Thus, sacrifices show us God’s love, and the Bible is very clear when it says “But God shows his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died in our place” (Rom. 5:8, REV, and see commentary on that verse).

Second, the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament pointed forward to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ. They did this by establishing from earliest times that God allowed a substitute to pay the price for someone’s sin. Although making the effort to do an animal sacrifice demonstrated the sincerity of the sinner, he or she was also supposed to see that the sacrifice was not a final payment for sin, but pointed forward to the sacrifice of “the lamb of God,” which alone could completely atone for the sins of mankind (see commentary on Rom. 3:26, “with a view to show”).

Third, animal sacrifice showed the costly nature of sin. Sacrifices always cost somebody something: animals were valuable property to their owners, and it goes without saying that Jesus Christ was beyond value to God.

Fourth, animal sacrifice graphically showed the terrible and final result of sin, which is death, and “death” is the absolute and terminal end of a person’s life. (Rom. 6:23; and see commentary note). Sin is horrible and the pain and death sin produces is horrible. Animal sacrifice and the death of Jesus were costly and horrible too, so horrible that they are only understandable and acceptable in the context of what God was accomplishing through them, including reconciling the sinner to God. God knows that sacrifice is repulsive, but in being repulsive we are powerfully reminded of the repulsive nature of sin and its consequence and thus motivated to do whatever we can to keep from sinning. If we truly understand the lessons God was trying to teach us via the sacrifices He commanded, we will do our best not to sin instead of excusing ourselves when we sin or entirely ignoring our sin. Only because God provides sacrifice as an offering for sin can we embrace this action of atonement.

Historically, the Devil has blurred the lessons that God has tried to teach through sacrifice, and he has done this by inspiring ungodly people to sacrifice things apart from God’s redemptive system. Many cultures perform sacrifices, even human sacrifice. These are not commanded by God, are not redemptive, and do not cover for sin. Furthermore, the way these sacrifices are conducted can be indescribably cruel. The uninformed people do not see a difference between the sacrifices God commands and the sacrifices done in pagan cultures, and thus they often say God is “bloody,” or “unrighteous.” We need to remember that God did not have to be “bloody” and require sacrifice. He could have allowed each person to pay for his or her own sin by dying. That would have pleased the Devil greatly, who would be delighted if all God’s potential family died in the flames of Gehenna. Thankfully, God loved us enough to allow people to accept a substitutionary sacrifice for their sin, in spite of the fact that this has caused Him to be misunderstood by
people who have not made the effort to get to know how lovingly and righteously He set up the provision of sacrifices set forth in the Bible.

“to show.” See commentary on “with a view to show” in verse 26.

“passed over.” The Greek is παρέσις (πάρεσις), and this is the only use of this word in the New Testament. It means a passing over, letting pass, neglecting, disregarding. This is a very exact recounting of what happened with God’s justice and judgment before the death of Christ. Israel offered sacrifices to God, but in actual fact, the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin (Heb. 10:1-4). God knew that, so He withheld His final Judgment of people until Christ could come and atone for sin. It is a very good thing that God waited for Christ to be the sacrifice for sin before He judged the world. Before Christ died there was no actual effectual atonement, no effective payment for sin, and thus there was no actual forgiveness for sin available. Thus, if God had judged people when they died, instead of waiting until Christ had come to judge, the people before Christ would all be doomed, because not one person would be righteous in God’s sight. Job would have been quite right: “How then can a man be righteous before God?” (Job 25:4). However because God’s Judgment is future, and well after the death of Christ, atonement resulting in everlasting life is available for everyone—those who lived both before Christ and after him.

Romans 3:25 is very good evidence that people do not live on after they die, as most Christians believe. If people’s souls or spirits lived on after they died, then that soul would have been judged right after the person died. But if the person died before Christ, nothing he could have done would have made him righteous in God’s sight, and so he would have been doomed. However, because all the resurrections occur in the future, after the death of Christ, salvation is available.

3:26. “with a view to show.” The commentator R. C. H. Lenski is quite right that many versions and commentators miss the sense of what God is saying in verses 25 and 26 by breaking them into two sentences that start the same way, thus making them into independent thoughts in which the second sentence elucidates the first. For example, the ESV has, “This was to show…it was to show…,” the NIV has “He did this to demonstrate…He did it to demonstrate…,” and the KJV has “to declare…To declare…. ” If we are to understand this verse, it is important to see how these phrases are connected and why. The Greek phrase in verse 25 starts, εἰς ἐνδείξις, while verse 26 opens with πρὸς ὧν ἐνδείξις. The noun ἐνδείξις is a “pointing out,” and hence a demonstration or showing forth. Being a “verbal noun,” a noun that inherently connotes action, it is not off the mark to translate it as a verb in English, which most versions do. Thus ἐνδείξις is translated “show” (ESV, REV; RSV; NRSV); “declare” (KJV); “demonstrate” (NASB; NIV), “prove” (NAB), etc.

Verse 26 start with πρὸς ὧν ἐνδείξις, which is not like εἰς ἐνδείξις, which means “to show” (more literally, “for a showing”), but instead means, “with a view to showing” (Lenski; Wuest’s Word Studies; Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible). Most translators see no essential difference in the two phrases, and that is why they have them start two different sentences. However, if the translators make the verse into two sentences, as we saw with the KJV, NIV, and ESV above, then the subject of both sentences is God’s making Christ an atoning sacrifice, and then God gives two different reasons for doing that, the first being the last half of verse 25 and the second being verse 26. Essentially, translated the way the KJV, ESV, NIV, and many others have it, the verses mean: “God set forth Christ
as an atoning sacrifice to show His righteousness in connection with passing over the sins previously committed.” And also, “God set forth Christ as an atoning sacrifice to show His righteousness at this present time.” We do not believe that is what these verses mean. Verse 26 is not an explanation of why God set forth Christ as an atoning sacrifice; it is an explanation of why God passed over the sins “previously committed,” that is, committed before the death and resurrection of Christ.

God passed over, disregarded, ignored, the sins committed before Christ. He had to, because if He had judged mankind before the death of Christ, everyone would have been guilty of sin and then sentenced to everlasting death. Even those people who sacrificed animals under the Law were only symbolically covered from their sin. Hebrews is clear: the Law was only a “shadow” of the things to come (i.e., Christ), and “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:1, 4). God’s condemnation would have been “just” because the people would have truly deserved everlasting death because of their sin, but that would not have accomplished God’s purposes for mankind, which was to have a family that would live forever with Him. Furthermore, since no one can really be righteous before God on his own merits, condemning mankind without giving them a fair chance to be righteous before Him would not have even really been righteous. So God passed over the sins committed before Christ—why?—“with a view to show his righteousness at this present time.” God set forth Jesus to be an atoning sacrifice to show His righteousness, and He also overlooked people’s sins before Christ in order to show His righteousness now, because in light of Christ’s atonement, He would be seen to be truly righteous, and also One who declares people righteous who have faith in His Messiah no matter when they lived. Thus the atoning work of the cross not only points from the death of Christ forward, atoning those who make Christ Lord, but it atoned backward, allowing God to judge those who lived before Christ through the lens of the shed blood of Jesus.

“trust in Jesus.” This translation takes the genitive as an objective genitive, where Jesus is the object of our faith. See also Romans 3:22.

3:27. “By what kind of law?” The Greek phrase is dia poios nomos, and the Greek word poios can mean “what” or “what kind of, what sort of.” In this verse the word nomos is not referring to the Mosaic Law, but just “law,” or “principle,” “norm,” or “basis,” so it is better to render the phrase by “what kind of law,” opening the door for multiple possible answers (cp. ESV, NASB; Lenski).

3:30. “declare...righteous.” See commentary note on Romans 3:22. In this verse, the Jews are declared righteous ek pisteōs (“out from faith”), while the Gentiles are declared righteous dia tēs pisteōs (through the [that] faith”). It is important to note that the second “faith” has the definite article, which in this context means more “that” than “the.” For the Jews, faith had always been the essence of what gave them righteousness, as Abraham (Rom. 4) and David (Rom. 4) discovered. Thus, for the Jews, faith was the source from which (ek), or the basis of (ek), their salvation. This verse is pointing out that the righteousness of the Gentiles also comes “through” (dia) that same thing—faith. We added the word “same” in italics for clarity.

3:31. “uphold.” The Greek word is histemi (#2476 ἱστήμι; pronounced hiss'-tay-me), and in this context it means “uphold, establish, confirm, validate” (cp. BDAG Greek-English lexicon). Some scholars (cp. F. F. Bruce) believe that Paul would have been thinking
about the Rabbinic language that faith “fulfilled” the law, but that is impossible to prove, and it seems that he could have worded the Greek better if that is what he meant.

“law.” This is not “the Law” of the Old Testament, but “law” in general, which includes “the Law” of the Old Testament. The “law” or “principle” (the Greek word nomos can mean both) of faith is in the law, as we will see from Abraham in Romans 4.

There are a number of ways that faith upholds law. For one thing, the presence of law shows the need for faith, because law is uncompromising in its convicting and condemning law breakers (sinners), and thus it prepares the heart to be accepted by God by faith. Second, faith is upheld by law (including the Law) because the law testifies to faith. Abraham is a great example. A third way that faith upholds law is that law still is the authoritative will of God; people of faith do not abandon law, they follow law as best they can. Thus, faith upholds law.

Chapter 4

4:4. “gift.” The word is the usual word for grace, charis (#5485 γάρις), but here it is not used with its theological trappings. The word also has a cultural meaning of “a gift of favor.”
4:7. Quoted from Psalm 32:1.

“Blessed.” The word for “blessed” is makarios (#3107 μακάριος), which also means “happy.” Not only are we blessed, but we should feel happy that our sins have been covered and not counted against us.

“were forgiven… were covered.” Most versions translate these verbs in the present tense, “are forgiven… are covered.” The verbs are in the aorist (past) tense, however, so we rendered it “were covered.”
4:8. Quoted from Psalm 32:2.

“man.” The Greek is aner (#435 ἄνήρ), a man, a male. It is quoting more literally from the Hebrew text, which reads adam, man.

“not.” The Greek is stronger than the English “not.” It is the phrase ou me, literally, “not not,” using two different Greek words for “no” together.
4:11. “seal.” The Greek word sphragis (#4973 σφραγίς) referred to a seal, as books were sealed.

“The purpose was to make him.” The phrase is a purpose idiom (cp. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament; cp. ESV, RSV, NRSV.) It is hard to communicate the purpose with just “that.” This shows that God had a plan to clearly reveal that He would justify people by faith—which He did in the OT and will do in the Millennium. However, today, in the Administration of the Sacred Secret, we see the ultimate justification by faith, because what we have is permanent.

“but are not circumcised.” This is the general idea of the statement. The Greek, “the ones believing through uncircumcision” would not be clear. It means those who believe and are in the condition of uncircumcision. (Cp. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament.) The phrase in Greek means without being in a state of circumcision.
4:12. “merely.” This is the essence of “only” here (cp. ESV; RSV). The difficulty with “only” is that the reader may think that it refers to a class of people, i.e., not only the
circumcision, but the uncircumcision. However, it refers to another aspect of the
circumcision. Being circumcised is not the “only” aspect of following (“falling in line”) with Abraham.

4:13. “seed” Greek is sperma, “seed.” By metonymy “seed” becomes “descendants, offspring,” etc., but we felt that the reader could make that jump as well as the translator.

“that comes by” is the genitive of origin. The literal “a righteousness of faith” is much less clear. Although almost all versions read “the righteousness…,” there is no warrant for it in the Greek.

4:14. “nullified.” The Greek word, katargeo, means, in this context, to cause something to lose its power or effectiveness, invalidate, make powerless, make ineffective, nullify, make the Law invalid (BDAG).

4:15. “For the law produces wrath, but where there is not a law, neither is there a violation.” The believer’s great freedom! We should read this verse and shout for joy. God has delivered Christians from the Law. Galatians tells us to “Stand fast in the freedom with which Christ has set us free.” We are not under Law, therefore we cannot transgress it and be guilty. Step up to faith and receive its benefits!

“For the law produces wrath.” A simple statement of fact. No one could keep the Law, therefore it produced wrath from God.

“violation.” The Greek, parabasis, literally means an overstepping, hence, a violation or transgression.

4:16. “The promise.” We felt that as long as the subject was ellipsed (Figure of Speech, Ellipsis), we might as well add it in italics for clarity. Most versions simply have “it.”

4:17. Quoted from Genesis 17:5.

“in the presence of.” Greek is katenanti (#2713 κατέναντι). There are two ways to understand how the phrase “in the presence of” fits with the parenthesis: (1) He is the father of us all (as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”) in the sight of God. This has the meaning represented in the HCSB: “He is the father of us all in God’s sight” (HCSB). Or (2) “to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”)—in the presence of God” (NRSV), meaning, the promise is secure to those who share the faith of Abraham in God’s sight.

We take the parenthesis in the second sense; it is to be set off as it appears in the REV (cp. NRSV and Kistemaker’s translation). The flow of thought regards those who in God’s sight are of the faith of Abraham; the entire clause about Abraham being the Father of all who believe and the supporting Old Testament quote is parenthetical.

“God…who gives life to the dead, and calls into existence the things that do not exist.” (This is the translation many versions have.) The context is Abraham. Sarah’s womb was “dead” (v. 19), and yet God spoke to Abraham in the past tense (idiom: Prophetic Perfect; see commentary on “seated,” in Ephesians 2:6).

4:18. Quoted from Genesis 15:5.

“beyond hope, believed in hope.” The word for “beyond” is the preposition para (#3844 παρά). Thayer is insightful with regard to its usage here: “beside, beyond, i.e. metaphorically, equivalent to contrary to… literally, beyond hope, i.e. where the laws and course of nature left no room for hope, hence, equivalent to without (A. V. against) hope.” The point is that considering Abraham and Sarah’s bodies, naturally speaking, they were without any hope of having a child. They were beyond hope. Although
Abraham and Sarah were “beyond hope” they believed in hope because God had told them they would have a child.

This is the figure of speech antanaclasis, “the use of the same word in the same sentence in two different senses” (Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*). Here “hope” is repeated, but used in different senses. The first occurrence refers to natural, worldly hope—in that sense, Abraham is beyond hope. The second occurrence of hope, however, is put for metonymy for the promise in which Abraham believed—he believed in hope, that is, he believed in the promise of God who said he would have an heir.

4:19. **“already having become dead.”** The passive perfect participle. Abraham’s body was “dead” when it came to having children without a miraculous intervention by God, and Sarah was in the same situation. To us, translating the Greek as “as good as dead” blurs the clear meaning of the text. What is a body “as good as dead?” Could he, or could he not have children? The Greek is clear as a bell—he was dead!

4:20. **“looking to the promise.”** (Cp. Lenski)

**“was not divided.”** Divided is a use of diakrino (Cp. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*).

**“by unbelief.”** There is no word for “by” or “in.” “Unbelief” is in the dative case, and here it is the instrumental dative (Robertson), thus “unbelief” is what causes people to be divided, or waver, or stagger. They doubt, and move in and out of a state of faith. Not Abraham. He did not allow himself to be divided by unbelief. To say “he did not waver in unbelief” is to say he was always in unbelief without varying from it, which of course is not the case. Wuest uses “vacillate” instead of “divided.” Abraham did not vacillate because of unbelief.

**“giving glory to God, being fully convinced.”** Two things that occurred in concert with Abraham being strong in his trust of God were that he gave glory to God [i.e., praised God], and that he was fully convinced. The Greek would allow for the things to feed on each other, so, for example, his praising God could, and likely did, contribute to him being strong in his trust of God.


4:24. **“out from among the dead.”** Almost every version we checked reads “from the dead.” When the average English speaker reads that Christ was “raised from the dead,” he thinks that “dead” refers to the state of death, as if the verse were saying that “Christ was raised from the state of death,” or that “Christ was raised from being dead.” This is not at all the meaning.

There are problems with the translation, “from the dead.” First, there is no word “the” in the Greek text, so “from the dead” is technically just “from dead.” Second, the word “dead” in the English phrase “from the dead,” is a noun, but in the Greek text “dead” is an adjective. More than that, it is a plural adjective. The Greek text reads, ek nekros, and means “out from among dead ones” [or “dead people”], (Cp. *Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible*; Wuest, *Word Studies*). The Greek word ek means “out from,” and the word nekros, as we said, is a plural adjective. An adjective modifies a noun, and thus the adjective “dead” must modify a noun, and thus answer the question “Dead what?” The scope of Scripture shows us that the answer to that question is “dead people.” Since Adam, people have died and been buried. Thus Christ rose out from among the dead people, who, not raised by God, stayed in the ground. This explains why the word “dead”
is plural; it refers to the many dead who are still in the ground. What the Bible is saying, and what we need to support with a proper English translation, is that when God raised Jesus, He raised him up and out from among all the myriads of dead people who are buried in the ground. Everyone who has died is in the ground, but God raised Jesus out from among those dead people, and gave him life. Furthermore, there will be other times people will be raised out from among the rest of the dead people. At the Rapture, Christians will be raised out from among the rest of the dead, and then at the first resurrection the righteous will be raised out from among the other dead people, the unrighteous being left in the ground until the Resurrection of the Righteous (Luke 14:14 KJV; Rev. 20:6). There are 44 usages of ek nekros in the New Testament, and not one of them refers to the resurrection of the unjust (Acts 24:15). That makes sense because at the resurrection of the unjust, which occurs at the end of Christ’s 1,000-year reign, no one is left in the ground. [For more on the Rapture and the two resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15].

Although ek nekros could be considered an ellipsis, with the emphasis on “dead” and the word “ones,” or “people” being supplied by the scope of Scripture, the phrase is more an idiom than a true ellipsis. This verse is not saying that Christ was raised from “death or “being dead” (a nominative use of death). It is saying that Christ was raised from among those who are dead. The rest of all the humans who had died are still dead and in the ground, and Christ was raised out from among them.

Chapter 5

5:2. “let us boast.” The verb “boast” can be taken as a subjunctive (cp. J. Dunn, Word Biblical Commentary; cp. CJB, Rotherham).

5:4. “character.” The Greek is dokimē (#1382 δοκιμή), a noun that can mean a test or ordeal, or the experience of going through a test, with emphasis on the result; thus, standing a test, being proven by test, proof, or “character.” The verb dokimazō mean “to prove by test” and was used of testing precious metals to see whether or not they were genuine. We believe “character” is a good translation of dokimē in this context because “character” is both developed, and shines forth, in difficult circumstances. Character is the sum total of our moral and ethical qualities, and it can be good or bad. It is based in the heart, but shines forth in the choices we make and what we say and do. The character of Christ is in part described by the fruit of the spirit, which is what the new nature produces in a Christian if the Christian strives for it: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22, 23). On their website, the organization “Character First” organizes good character in the categories of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.

5:5. “disappoint us.” The Greek is kataischuno (#2617 κατασχύω), which means to dishonor or disgrace; put to shame or humiliate; or disappoint (BDAG). The point is that our hope, which is real, will not disappoint us or put us to shame, while false hopes will disappoint and put to shame those who believe in them.

“through the holy spirit.” The Greek text does not have a definite article before “holy spirit.” In Greek, if a preposition (in this case, dia) precedes a noun, the noun can be definite without specifically adding the definite article; the subject and context are the
final arbiter. Daniel Wallace writes in *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (p. 247): “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.” A. T. Robertson writes in *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, pp. 790-792: “…the article is not the only means of showing that a word is definite. …The context and history of the phrase in question must decide. …[As for prepositional phrases], these were also considered definite enough without the article.” In this case, the holy spirit is the gift of God’s nature with which we were born again and which is sealed in us. Robertson then cites some examples that use ἐκ.

When a person is born again, what is “born” (actually “created” 2 Cor. 5:17) inside the person is the nature of God, which becomes part of them, indeed, become a new nature in them (2 Pet. 1:4). Because this new nature is now part of person and thus cannot be removed, it is said to be “sealed” in the person (Eph. 1:13), and is a “guarantee” of everlasting life (2 Cor. 1:22; 2 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 1:14). God works through the spirit that is now inside each believer in order to help them be like Christ. And He and Jesus Christ communicate through the spirit with each believer, so they are working in each one “to want to do, and to do,” their good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). In this verse, they work to show us their love and help us be loving to others. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

5:6-8. “in place of the ungodly…for… in our place.” All of these are translations from the Greek preposition ὑπέρ (#5228 ὑπέρ). Huper can have the sense of in place of, instead of, in the name of (BDAG; TDNT; Robertson, *Grammar*, pp. 630-32 and *The Minister and His Greek New Testament*, pp. 35-42.) [See also Appendix 11: “Greek Preposition”]. In such cases the meaning of substitution is indicated, as can be clearly seen in Romans 5:7: “For scarcely for [ὑπέρ] a righteous person will one die; though perhaps for [ὑπέρ] a good person someone would even dare to die…” The meaning is clear. The verse is speaking of dying in place of someone else, or dying in one’s stead. This becomes important for understanding the nature of Christ’s atonement for our sins—it was a substitutionary atonement. Christ literally died instead of us, thus taking our place in death: “Christ died in place of [ὑπέρ] the ungodly… while we were still sinners, Christ died in our place [ὑπέρ] (Rom. 5:6, 8).

5:6. “weak.” Figure of speech, tapeinosis, or understatement. “Weak?” We were more than weak—we were dead! We were dead in sins, totally unable to help ourselves, and God, in his grace and mercy, sent Christ, who died for us so that we would be strong in him.

5:11. “continue to boast.” The present participle of “boast,” καυχάοµαι (#2744 καυχάοµαι), calls for the translation “continue to boast” (cp. Lenski). This is known as the continuous present.

5:12. “through one man sin entered the world.” [For information on the original sin and its effects, see commentary on Romans 7:17].

5:16. “judgment came from one transgression.” [For information on the original sin and its effects, see commentary on Romans 7:17].

5:18. “one transgression resulted in condemnation.” The English translation only implicitly refers to the conduit for which the results of condemnation and justification come. In the Greek, however, this verse strongly communicates both the results and the means through which the condemnation and justification come. It indicates result with the preposition εἰς (#1519 εἰς), meaning “resulting in,” and it shows the means through
which the result comes with the word *dia* (διά), meaning “through.” Literally the Greek reads: “through (*dia*) one trespass unto all men results in (*eis*) condemnation, so also through (*dia*) one righteous act unto all men results in (*eis*) justification of life.” The one trespass was the conduit through which the result of condemnation came, and the one righteous act was the conduit through which the result of justification to life came. [For more information on the original sin and its effects, see commentary on Romans 7:17].

“righteousness that brings life.” According to Robertson, this is an objective genitive (Grammar, p. 500-501), meaning that life functions as the object of the verbal noun “righteousness;” i.e., the life that is brought by the action of righteousness (cp. Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax*, p. 116-117). This is justification that results in life.


5:20. “with the result.” God did not give the Law “so that” trespass would increase, but rather “with the result” that it did. The Greek is *hina*, which can be used to indicate a result. So it is here (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*; Lenski). In this case it is particularly used with the subjunctive (*pleonazo*) to indicate a result that was not intended—that is, God did not introduce the law with the *intent* of making trespasses increase, this was merely the *result* of the introduction (see also commentary entry on Rom. 7:10). Cp. Wallace: “This use of *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood expresses the result of the action of the main verb. It indicates a consequence of the verbal action that is *not* intended. The *hina* is normally translated *so that*, *with the result that*” (*Exegetical Syntax*, emphasis in original). See Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.”

This should not be translated as a purpose clause, as though the Law was introduced for the purpose of making transgression increase. God never intends for transgression to *increase*. Rather, this was merely the result of the introduction of the Law. This topic is taken up in Romans 7:7-13, specifically refuting the idea that the Law is culpable for bringing evil. The Law was holy and just (7:12), yet when the command came, sin came alive and produced death (7:7-11). Paul writes that “by no means” did the Law become death for us (7:13), for it is *sin*, not the Law, that produces death. If the *purpose* of the Law was to increase transgression, then the law would indeed have become death for us and Paul’s entire argument in Romans 7 would be fall apart. The purpose of the Law was not to increase sin, but to silence everyone who was under its standard, to make us aware of the extent of our transgression, and be our “guardian” until Christ came [For “guardian,” see Gal. 3:24]. A guardian is meant to protect. So if the Law brought us closer to sin, and the wages of sin is death, then how can the Law protect us when its purpose was to take us to death? (See also: entries on Rom. 7:13, “with the result that,” and Gal. 3:19, “because of transgressions”).

Scripture is telling us that it was not God’s intent that sin would increase by introducing the law. But if he knew that it would, how could this not be his intent? It is much like a doctor who performs a surgery which he knows will result in weeks of painful recovery for the patient. Yet he does not perform the surgery with the *intent* that pain ensues. The pain is simply a byproduct of the greater good being accomplished. And in the case of God putting forth the Law, it’s not even as though God brings the pain—adding the law didn’t force people to sin, they still chose to sin on their own.

“came in.” The Greek is the compound verb, *pareiserchomai* (παρεισέρχομαι); built from the prefix *para* (beside, alongside) and *eiserchomai* (to come or to go).
Pareiserchomai has two meanings: 1) “to come in besides,” or “to come in alongside of” and 2) “to come in secretly or by stealth” (Gal. 2:4). In this context it means, “to come in alongside of.” Eight verses earlier, in verse 12, sin “entered” into the world. Now in verse 20, law “enters in alongside” the sin that is already here. Most versions simply say “came in” or “entered” because the scope and context make it clear that sin was already in the world, and writing “came in alongside of” can confuse the reader.


Death is the means that sin used to reign over people. It is not that sin reigned “in death,” as if it reigned over them when they were dead. We can see this because of the “in this way also” (houtos kai) construction of the sentence. Grace is said to reign “through” (dia) righteousness, expressing the means through which grace reigns; this is set in comparison (“in this way also”) with sin reigning by death. Just as righteousness reigned “through” death so sin reigns “by means of” death.

“grace reigns.” The Greek word basileuō (#936 βασιλεύω; pronounced bass-i-loo'-ō), translated “reigns,” is in the aorist tense, subjunctive mood. The aorist does not mean that its reign has ended, only that it was established as a one-time event. The subjunctive mood is caused by the conjunction hina at the beginning of the phrase and so the verb needs to be understood from the context, which is not that grace “might reign” or “may reign,” but that it is reigning now. Grace has encroached into sin’s reign, and now, even though sin still reigns by means of death, grace also reigns and gives people everlasting life.

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.]

Chapter 6

6:1. “will increase.” The verb “increase,” pleonazō (#4121 πλεονάζω; pronounced pleh-on-ad'-zo), is in the subjunctive mood, thus many versions have “may” increase, but the Greek conjunction hina (#2443 ἢνα) earlier in the sentence is the reason the verb is subjunctive, and therefore in these cases we must get the sense of the verb from the context. In this case, if grace covers our sin, if we sin, grace “will” increase.

6:3. “baptized...baptized.” This is not baptism in water, but baptism in the gift of holy spirit. We can tell that this refers to baptism in holy spirit because of the two baptisms, baptism in water and baptism in holy spirit, only baptism in holy spirit actually produces what this verse says, “baptized into union with Jesus Christ.”

There is a huge difference between being baptized in water and being baptized in holy spirit. Baptism in water is symbolic. It does not mean the person is saved. Many people go through the motions of being immersed in water and never have the true faith in Jesus that gets them saved. It is well known that many people who have been water baptized never gave their life to Christ or had faith in Christ to the point of salvation.
People such as those are baptized in water, but it does not result in “union with Jesus Christ.” Baptism in holy spirit is totally different. It is not a ceremony or ritual, and it is not done by people. Only Jesus can baptize a person in the holy spirit, and he only does so when that person has true faith in him. A person who is baptized in the gift of holy spirit does not just participate in a ceremony that represents going from death to life; the person actually passes from everlasting death unto everlasting life. A person baptized in holy spirit is truly baptized “into union with Jesus Christ.” When a person is baptized in holy spirit, he is no longer the same person. He is saved and has spiritual power. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that Christians are baptized in holy spirit, and it is that baptism, not water baptism, that brings us into union with Jesus Christ such that when he was crucified, we were crucified, when he died, we died, when he was buried, we were buried, and when he was raised from the dead we were guaranteed new resurrection life.

“into union with.” This phrase is translated from the Greek preposition eis, which can refer to relation as well as to motion. In this context, the word eis (#1519 εἰς; pronounced “ace”) is defining a relation, which is referred to as the static sense of eis. R. C. H. Lenski writes:

“It is the task of the grammars to tell the story as to how the Koine eis has expanded and invaded the territory of en [in] so that it reached even the static verbs, even those of being, letting us have the construction einai and on eis, this invasion being completed in modern Greek, en there being swallowed up entirely by eis. All the old grammars and all the old exegesis are superseded by the immense volume of new information now at hand in the papyri, etc. We now see how wrong it was in scores of instances in the New Testament to interpret eis as “into,” and how only sheer ignorance forced the idea of motion into the preposition. Here in verse 3, 4, where it is found three times, as in Matt. 28:19, eis denotes sphere (Robertson’s Grammar, p. 592) and not motion. The grammars now call it static eis.”

In the context of Romans 6, eis is denoting a relation (also in Acts 19:3; see commentary on that verse). Most English versions have the very literal translation “into Christ” in spite of the fact that that phrase usually only confuses the reader and in spite of the fact that the native Greek speakers of the first century would have understood what Paul meant. The Greek indicates that the Christian is baptized by holy spirit “into Christ,” i.e., into a relationship of union with him. Lenski translates it “as many as were baptized in connection with Christ Jesus were baptized in connection with his death.” While “in connection with” is good, we felt it was not as clear as it could be. When Christians are “in Christ,” there is more than just a connection; we have a spiritual union with Christ. The Christian was crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20), died with Christ (Rom. 6:8), was buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12), and was raised with Christ (Eph. 2:6). Also, it is due to our union with Christ that we are “circumcised,” not just the foreskin, but our entire flesh body (Col. 2:11). Thus, although we have a “connection” with Christ, the word “union” seems much more appropriated and clear. Several English versions besides the REV use the word “union” to express the relationship that eis is describing in this verse and context (The New English Bible; Goodspeed’s translation; Charles Williams’, The New Testament in the Language of the People; and Cassirer’s translation, God’s New Covenant).
Lenski noted that the meaning of the preposition *en* had been “swallowed up” by *eis*, but *en* is still used to describe a relation or association, and “in Christ” or “in the Lord” are important phrases. [For more information on the static use of *en*, see commentary on Ephesians 1:3.]

**6:4. “into union with.”** See commentary on 6:3.

“glory.” The Greek word translated “glory” is *doxa* (δόξα), and usually means “the condition of being bright or shining, brightness, splendor, radiance” (BDAG lexicon). However, it can also include the idea of power or might, and that is the case in this verse (BDAG), which is why the New Jerusalem Bible reads “glorious power” instead of just glory. Rather than add “power” to the REV, we thought it best to just educate the reader that the “glory” of God often includes His power.

“his death.” The Greek has the definite article: “the” death. It is referring specifically to the death of Christ, thus we translate it “his” death to indicate the particularity being expressed.

“out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among those who are dead.”

**6:5. “united with.”** The Greek is *sumphutos* (σύμφωτος). This union or identification is an amplification of the union expressed in the phrase “into union with Christ” in verse three. *Sumphutos* literally means “planted together,” and is an example of how translating in a strictly literal manner, without taking into account how a word was used in the culture, can be more confusing than helpful. After all, what would it mean to be “planted together” with Christ? The word *sumphutos* was used when two things grew together and became intertwined. Thus English versions translate it as “united with him” (ESV; NASB; NIV) “joined with him” (HCSB); “identified with him” (Darby); “incorporate with him” (NEB); and “become one with him” (Cassirer). Kenneth Wuest describes the meaning of the *sumphutos*:

> It speaks of a living, vital union of two individuals growing up together. The word could be used of the Siamese twins whose bodies were connected at one point, and whose blood stream flowed through the two physical bodies as it does normally through one. (Kenneth Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, Vol.1, p. 99)

Wuest’s example of the Siamese twins shows how closely the Bible portrays our lives being intertwined with Jesus’ life.

“like his.” This is translated from the Greek word *homoioōma* (ὁμοιοϊμα), which many versions translate as the word “likeness” or “like his.” Robert Thayer (*Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*), referencing this very verse, says, that *homoioōma*, “amounts almost to equality of identity.” This further confirms our identity with Christ. No wonder so much of what we have as Christians we have “in him” (“in union with him”), not alone or “on our own.” Due to our union with him we have “every spiritual blessing” (Eph. 1:3), “glorious grace” (Eph. 1:6), “redemption” (Eph. 1:7), our being sealed with holy spirit (Eph. 1:13), our being raised to life and our promise of being seated in heaven (Eph. 2:6), God’s kindness (Eph. 2:7), and we are part of the living temple of God (Eph. 2:21).

**6:6. “body of sin.”** This is not just the genitive of character for “sinful body,” but in the context seems to be a genitive of possession, “the body owned by sin,” or “the body used by sin.” Lenski would make it attributive, “the body marked by sin.” It is not the genitive
of apposition, “the body; namely sin,” or a genitive of content, “the body made of sin.” The context makes the genitive of possession very clear, because in verse 6, and in the following verses (6 twice, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14), “sin,” while retaining its literal meaning, also is the figure of speech personification. Sin is presented as a powerful lord. It uses our flesh body (v. 6); we must not be its slave (v. 6); the one who has died is free from it (v. 7), and we died to it (v. 10); now we must consider ourselves dead to it (v. 11), and not let it reign in our body (v. 12), and not offer any part of our body to sin (v. 13), for sin must not exercise lordship over us.

“powerless.” The Greek word is katargeō (#2673 καταργέω), and in this context it means to render idle, unemployed, inactivate, inoperative, powerless. “Destroyed” is too strong in this context. The body, our flesh body, which is being used by sin, is made powerless with the intent that it can no longer serve as a slave to sin.

“serve as slaves.” The Greek word is douleuō (#1398 δουλεύω; pronounced “doo-lay-uh-oh”), related tooulos, a slave. The verb douleuō means to serve or to be a slave, so “serve as a slave” is a good English translation. “Be in bondage” is not wrong, but it fails to put enough emphasis on the service that sin is forcing the slave to do, instead placing the emphasis on the state of bondage that exist. While the flesh body is indeed in a state of bondage, the emphasis here is that it is forced to serve. Slavery was a part of Roman society, and a person could serve as a slave in a bad sense, be a wicked slave or serve an evil master, such as sin, or a person could be a valuable help and serve in a good sense if the master is good, such as God.

6:7. “has been freed.” The Greek word is dikaiōō (1344 δικαιώω). It is from the root dikē, “right,” and thus it is related to all the uses of “righteous,” “righteousness,” etc. here in Romans. However, although it would literally be “render righteous” or “pronounce to be righteous,” it was used idiomatically in the culture for a slave being set free. Therefore, “set free” is the clearest and best translation in this context, even though when it is translated that way, the reader does not see the verbal relationship between us being “righteous” and us being “set free.”

6:8. “since.” The Greek word ei (#1487 εἰ) usually means “if,” but in some contexts it can mean “since.” Friberg’s Lexicon states that in some cases, ei “express a condition of fact regarded as true or settled; since, because.” R.C. H. Lenski referred to it as the “if of reality” (cp. his note on Col. 3:1). E. W. Bullinger (Lexicon, “if”) wrote that it: “assumes the hypothesis as an actual fact, the condition being unfulfilled, but no doubt being thrown on the supposition.” Meyer writes: If the former, the ἀπεθάνομεν σὺν Χριστῷ [died with Christ] be true, we cannot doubt the latter.” We follow the Stern (Complete Jewish Bible) and Estes (The Better Version of the New Testament) in our translation, “since.” Weymouth, New Testament in Modern Speech, says, “seeing that we have died with Christ.” The Moffatt Bible has, “We believe that as we have died with Christ....” (Cp. commentary on Col. 2:20).

Whether to translate ei as “if” or “since” in some contexts has been debated by Greek grammarians. Grammarians such as Daniel Wallace (Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics; “Conditional Sentences, pp. 680-711) points out that there is no single pattern of words that can be translated “since.” And this seems to be the problem from a grammatical standpoint. Grammarians would like to find a grammatical pattern in which ei would always best be translated as “since” (a pattern such as, ei combined with a word or words in the indicative mood having any tense). However, there is no such pattern.
That has caused some translators to always translate εἰ as “if.” But just because there is no grammatical pattern to when εἰ should be translated “since” does not mean that there are not times when “since” is clearly the meaning of the word εἰ. This is shifting the definition of εἰ from a grammatical pattern to a contextual judgment call, which occurs constantly in Greek. Most Greek words have multiple definitions, and the proper one for any context is determined by that context, so the reader or translator makes a “judgment call” about the meaning of the word in that context. It seems clear that εἰ works that way as well.

Thus, regarding certain cases involving the indicative mood, Wallace agrees that, “...the point of the argument [using εἰ] is based on the assumption of reality.” However, if there is an assumption of reality, then translating εἰ into English as “if” in those cases is suspect at best, and wrong at worst, because although in English we do sometimes use “if” when there is an assumption of reality, it is very rare. So rare, in fact, that a look through Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary did not turn up a single example of “if” being used as assuming the reality of something. The plain fact is that in English, the word “if” almost exclusively introduces doubt. So since the word “if” generally introduces doubt in English, but sometimes does not in Greek, then we should feel free to translate εἰ as “since” (or a similar way such as “seeing that”) in our English text if that is what it will take to make the meaning of the verse clear and keep doubt from being introduced when there is no doubt implied in the Greek.

“we have died with Christ.” The fact that we died with Christ, were buried with Christ, and were raised with Christ shows that the salvation of the Christian believer, which has spiritual substance in the New Birth, is never in doubt. A Christian is a child of God by birth and that cannot be undone. (See commentary on Rom. 6:3; 1 Pet. 1:23).

“believe.” The Greek verb is πιστεύω (πιστεύω), and it means to believe, to have confidence in. The evidence is clear that Christ died, and the text says that when he died, we died with him, therefore we must believe that we will be raised from the dead. It only produces torment to doubt that. We must bring our thoughts captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).


“exercises Lordship.” The Greek verb is κυριεύω (κυριεύω; pronounced kū-ree-you’-ō), and it is related to kurios, “lord.” It means to rule, have dominion over, have power over, or, as we would say, “be lord over” or even “lord it over” someone. Wuest (Word Studies) translates it “exercises lordship,” which we feel catches the sense exactly. Before coming to Christ, people were lorded over by death, and had no escape from it. When Christ becomes the Lord in a person’s life, that person is guaranteed everlasting life, and death no longer exercises Lordship over the person. (Cp. note on Romans 6:14).

6:14. “exercises lordship.” The Greek verb is κυριεύω (κυριεύω; pronounced kū-ree-you’-ō), and it is related to kurios, “lord.” It means to rule, have dominion over, have power over, or, as we would say, be lord over or even “lord it over” someone. Wuest (Word Studies) translates it “exercises lordship,” which we feel catches the sense exactly. Before coming to Christ, the sinner’s lord was Lord Sin, who made a slave of the person and forced him to sin. When the sinner comes to Christ, he dies in Christ and gets both a
new Lord and his body is made powerless to Sin (6:6). Given the exchange of lordship, it needs to be expressed clearly that Sin no longer has lordship. (Cp. note on Romans 6:9).

6:16. **“sin leading to death.”** Disobeying and defying God only leads to more disobedience, and eventually death and everlasting death (cp. v. 19 and commentary on 2 Tim. 3:13).

6:17. **“slaves of sin.”** The Roman Cicero (*Paradoxes of the Stoics*) mentioned ways that a free citizen could still be a slave. “...anyone who is saddled with a greedy, violent, or simple-minded nature could be considered a slave. ...a man who is under the thumb of a woman...People who devote inordinate amounts of time and effort to admiring and acquiring works of art could be considered slaves of the very things that they aspire to control through ownership...An excessive ambition...can turn a free man into a slave, if he is willing to sell out his honor to satisfy that ambition...”

“were handed over.” The Greek word *paradidōmi* (#3860 παραδίδωμι; pronounced par-a-did'-ō-mee) means to give over into the hands or power of someone else, to give something to keep to someone else, to deliver someone over into the custody of another. Lenski writes that it,

(always implies handing someone over to what he does not want. It has that force here, for what sinner wants to be handed over to the slavery of God, wants to ‘be enslaved to righteousness’?

We were sinners and slaves to sin, but we were bought and paid for by Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:20), and so we were handed over to be slaves of righteousness. It was so true, and common, in the Roman world that slaves were bought and sold like cattle that this illustration of being a slave to sin but then bought and delivered over to being a slave for God. And just as true to the text, although we know we wanted the sale to occur, our flesh still often resists being a slave of God and we battle with obeying the lusts of our flesh and with acting as if “Sin” was still our owner and master.

6:18. **“having been set free”** is in the passive tense. It is something that happens to us, we do not accomplish this freedom for ourselves.

6:19. **“resulting in more iniquity.”** Disobeying and defying God only leads to more disobedience (cp. commentary on 2 Tim. 3:13).

6:20. **“free from obligation to righteousness.”** The word “righteousness” is in the dative case and is the indirect object. However, simply saying “freed to righteousness,” is not very clear. The dative is a dative of relation, but what is the relation? Many translations simply set forth the relationship by saying, “free in regard to righteousness,” which is good but perhaps not as clear as it could be. Other versions say things such as “free from the control of righteousness” (NIV), or “free from allegiance to righteousness” (HCSB). The context makes it clear that this verse is describing the “master-slave” relationship, and continuing the personification of sin, but adding “Righteousness” as another Master (see commentary, Romans 6:6). A slave only has one master to serve, and serving that master is an obligation of slavery. The Christian became a willing slave of Righteousness (6:18). However, when we were unsaved and still slaves of Sin, we had no obligation to righteousness. Not surprisingly, that is how many unsaved people feel and act. They live their lives doing whatever they want, with no obligation to Righteousness at all. The obligation that exists in the master-slave relationship is the reason we define the relationship in this verse as an “obligation.”
6:22. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.

6:23. “For the wages of sin is death.” God uses the phrase “wages of sin” very accurately. God created us to fellowship with Him and each other, and when we disobey and defy God, we “earn” wages—and in this case, the wages we earn is our death. Why are the “wages of sin,” i.e., the consequences of sin, so harsh? Why death? The answer is that by making the wages of sin death, God designed a righteous way of ridding the world of evil. Evil people will not humble themselves and accept God and His ways, and so they die forever and will not be part of the next life.

Universalists, who believe that everyone who has ever lived will be saved, believe that in the next life things will be better because people will not be evil. After all, can’t God reform everyone? Or, if people really saw God for who He was, wouldn’t they repent of their evil and become kind and loving? Sadly, no. Most people who are evil and hurtful act the way they do out of the freedom of their will. Furthermore, the Devil and his demons prove to us that even created angels who know God and come directly into His presence can and do remain obstinate and disobedient (Job 1:6; Matt. 8:29; James 2:19). In summary, evil people do not submit to God and are blind to, or do not care about, the hurt and pain they cause others. The only way God could insure that each person in the next life would still have freedom of will, and yet would live in a wonderful place with other wonderful people, was to provide a righteous way to rid the world of evil people. He did that by setting up from the very beginning that the wages of sin is death.

God, in His love and grace, gave people freewill. Also, He commanded us to obey Him, and told us that if we sinned we would die (Rom. 6:23). In fact, God made it very clear even from the time of Adam that the consequences of sin is death (Gen. 2:17). God’s desire, however, is for people to choose life over death (Deut. 30:19; Ezek. 33:11). But evil people are selfish and will not submit to God or be obedient to Him, and regularly break His laws. They do not realize they are wrong and that they need to change, no matter how clearly and lovingly they are confronted. Like the Devil, they cannot be reformed unless they reform themselves, which they are generally unwilling to do. So of their own freewill, they sin, even though God has always stated that sin ends in death. Therefore, on the Day of Judgment, God honors their freewill choice to sin and He gives them the consequence of their sin that He warned them was coming—death. On the Day of Judgment, evil people will be consumed in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:13-15; see commentary on Rev. 20:10 on annihilation in the Lake of Fire).

The wages of sin is now, and has always been, death. Anyone can pay for his own sin by dying. Thankfully, God allows us to have someone else pay the price for our sin, but to make that payment the substitute must himself be sinless, and the only sinless person to ever live has been Jesus Christ, who thankfully did die on the cross for the sins of anyone else who cares to accept his dying in their place.

It seems clear that right from the very beginning and the very first sin, God graphically portrayed that a person’s sin could be atoned for by someone else. Although God told Adam if he sinned by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he would die that day (“for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die” Gen. 2:17 NASB), Adam and Eve did not die that day. Instead, God killed animals that died in their place (most likely sheep) and from the skin of those animals He clothed Adam and Eve.
Thus, Adam and Eve were temporarily forgiven their sin by the death of a
substitute, just as the New Testament says the wages of sin is death, but then allows us to
avoid that death by accepting Jesus’ sacrificial and substitutional death (as a “type” of
Christ, animal sacrifice never totally forgave sin, but it covered it temporarily until the
sacrifice of Christ occurred. See commentary on Romans 3:26).

Another reason we know that sacrifice for sin was established by God very early
is that Cain, the first human ever born, and his brother Abel, knew about sacrifice and
even that there was an acceptable and unacceptable way to offer the sacrifice (Gen. 4:2-
5). God promoted sacrifice as both a way to atone for sin and as a portrayal of the
ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ, including institutionalizing it in the Tent of Meeting
(Tabernacle) and Temple, up until the one-time sacrifice of Jesus Christ for everyone’s
sin.

Yes, everyone sins (Rom. 3:23), so how do people who want to obey God but sin
due to human weakness avoid their own death? As was stated briefly above, God has
always provided a way for sinners to avoid death by accepting a substitute that will die in
their place (Rom. 5:6-8). In the Old Testament, animal sacrifice was the example of how
God would provide a substitute for sin (see commentary on Romans 3:25, “sacrifice”).
Animal sacrifice graphically showed how horrible sin was because it resulted in death. It
also showed that God, in His mercy, would accept a substitute to die in place of the
sinner and receive the death the sinner deserved. In the Old Testament, the sinner became
identified with the sacrifice by placing his hand on the head of the animal as it was being
killed, and in this way it became a substitute for him and died in his place (Lev. 1:4). The
animal sacrifice of the Old Testament pointed to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who was
the ultimate atoning sacrifice for the sins of all mankind. Today, we become identified
with Jesus Christ by confessing that Jesus is our Lord and believing that God raised him
from the dead (Rom. 10:9). His sacrificial death atoned for our sins once and forever so
that, in spite of our sins, we can have everlasting life.

When the Bible says the wages of sin is death, it is speaking of the ultimate end of
sin, which is the death of the sinner. The Bible never says, nor implies, that death is the
only consequence of sin. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), but we must be careful
not to take that one verse out from the context of the whole Bible. Romans 6:23 never
says that the wages of sin is immediate death. Before people die in Gehenna, the lake of
fire, they are punished in proportion to their sin. The Bible says in many different places
that people will be repaid for what they have done on earth (cp. Job 34:11; Psalm 62:12;
Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8). This is
one reason the Bible says that for the wicked there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth
(Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). [For more on the punishment of the wicked, see
commentary on Romans 2:5].

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new
Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.

“in Christ Jesus.” The Christian’s life in the Age to come is due to, and in
connection with, Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3.

Chapter 7
7:4. “became dead in regard to the law.” The Greek for “became dead” is thanatoō (#2289 θανατοόω; pronounced than-a-tah'-ō), and it is the passive voice. It is literally, “put to death,” or more generally, “became dead” (The Source New Testament), or “rendered dead” (Lenski; Meyer). Thanatoō is a very strong word, and different from the word for “dead” in verses 2 and 3. It is not just that the believer “died,” but that we were put to death; we became dead to the law. How? “Through the Body of Christ.” This is a continuation of our identity with Christ, which was a huge subject in Romans 6, which states that because of our union with Christ, our identity with him, we were crucified with him and died with him. By virtue of our identity with Christ, we were “put to death” with him to the law, or otherwise stated: we became dead in regard to the law through our identify with the body of Christ.

One can see that the marriage analogy is not exactly correct, but gets us heading in the right direction. In the marriage analogy, the husband dies, which allows the woman to marry another. But in this analogy, it is not the law that dies, but it is the wife (the Christian); and it is by death then that we are freed to be married to Christ. This harkens back to Romans 6, which says that we died with Christ when he died, and thus any ties to this world are broken by our death.

“out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among the dead.”

7:5. “to bear fruit to death.” The Greek can read as a purpose or result clause. The REV translates it as a purpose clause, with hopes that the reader would see that the sinful passions that work in us not only do so “to” bear fruit to death, but that they are successful in their mission and “result in” fruit to death.

7:6. “a new way.” The Greek is literally “in newness of spirit” and it is contrasted with the old way of the “letter,” or better here, the “written code.” The concept of “new way” comes from the Greek kainos, which is new in quality. The Greek language has an advantage over English because it has two completely different words for “new.” Kainos is new in quality, while neos is new in time. This verse uses kainos, so it is not a brand new spirit, but a new quality of the spiritual thing being referred to, thus a “new way.”

“of the spirit.” This genitive, “of the spirit,” has many possible meanings, all of them having some value. The most dominant meaning seems to be the genitive of character, where “spirit” defines the character of the relationship: that we have a new, “spiritual” way of living, not an old life based on the legal code. Also, however, the genitive of origin (the new way we do things originating from holy spirit) is true also, and the genitive of relation, the new way of life that involves our interrelation to the spirit, not just obeying the letter of the law.


7:8. “afforded by.” Cp. NIV. This is the preposition dia (#1223 διὰ) in the Greek. It is here used to indicate the means by which sin seized the opportunity to produce coveting [cp. Appendix 11: “Greek Prepositions”]. It was “through” the command that sin did this; the command was the means through which sin seized the opportunity, thus, the opportunity was “afforded by” the command.

7:10. “for life…resulted in death.” The Greek in this verse twice uses the preposition eis (#1519 εἰς), which can express both purpose and result [See Appendix 11: “Greek Prepositions”]. The first instance conveys the purpose of the law (“was given for life”), the second instance conveys the result (“resulted in death”). See also commentary on Romans 5:20.
“actually.” Compare NIV translation. There is no Greek word in this verse explicitly meaning “actually,” but it is nevertheless implied. Bringing out this implicit “actually” accomplishes two things. First, there is an emphatic “this” (aute) in the Greek, literally, “the commandment for life, this resulted in death.” The translation “actually” serves to highlight the emphatic nature of the result. Second, it captures the sense of the two uses of eis, bringing into English how the purpose-result prepositions are playing off each other in Greek—intended for life but actually resulted in death.

7:11. “and through it killed me.” If we were to bring this verse into more vernacular English we might say, “For it was sin that, finding an opportunity through the commandment, completely deceived me, and used the commandment to kill me.”

7:12. “So then.” The opening question was, “Is the law sin?” Then followed the argument that made clear that it was the law that showed us right from wrong, but it was sin that used the law against us and by it, killed us. This, then, concludes the argument: “So then, the law is holy, righteous, and good; it is sin that is evil.” In fact, the reason that sin could use the commandment to kill us was that the commandment was so holy and righteous and good that we could not keep it, so we were always breaking it and bringing the penalty of “death” down upon ourselves.

“good.” See commentary on Romans 3:2.

7:13. “with the result that… with the result that.” This is the translation of hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood. We feel this should not be translated as a purpose clause, “in order that sin might be recognized…so that through the commandment.” The Greek conjunction hina can introduce a purpose clause or a result clause, and here it should be a result clause. Sin does not produce death with the purpose of being revealed for what it is. Sin does not want to be revealed, it prefers darkness and ignorance. See the commentary on Matthew 2:15, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.” (Also see commentary on Rom. 5:20).

7:14. “as a slave to sin.” The Greek in this verse literally says we are “sold under sin,” but that was idiomatic for being sold as a slave to someone, whose power the slave was then under. That being said, there is no reason to introduce a literal reading that would not be understood by a modern reader, so we should translate the meaning of the idiom.

The Greek word for “sold” is pipraskō (#4097 πιπράσκω), and it is used of the selling of slaves (cp. Matthew 18:25), many of whom were captured in a war, and that is the context of Romans 7:14. In 7:8, sin seized the opportunity, and in verse 11 it found an opportunity. Sin made a surprise attack on us and enslaved us. The phrase paints a picture of sin’s dominating power over us. Like slaves being sold to a master, we are under the power of sin. The root of the power of sin in our lives is the sin nature that lives in us (see commentary on Romans 7:17, “sin”).

7:15. “For I do not understand.” The Greek sentence starts with the word “for,” and introduces a reason or explanation. Many versions omit the “for,” because it is not immediately clear, especially to the modern reader, why it is there. To understand what it is communicating, we must understand that to most people it is not readily apparent that they are the slaves of “Mr. Sin.” They just think that wanting things and doing things that are bad for them is “just natural.” But it is not, it is due to our sin nature, i.e., the fact that we are slaves to Mr. Sin. If we were going to fully expand verses 14 and 15 and add the unstated thought, we might say: “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the
flesh, having been sold as a slave to sin. I know this because I do not understand my own actions, for I am not practicing what I want, but I am doing the very thing I hate.”

“understand.” (Cp. Wuest). Romans 7:15 is very hard to translate accurately because it contains three words that all more or less mean “do.” Thus the NIV translates them all as “do,” but then a lot of the meaning of the verse is lost. Here are the three words: “actions,” the Greek word *katergazomai* (#2716 κατεργάζοµαι), is to bring about a result by doing something. “Practice,” the Greek word *prassō* (#4238 πράσσω), is to behave in a certain way, do, accomplish, perform. In this context, it would refer to that which is done a certain way, or “practiced.” “Do,” the Greek word *poieō* (#4160 ποιέω), is the closest to our English word “do.” Because the three words are all used in the same context, they are juxtaposed with each other, bringing out the subtle differences.

7:17. “sin.” "Sin," dwells, or lives, in us even when we are not in the act of “sinning.” This is due to our “sin nature,” the nature we have as descendants of Adam. We have a sin nature, and it leads us to sin in our flesh. An unanswered and historically much-debated question is exactly how it came to be that everyone is under the power of sin. The term “original sin” does not occur in the Bible, but the doctrine of original sin and subsequent sin nature is clearly in the text. To summarize: the “original sin” was the sin that Adam committed that produced in him, and then all of his descendants (thus all humans) an inescapable sin nature that results in the verdict of “death” in the eyes of God. When Adam knowingly and willingly disobeyed God and ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:6), his nature actually changed from being pure and blameless before God to being an impure, sinful nature. Worse, this sin nature was then somehow passed down to all his descendants; all mankind. But how did that happen? We do not know “how” the sin nature is passed from generation to generation, although there is much speculation about it. Perhaps it would be more honest just to say we are not sure. What we do know is that the Bible makes it clear that the nature of the Devil became the nature of Adam and Eve, and mankind has had a crafty nature ever since then.

In Genesis 2:25, Adam and Eve are portrayed as “naked” (Hebrew is *arvm*). In the next verse, Genesis 3:1, the serpent (which is the figure of speech *hypocatastasis* for the Devil; cp. commentary on Rev. 20:2, and Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*) is said to be more “crafty” (*arvm*) than any other creature. In the original Hebrew text, which had no vowel points, the root words are spelled the same: *arvm* (which with the vowel points can be pronounced “ah-room” or “ah-rome” depending on whether is it “crafty” or “naked”). Although many scholars say these two words are built from different trilateral roots, the spelling of the root words in Genesis are the same: ARVM; ayin, resh, voy, mem; as any good lexicon will show. Nevertheless, in Genesis 2:25 and 3:1, no one confuses them. No one thinks that in their primal state Adam and Eve were “crafty” and the serpent was “naked.” However, after Adam and Eve sinned, what meaning do we assign to *arvm*? In Genesis 3:7, immediately after they sinned, the Bible says their eyes were opened and they knew they were *arvm*. But is that naked, or crafty? Actually both. They dealt with their nakedness in verse 3:7 by covering themselves, and they displayed their craftiness in 3:8-13 by first hiding from God and then, when He confronted them, blame shifting. Adam openly blamed Eve, and although Eve told the truth when she said she had been deceived, she does not tell the “real truth,” which was
that she thought the tree would be good for her (for food and to make her wise) and so willingly ignored God and followed the serpent’s advice.

Thus, although the Bible does not say exactly “how” Adam and Eve took on the nature of the serpent, something happened when they sinned that was deeper than just “a sin.” A regular sin can be forgiven with a simple and heartfelt, “I am sorry, will you forgive me?” But what happened to Adam and Eve could not be forgiven that easily. Their sin eventually resulted in their death, and the subsequent sin and death of all of their descendants. Furthermore, their sin could not be atoned for by a confession, it could only be paid for by death. God temporarily covered people’s sin by animal sacrifice in Old Testament times, but eventually Adam’s sin had to be atoned for by the death of another perfect human being, the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ.

How do we know there is a “sin nature” that lives and works in all of us? Many ways. One of them is our inability to stop sinning. Countless thousands of good people have struggled with sin and tried desperately not to sin and to live blamelessly before God—all to no avail. One reason we sin, and cannot stop, is that it is our nature to sin. Paul wrote eloquently on man’s inability to do what he wanted and how we all end up doing things we do not want to do. He wrote: “I do not understand my own actions, for I am not practicing what I want, but I am doing the very thing I hate” (Rom. 7:15). Our sin and sin nature is why every human sins and needs a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today we are 6000 years removed from Adam, and the reality of Adam’s life and sin in the Garden is only “head knowledge” that we learn from the Bible. However, those who lived much closer to the time of Adam were much more in touch with the cause and reality of their sin nature and inability to stop sinning. Noah and his immediate descendants knew only too well about Adam and his sin, and the subsequent sin that brought the wrath of God upon the earth in the form of the Flood. So it is not unusual that people who lived close to the time of Adam were much more in touch with the cause and reality of their sin nature and inability to stop sinning. Noah and his immediate descendants knew only too well about Adam and his sin, and the subsequent sin that brought the wrath of God upon the earth in the form of the Flood. So it is not unusual that people who lived about that time would write about mankind’s inherent sinfulness. Thus an Akkadian text reads, “All humans who exist are sinful” (quoted in Anchor Bible Dictionary; “Sin: Origins and Universal Extent.” The city of Akkad was founded by Nimrod, the great-grandson of Noah and grandson of Ham, and is mentioned in Genesis 10:10). Similarly, an early Sumerian wisdom text reads, “Never has a sinless child been born to its mother” (J. Prichard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts; p. 590, line 102; Sumer was a city-state that pre-dated Abraham). The inherent sinfulness of people was also mentioned by biblical characters who lived close to the time of the Flood. Eliphaz, a friend of Job, rightly said that man was “vile and corrupt” (Job 15:16), and Bildad, another friend of Job, said, “How can one born of woman be pure?” (Job 25:4). Later biblical writers also acknowledged the existence of a sin nature that made all people sinful. The Psalmist wrote that sin nature is passed on to the new human at conception (Ps. 51:5) and so the Psalmist says that the wicked, i.e., people who give in to that nature, go astray right from the womb and err from their birth (Ps. 58:3).

Another reason we know we have a sin nature and are inherently sinful before God is that if we did not have a sin nature, then a baby that died before it had a chance to sin would not need a savior to die for its sin, and so it could have everlasting life on its own merits. But the Bible makes it clear that babies must be saved too. For example, Romans 3:23 says that “all” have sinned. Not “all” except babies who have not sinned yet, but “all,” because babies are born with a sin nature and require a savior. Thankfully, the Bible says that God considers babies born to saved parents to be saved until they
reach the age they can believe in Christ on their own (1 Cor. 7:14). That is a huge argument for being saved!

Although the sin nature and its effect are mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments, it is most clearly explained in the Epistles of Paul. We have already seen that Paul wrote about the effect of the sin nature on us—that we don’t do what we want to do and end up doing things we hate to do. Romans also shows us that sin is not only seen as an act against God that people do, but is seen as an independent power that lives in people and corrupts them. Romans 6 and 7 personify “Sin” as if it is a slave-owner who exercises an inescapable influence over us (for the figure of speech “personification, see Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible). Romans 6:6 says we are slaves of Sin until we die (cp. 6:17, 20). In 6:12 and 14 we have to fight to keep from obeying Sin and being subject to its lordship. In 6:18 we were freed from Sin by virtue of being dead in Christ. In 7:5 and 8, the Law, which should have helped us live godly lives, instead simply aroused sinful and rebellious passions in us, which is due to our sin nature, which naturally tends to resist godly authority. Romans 7:11 says that Sin searched for an opportunity to kill us, and did so through the Law. Then Romans 7 covers again the reason why we seem to be so rebellious, and it turns out that it is not “I who acts this way, but sin living in me” (Rom. 7:17). So Romans clearly sets forth a doctrine that there is sin living in me and lording itself over me that is not part of “me” but yet definitely inside me and influencing me. That is the sin nature, and we all have one that we inherited from Adam. Romans tells us we will be freed from our sin nature when we die. I serve Sin in my flesh now (Rom. 7:25), and I will serve Sin until I die and get a new body (cp. 1 Cor. 15:42-57; Phil. 3:21).

Romans is also clear that sin came into the world through one person, Adam, and came to all mankind, resulting in death for everyone (Rom. 5:12). This “sin” has to refer to the sin nature, not just an act of sin, because Adam’s act of sin would not have made everyone else a sinner and doomed to death. Only a sin nature passed down from generation to generation to every human could do that. Romans continues to elucidate this truth, telling us that from one man who transgressed, sinning and condemnation to death came upon all people (Rom. 5:16-19). Why were all guilty, even those who like babies or those people born with no mental faculties? Because of the sin nature.

Galatians is another book that sets forth the difference between our sin nature and our godly nature. Galatians 5:16 and 17 shows the difference between the new godly nature a Christian gets when he is saved, called the “spirit,” and our ungodly sin nature bound up in our flesh.

The Bible does not answer many of the questions we have about original sin, such as how did Adam’s sin affect the whole human race, or, how is the sin nature passed from generation to generation? As with most subjects, there are many questions the Bible does not answer. However, that does not mean the Bible is not clear on the existence of original sin and its effect, which is everlasting death unless we are rescued by the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 7:24, 25).

7:21. “while I am wanting to do good.” The word desiring is a present participle showing a continual fact of wanting, from thelō (#2309 θέλω). Translations which read, “when I want to do good” make it sound as though the wanting is a particular singular instance, a one-time wanting to do a good thing; however, this is not the case. The “law of sin” (vv. 23, 25) that Paul is discussing is the continual desire to be doing what is right,
yet having evil within, and further, often giving in to it even though it is not what one truly desires. This is the culmination of the battle described in verses 14-20.

7:22. “in accordance with the inward man.” Verses 22 and 23 are very similar to Galatians 5:17, which portrays a battle between the flesh and the spirit. Most versions miss the point of this verse. Paul is not saying “For in my inner being I delight in God’s law” (NIV), as if it was Paul’s inner man that delighted in God’s law. Rather he is saying that “I,” Paul, delight in the law of God, “according to” the inner man. The inner man is the holy spirit, the divine nature that is created in man when he gets born again. That inner man fights against the flesh (Gal. 5:17) working to produce its own godly nature in the person. Paul is saying that he (in his mind, v. 23) delights in the law, according to the inner man, i.e., even as the inner man does.

7:23. “different law.” The “different” law that is in Paul’s “members,” i.e., body, is the law of the flesh, or the fleshly nature.

7:24. “this body of death.” Figure of speech antimereia (cp. Bullinger, Figures). For emphasis, instead of “death” being an adjective, it is a noun. We might say, “angels of might” for emphasis, instead of “mighty angels.”

Chapter 8

8:1. Some older texts add the phrase “who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit,” at the end of the verse, but the early texts do not have that. The shorter reading “is strongly supported by early representatives of both the Alexandrian and the Western types of text” (Metzger, Textual Commentary).

“in union with.” See commentary on Romans 6:3.

8:2. “has set you free…” The texts vary as to whether, “I” “you” or “we” have been set free, but “Impressed by the weight of the combination of Alexandrian and Western witnesses, a majority of the Committee preferred σε [you] as the earliest attainable text” (Metzger, Textual Commentary).

8:3. “in that.” Not “because,” but “in that.” The phrase en ho (ἐν ὧν) sets the limits or defines the boundaries in which the Law is limited. The Law itself was not weak. But it was weak “in that” it was limited in us, by our flesh. If we say, “the Law could not do something because it was weakened by our flesh,” it makes it seem like the Law was weak. It was not. We were weak, so there were things that the Law could not do in regard to us humans.

“as an offering for sin.” Jesus was given as an offering for sin, the antitype of all the sacrifices for sin, going all the way back to the Garden of Eden, in which God clothed Adam and Eve with animal (probably sheep) skins.

8:4. “so that.” Purpose-result clause. See Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.” God sent his son and condemned sin in the flesh both for the purpose of the law being fulfilled in us, and resulting in the law being fulfilled in us.

8:5. “For those who are living according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh.” The Greek is very clear. Those who are of the flesh, who do not have spirit, set their minds on the things of the flesh. It is wrong to translate this verse as “Those who live…” or “Those who walk….” This verse is saying behavior follows nature.
8:6. “life.” Not everlasting life. Setting your mind on spiritual things does not keep you saved. This is the use of “life” that is life to the full, the enjoyment of life (cp. 1 Thess. 3:8.) “The ‘life’ he offers speaks of full satisfaction and the exercise of one’s total abilities. Oh, to live life at its fullest and best! Many people think they are really living today, but it is a shoddy substitute for the life God wants to provide” (J. Vernon McGee, *Through the Bible*).

8:7. “because” (*dioti*) = “because” in this context. BDAG.

8:9. “if in fact the spirit of God dwells.” The *eiper* “does not question the fact expressed (as if some of the Romans were remiss) but emphasizes it…” (Lenski, on 8:17). The NRSV says “since,” (as does the interlinear by Brown and Comfort).

“of God.” This is a genitive of origin; it is the spirit from God.

“spirit of Christ.” This is not a different spirit than the gift of holy spirit from God in the first part of the verse. Rather it is a different name for holy spirit. The genitive “of Christ” places the emphasis in a couple different ways (Figure of Speech; *amphibologia*). First, since his ascension it has been Jesus Christ who has given the holy spirit, so it is a genitive of origin, “spirit from Christ.” Also, holy spirit allows us to relate to Christ: to better understand the aspects of the Christ and also to be like him. Thus “spirit of Christ” is also a genitive of relation. Second, very accurately, anyone without “spirit of Christ,” i.e., holy spirit, “this one is not his.” A Christian is one who has the seed of God born and sealed within him, and thus is a partaker of the divine nature. A person without holy spirit is not a Christian.

8:10. “life.” Not just “alive,” but “life.” The gift of holy spirit in each believer is our true life now, and our guarantee of everlasting life later.

8:11. “out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among the dead,” “from among the dead.”

8:13. “continue to live.” The Greek is *zaō* (#2198 ζάω) which means “live,” but the verb is in the present tense, active voice, indicating an ongoing action. Just saying “live” usually communicates that someone makes a practice of living in the way described, but in this context it did not seem as clear as “continue to live” or perhaps “continually live,” or “keep on living.” While clearly expressing the present active form of the Greek does not make a dramatic difference in English in some places, often it makes a big difference. A very clear example of that occurs in the Sermon on the Mount. Although most English Bibles just say, “ask...seek...knock,” the present active form of the verb makes the following a much better translation and one that is open to much less confusion: “Keep asking, and it will be given to you; keep seeking, and you will find; keep knocking, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who keeps asking receives, and he who keeps seeking finds, and to him who keeps knocking it will be opened” (Matt. 7:7, 8). Similarly, what Jesus was asking the disciples to do is much clearer in John 14:11 when the tense and voice of the verb are openly brought into English: “Keep on believing me....” In the Epistle of 1 John, the present tense, active voice can make the text much more emphatic: “If we say that we have fellowship with him but continue to walk in the darkness, we are lying, and are not living the truth. But if we continue to walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son continues to cleanse us from all sin” (1 John 1:6, 7). Here in Romans 8:13, those who continue to live in the flesh are about to die.
“about to die.” The Greek word *mellō* (3195 μέλλω) means “to be about to; to intend to; to occur at a point in the future subsequent to another event and to be closely related to that event; to delay” (Thayer; Louw and Nida; Lenski’s translation). We decided to translate *mellō* as “about to” rather than “will” or “shall” because “about to” carries the implication of something taking place soon rather than later. “Will” and “shall” carry the implication of an event occurring at some point in time in the future whether it is sooner or later. Daniel Wallace translates the phrase, “If you live according to the flesh, you are about to die” (Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics; p. 682).

This verse is not contrasting non-Christians and Christians, but Christians with other Christians. To fully grasp this, we need to look back at the context of Romans 7:14-8:18. In 7:14-25, Paul begins by informing us of his own inner struggles with his flesh. He says things such as “…I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin;” “…what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do;” “…what is good, but I cannot carry it out;” “…the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.” Paul continues by informing us that he fights against the law of sin that is still inside him, and God is the only means of victory over the law of sin.

In Romans 8:1-18, Paul continues the thought about the battle we face in the flesh, and informs the Romans that they will go through the same struggle with their sinful nature. He tells them of the two different ways in which a Christian can live, from the spirit or from the flesh, and what each choice brings. Paul informs the Romans that the only way to stand strong is through the spirit. Romans 8:13 is part of the overall context and is addressed to Christians. It is not suddenly contrasting Christians, who walk by the spirit, with non-Christians who do not and will eternally die.

Most of the commentators say that this verse refers to a Christian losing his salvation by not walking in the spirit, however, this belief conflicts with the salvation picture painted by the epistles (see the 3rd point in the commentary entry for Eph. 1:13); especially when 2 Corinthians 5:5 says that salvation is guaranteed for us. The verse does not say, “you will lose your salvation,” it simply says, “if you live according to the flesh, you are about to die.” The question is: what will die if you live in the flesh? The answer is that Christians will lose their “life,” their enthusiasm, joy, peace, and feeling of connection with God, if they live according to their fleshly desires. J. Vernon McGee writes about the “death” in this verse, stating that it relates to a person’s fellowship with God, not to his physical or eternal death: “Die to God. That is, you have no fellowship with Him. I am not talking about a theory. If you are a child of God, you know this from experience.” (McGee, Thru the Bible). In Absolutely Free, Hodges also hits upon this point by saying, “Pursue sin, warns Paul, and your existence will be an experience that accords with the deadness of your physical body.” In verse six, Paul contrasted death with “life and peace.” Throughout Romans, the phrase “life and peace” is used to mean abundant life, so it is logical that “death” must refer to the opposite of life and peace, which would be a loss of enthusiasm, peace, and the feeling of connection to God (see commentary on Rom. 8:6). Throughout the Bible, *apothnēskō* (599 ἀποθνῄσκω), “die,” is used both metaphorically and literally. It is used to mean the death of a person (John 6:49), to represent eternal death (John 6:50), and the death of a principle (Rom. 6:2); however, it is also used to represent a mental death. In 1 Corinthians 15:31, Paul says that he dies every day; however, he is not literally dying every day. He was mentally stressed and beaten down by all the persecution he was going through. Another use of death being
in the category of the mind is Romans 7:9, which says, “Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.” Thayer’s lexicon points out that Paul is talking about being deprived of real life and sinking into spiritual torpor because of the Law. *Apothēskō* is not the only word translated death; *thanatos* (#2288 θάνατος) is another Greek word meaning death, and it is also used in a metaphorical sense. 2 Corinthians 7:10 says that godly sorrow brings salvation, but worldly sorrow brings death. Worldly sorrow brings about depression, a lack of enthusiasm, and disconnectedness; thus, it makes your spiritual life “dead.” Thus, death is not always used to mean a literal or eternal death, and it is not used of everlasting death in this section of Romans.

**“by the spirit.”** This refers to the gift of holy spirit born inside each Christian. It has no article “the” in the Greek text. The gift of holy spirit is contrasted with the flesh. If a person lives according to (by the standards set by) the flesh, he will die, but if he lives by holy spirit he will live life to the full. This is the use of “live” that is “really live,” or “live life to the full.” (Cp. 1 Thess. 3:8.) “By spirit” is the dative; here it is an instrumental dative, there is no separate word for “by.” We can do our best to not live in the flesh by the power of our flesh, and we will fail. We would be no better off than the Israelites, who could not keep the Law. It takes our will-power, plus the power of holy spirit, to live by spirit.

**“live.”** The Greek word is *zaō* (#2198 ζάω), and it is used of literal physical life as well as mental, emotional, and spiritual life. 1 Thessalonians 3:8 says, “For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.” Paul is certainly not saying that if the believers in Thessalonica walk away from the Lord that they will become unsaved. He is using “live” for the fullness of life. Paul will be excited, happy, and energized. Proverbs 3:21-22 says that sound wisdom and discretion will be life for the soul. It is saying that wisdom and discretion will bring the fullness of life to the person, and the idea of everlasting life is included as well, but as an undertone, not a primary meaning. In Romans 8:6, “life” is connected with “peace,” so it means a life of joy and completeness.

**8:15. “adoption.”** See commentary Ephesians 1:5.

**“in connection with.”** The Greek word *en* often denotes a relationship, and that is the case here (see commentary on Rom. 3:24 for more on *en*). We are children of God. We were fathered by God when He placed in us His gift of holy spirit, and thus it is in connection with that holy spirit we can call Him “Abba,” the Aramaic for “father.” The Trinitarian theology of most theologians shapes their understanding of this verse, and thus many versions read something such as, “by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” (ESV). However, the Christian does not cry “Father” by way of the Third Person in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. It is unclear what that would even mean. We Christians cry “Father” out of our hearts, speaking directly to God, coming boldly before His throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). Furthermore, this verse is not using *en* in the instrumental sense, as if we called God “Father” by way of holy spirit (NASB). Christians can speak by the spirit of God, which is speaking in tongues and other spiritual utterances such as prophecy (1 Cor. 14:2-3). However, there is no reason to assume that Christians can only say “Father” by the spirit of God. We say “Father” from our hearts because God is our Father, and we became His children when we were “born” of God. That happened when we got His spiritual seed placed in us and were “born again” (1 Pet. 1:23), which happened when we confessed Jesus as our Lord and believed God raised him out from among the dead (Rom.
Thus, in connection with the gift of holy spirit we received as children of God, we can say, “Father.”

“**Abba** (Father).” The Hebrew is *abba*, its translation is “father,” in this context “Father” because it is referring to God. This is similar to Mark 5:41 and Galatians 4:6, where the Hebrew is given, then its translation, and the NIV and many other versions put the translation in a parenthesis. (See commentary on Galatians 4:6).

“**Father.**” On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), God did something new: He gave spiritual birth to children for the first time. Christians are born into His family. That is why God calls Himself “Father” more than 70 times from Acts to Jude. It also explains why there is so much family terminology in the Epistles to the Christian Church. Individual Christians are God’s “children,” and “sons (a term inclusive of women)”. Christians are also “brothers” of Jesus; “heirs of God;” recipients of God’s “seed;” partakers of God’s divine “nature;” “born” and “adopted” into God’s family; able to call God “Abba” (“father”), and so forth.

It is common today to hear people say that God is the “Father” of everyone. However, that is not true in the New Testament sense, the way that “Father” is used in the Epistles to the Christian Church. Once the Church started on the Day of Pentecost, God is only the Father of those people He has fathered, those people who have been born again.

One reason that “Father” does not seem unique to the epistles to the Church (Acts-Jude) is that Jesus instructed his apostles to pray using “Father” in the Gospels, before the start of the Christian Church. That fits perfectly with one of the ways that “father” was used in the biblical culture. In the Eastern culture, “Father” was a term that was used in a variety of ways.

- In the literal and common way it is used today (Gen. 22:7).
- Of a grandfather (Gen. 28:13. The Hebrew language has no word “grandfather”).
- Of a male ancestor (Josh. 24:3).
- Of the originator of something. Thus Jabel was the “father” of tent dwellers (Gen. 4:20), Jubal was the “father” of those who play the harp and flute (Gen. 4:21), and Abraham was the “the father of all who believe” (Rom. 4:11).
- Of someone who provided protection and help (Job 29:16).
- Of someone who could counsel and give advice. Joseph was made a “father” to Pharaoh (Gen. 45:8); Micah asked the wandering Levite to be a “father” to him, but the Danites wanted him to be a “father” to them (Judg. 17:10 and 18:19).
- Of someone worthy of honor and respect. Elisha called Elijah “father” (2 Kings 2:12), Naaman’s servants called him “father” (2 Kings 5:13); the king of Israel called Elisha “father” (2 Kings 6:21).

The point is that the term “father” in the Eastern culture did not have to refer to a birth father. In the Old Testament, people thought of God as a Lord to be feared and obeyed. Jesus changed people’s perception of God from that distant relationship to a more intimate relationship that allowed God to be referred to as “father.” However, Jesus never taught that one day God would be a Father in a literal sense.

On the Day of Pentecost when the Christian Church started, God “fathered” spiritual children in a literal way. Today God creates spiritual “seed,” His very nature, the gift of holy spirit, inside those people who believe, and they become “born again.” The
New Birth is real, not just a nice description, and God uses three different words for it, all of which mean birth and all of which are only used of an individual being born of God during the Church Age. The three words are: 1) Anagennaō (#313; ἀναγεννάω; from the Greek prefix ana, “again” or “up,” and gennaō, “to give birth.” It means to be given birth to again, or to be born again, and it occurs in 1 Peter 1:3 and 23). 2) Paliggenesia (#3824; παλιγγενεσία; from palin, “again” and genesis, “genesis” or “origin.” It means to have an origin again, a new genesis, and it occurs in Titus 3:5). 3) apokueō (#616; ἀποκυέω; from the Greek prefix apo, “away from,” and kueō, “to be pregnant.” It means “to give birth to,” and it occurs in James 1:18).

The family relationship we have with God today is totally different from the covenant relationship Israel had with God. In a covenant relationship, if a person breaks the covenant, the blessings of the covenant are forfeited, but in a family, no matter how horribly a child behaves, he or she is still a member of the family. That is why Romans 8:37-39 says that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God [see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation”].

8:16. “The Spirit” refers to Jesus Christ (see commentary on Revelation 2:7 and the commentary on Romans 8:26).

“Bears witness together with.” Both Jesus Christ and the holy spirit within us bear witness that we are the children of God. Our holy spirit testifies conclusively by empowering us to speak in tongues and to operate other manifestations of the gift of holy spirit. Jesus bears witness in many ways, if we will walk with him daily and commit our lives to him and his Father. Thus, both our gift of holy spirit and “the Spirit,” Jesus, bear witness that we are children of God. Lenski has, “testifies together with,” in his translation.

8:17. “share in his glory.” The verb for “will be glorified” in the phrase, “so that we will also share in his glory,” is part of a purpose-result clause in the subjunctive mood. Since the subjunctive mood frequently expresses uncertainty, the word “will” is often translated as “may.” However, the subjunctive mood, from which the “may” translation comes, does not always express uncertainty, particularly in result clauses. Here the subjunctive is due to the purpose-result clause, and hence does not necessarily express any doubt that we will be glorified with Christ. As Wallace writes, “Sometimes the subjunctive acts like a future indicative…” When used in result clauses, for example, the subjunctive cannot be said to express “probability” (Grammar, p. 462). Seeing this is the case, we have rendered the verb with the future “will” to avoid mistakenly inferring doubt from the subjunctive, which grammatically is not intended here. For more on purpose-result clauses, see Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.”

8:18. “in us.” Not to us, even though the word is eis. The KJV has the sense. The glory will be revealed in us (touching us, we are participants). If it was revealed “to” us in the ordinary sense of the word, then pros, not eis, would be used. (Cp. Lenski). We are not simply onlookers, but participants in this glory, as verse 17 makes clear: “we will be glorified with him.”

8:19. “the eager anticipation of creation.” This is an attributed genitive (cp. Wallace, Exegetical Syntax). Tholuck argues that the attributive has the effect of the figure of speech personification. The coming revelation will be so great that even the expectation itself becomes a character who is expecting.
8:20. All but the last two words, “in hope” belong inside a parenthesis, and the words “in hope” go with verse 19. The creation was subjected to mataiotes, (futility) by the will of the one who subjected it. That “one” is the Devil. He is the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4). However, the creation is waiting in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed—in hope that the creation itself will be liberated.

8:22. “right up to this present time.” Cp. NIV. Most versions read, “until now,” but this translation can be confused to mean, “not anymore,” which is not the case. The creation is still groaning today and will continue to do so until the new creation.


8:24. “were saved.” The Greek word “saved” is sōzō (#4982 σώζω), which has a broad range of meaning but in this context means saved from death and thus given everlasting life. It is in the aorist tense, indicating the one time action in the past when our salvation was guaranteed (Lenski). “Hope” is in the dative case and has the definite article. It is not the dative of means, for we were not saved by hope, we were saved by faith. The entire context of the chapter is pointing to the future, when the world, which was “subjected to futility…because of the one [the Devil] who subjected it” (Rom. 8:20), is “freed from the bondage of corruption” (v. 21). Even Christians, “who have the first-fruits of the spirit…groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption—the redemption of our body” (v. 23). God saved us, not to live in this fallen world, but to live in Paradise. The key to understanding the verse is knowing that we are not “saved” yet. We have a promise of salvation, a guarantee of salvation, but we are not actually “saved” yet. However, we will be “in the Hope,” that is, in the future that is promised to us and therefore we hope for. Our new birth and guarantee of salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14) is so strong that the Bible can say we are already saved “in the Hope.” God saved us “in the hope” of a glorious future, when “the whole creation [which] groans together and suffers the pains of childbirth together” (v. 22) will be liberated.

When it comes to salvation, the New Testament can be quite confusing for an average reader. That is due to the fact that some verses say we have already been saved (Eph. 2:8), some verses say we are being saved now (1 Cor. 1:18), and some say our salvation is future (Rom. 13:11). The word sōzō has a large range of meanings and it does not have to refer to the future salvation of the Christian. That range of meanings explains some of the variations in the use of “saved.” However, when it comes to sōzō meaning having everlasting life, we must understand the Bible has an idiomatic use of verbs in which a past tense verb is used to indicate the certainty of a future action. If something is absolutely going to happen in the future, the Bible often refers to that as if it had already occurred. One way scholars refer to this is the “prophetic perfect.” A good example of this is Jude 1:14, which in the Greek text says the Lord Jesus “came” with his holy ones. Of course, that has not happened yet, but the fact that it will happen is so certain that God can put it in the past tense (in that verse, the aorist tense). For more on the prophetic perfect, see the note on Ephesians 2:6

“what he sees.” This is a Greek idiom where “see” is put for “has.” We have a similar idiom in English and say, “Let me see it,” when we mean, “Let me have it.” Cp. NIV: “Who hopes for what he already has?”

8:26. “the Spirit” in this verse is Jesus, just as he is “the Spirit” who speaks in Revelation 2. When Jesus was resurrected, his body was still flesh and bone (Luke 24:39), but it was spiritually empowered. 1 Corinthians 15:44-46 says Jesus was raised “a
spiritual body.” When he first appeared to his disciples, they thought he was a spirit (pneuma), an incorporeal being (Luke 24:37). But Jesus told them he was not a spirit or spirit body, and had them touch his body to feel his flesh. However, because Jesus’ new body is spiritually empowered, the New Testament refers to Jesus as “the Spirit” in many different places. These include Acts 2:4; 10:19; Romans 8:16, 26, 27; 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; and 22:17. (see the commentary on Revelation 2:7 and see the commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:44. Also, the book, The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be Like Christ by Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit).

Here in Romans 8, the word “Spirit” is not referring to the gift of holy spirit. The gift of holy spirit that is born inside Christians does not have a mind as this “Spirit” does (v. 27). Neither does our holy spirit intercede for us, as if it had a mind of its own. The one the New Testament says intercedes for us is Jesus Christ (Heb. 7:25). While it is true that we pray for others via our holy spirit, that is not what this verse says.

Those who say that the “Spirit” in this verse is the gift of holy spirit usually also say that the groans mentioned in the verse are speaking in tongues. However, it is the Christian who speaks in tongues, not the gift of holy spirit, but this verse clearly says that it is the “Spirit” that groans. The context makes it clear that the world is groaning (v. 22), we are groaning (v. 23) and Jesus, who loves us, is groaning. Even today Jesus is feeling the awful effects of the fallen world, and he groans because of the fallen and painful state of the world and of the pain and groaning of his Body, the Church.

“in the same way.” In the same way as what? This explains what the “groans” are. The creation groans (v. 22), we groan (v. 23) and in the same way, the Spirit, Jesus groans. Nothing in God’s creation is free from the horrific consequences of sin. As our fellow brother, and as one who loves God’s creation, Jesus groans too. This is a case where the orthodox belief in the Trinity and that God is unchanging and all-controlling causes the verse to be misunderstood. For example, Lenski wrongly writes, “…the Holy Spirit does not and cannot groan….” The truth is that God can groan, and has a myriad of other emotions as well. So does Jesus. Like Hebrews, which says that Jesus is touched with the feelings of our infirmity (Heb. 4:15), this verse tells us that Jesus, like the rest of creation, is groaning in distress about what is happening in God’s creation.

“joins in to help.” The word sunantilambanomai (συναντιλαμβάνομαι) means, to ‘take part with,’ generally, to come to the aid of, be of assistance to, help. (BDAG). The prefix “sun” means “together with.” The Spirit, Jesus, “helps” us, but he does not do it all. We also must pray if we are going to have God’s power fully manifested in our lives.

“intercedes for us.” The Greek verb is in the present tense, active voice, indicating Jesus’ ongoing prayer for us. Jesus prays for us to the Father now, just as he did when he was training his apostles on earth (Luke 22:32). Although the Greek uses the word huperentugchanō (#5241 ὑπερεντυγχάνω), which has the prefix huper, in this case it does not mean “super-intercedes, but rather is an intensifier” (cp. Lenski).

“along with groans” Jesus prays for us, and he also groans about the fallen state of the world (there is no separate word for “with” in the phrase, “with groans,” groans is in the dative case). This verse is not saying that Jesus prays “with groans,” i.e., that he prays by using groans. That misses the point and the context. The verse is saying that Jesus is praying and groaning at the same time. This often happens to any Christian that truly feels the pain of those he or she is praying for. The world groans, we groan, and Jesus groans, all of us groaning because of the fallen state of the world.
“groans.” We use “groans” rather than “groanings,” “sighs,” etc., because it can be understood as a noun, and makes the connection with v. 22 and 23 more easily.

“too deep for words.” Friberg’s Analytical Lexicon has a clear definition of the Greek word: “of something that arouses such strong emotions one cannot find words to speak of it” (cp. also BDAG). This definition is reflected in many modern translations. The groans over the ruined and enslaved state of creation are too deep to express in words.

The “groans too deep for words” are not speaking in tongues in this verse any more than the groans in verse 22 or 23 are speaking in tongues. Besides, if it were speaking in tongues, the verse would be saying that Jesus makes intercession for us by speaking in tongues, but there is no reason to think that is how Jesus prays to the Father.

8:27. “and He who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he makes intercession for the holy ones according to the will of God.” It is important that we understand who this verse is speaking about, so we have clarified that in brackets in this commentary. “And he [God] who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit [Jesus], because he [Jesus] makes intercession for the holy ones [Christians] according to the will of God.”

“The Spirit.” The gift of holy spirit has no “mind,” so it is clear from this and from the context that “the Spirit” is Jesus (see commentary on Romans 8:26, and see commentary on Revelation 2:7).

The one who searches the hearts is God (cp. 1 Chron. 28:9, Ps. 129:33; Jer. 17:10). Although Jesus is also said to search the heart (cp. Rev. 2:23), historically, the great “Searcher of hearts” was God, which also fits in the flow of the verse. The “mind of the Spirit” does not refer to the “spiritual mind” of a Christian, but rather the mind of Jesus Christ, who is the one who makes intercession for us (Heb. 7:25).

“according to the will of God.” Jesus always does the will of God. He did while he was alive on earth, and he continues to do so.

8:28. “in all things God works for the good of those who love him.” This verse shows us that no matter how difficult a situation is, God is always trying to do His best for His people. However, historically, this verse has been used to teach that every situation, no matter how terrible, will turn out “good” if a person loves God. The reason for the different interpretations is that the way Romans 8:28 is translated and understood is due to the theology that the translator and interpreter bring to the verse from their scope of Scripture.

Grammatically, the Greek text can be translated in two different ways, with two completely different meanings. In the Greek, the phrase “all things” can be nominative (the subject) or accusative (the direct object, or used adverbially). If it is nominative, then the verse should be translated as it is in many versions, that “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God…” (KJV). This particular translation has a lot of defenders. However, it should be noted that since the time of Augustine (354-430 AD), the majority of the Christian theologians have been Augustinian/Roman Catholic/Calvinist/Reformed or of that theological persuasion. They believe that everything that happens, good or bad, is God’s will, and they translate the Greek in a way that supports that belief. R.C. H. Lenski provides a good example. When it comes to the “all things” of this verse, he comments: “all of them without exception operate together
to produce ‘good’ in the sense of what is beneficial for God’s lovers. This includes every kind of painful experience in Christian lives,…” (Lenski, Romans, p. 551).

The problem with this interpretation is that it seems very clear from life itself that everything does not work for good for those who love God. In fact, everything does not even work for good for God Himself. He wants everyone to be saved, but they will not all be; He wants people to come to a knowledge of the truth, but they all do not; He wants people to obey and love Him, but they do not. So if all things do not work together for God, how can all things work together for God’s people? All things do not work together for good just because a person loves God. Many evil things happen to those who love God. The earth is a war zone, with the forces of good fighting the forces of evil. Sometimes the Devil can hinder God’s purposes. This point is discussed at length in Don’t Blame God, by Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit.

As we said above, instead of being in the nominative case, “all things” could be accusative. If that is so, it can either be the direct object (“he works all things”) or it could be understood as being adverbal (thus, “he works in everything”). Of those two choices, the adverbal use best fits the scope of Scripture that not everything that happens is God’s will, but in everything that happens God is working for the good of those who love Him. F. F. Bruce prefers the adverbal, (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Romans), as do a number of English translations (New English Bible, NIV, REV, and RSV; cp. Moffatt’s translation and Aramaic Peshitta New Testament Translation by Janet Magiera).

There is every reason to believe that God works for the good of His people in every situation. That is in accordance with His nature, and also with the fact that He is not in control of all things. God cannot make everything good, but in every situation He can work for the good of those who love Him. It needs to be stated that F. F. Bruce has pointed out a possible interpretation that, while long known about, does not get much attention in commentaries or versions (although the NEB is an exception). In this interpretation, the subject of “works together” (which is one word in the Greek) is “the Spirit” from the previous clause. Since the original text had no punctuation or breaks between sentences, the last phrase of verse 27 and the first part of verse 28 could be together, and the verse would read, “And he who searches the hearts [God] knows what is the mind of the Spirit [Jesus Christ], because he [Jesus] makes intercession for the holy ones according to the will of God. Now we know that in everything, he [the Spirit—Jesus Christ] cooperates for good with those who love God.…” This translation very accurately represents the meaning of the word sunergeō (#4903 συνεργέω), which means “to engage in cooperative endeavor, work together with, assist, help” (BDAG).

There are some theologians who believe the translation “all things work together for good” is correct, yet realize how clear it is that, indeed, all things do not work together for good for those who love God. Thus, they suggest that the phrase “all things” is using “all” in its limited sense and refers to less than “all” things. However, as we will see, this weakens the statement so much it becomes almost pointless. Certainly there are times when “all” can mean “some.” This happens two ways. The first way is by seeing “all” as a synecdoche of the whole for the part (cp. Bullinger), and the second way is that the context of the verse limits the meaning of all to the “all” in the context, or “some” overall. The problem with “all things” being a synecdoche is that there is nothing in the context that demands it, and no apparent reason for the figure of speech. Usually when
“all” is used for the greater part (i.e., “most things”), the synecdoche is obvious, and the greater part can justify the use of “all.” That does not seem to be the case here. In the lives of many Christians, especially in the early years of the Church in the Roman Empire, it is likely that very many things did not work out for the good of the Christian. The same problem exists when we try to make “all” mean “some” by the context. It just does not seem to be reasonable here. The context of verse 28 is the fallen world, and that the entire world is subject to the bondage of corruption (v. 21). This bondage is so widespread the whole world is groaning in pain (v. 22), we groan in pain (v. 23) and even Jesus, the Spirit, groans in pain (v. 26). The groaning in this context is worldwide, and seems to cover the creation itself, so there is no reason to conclude that “all” is being limited here to “some” or even “most” in this section.

It seems clear that if the “all” in verse 28 actually means “some,” then the verse is saying that “some” things work together for good for those who love God, which is not really saying anything at all. After all, it is obvious that “some” things work together for good, but that is not helpful in the difficult situation in Romans 8. When people are groaning in pain (v. 23), it is not helpful to try to cheer them up by saying “Not everything is wrong, some things are good.” If a child is in pain with a stomachache, it does not really help to say that “some” things on the child’s body do not hurt. The truth is that the earth is a war zone, God is a warrior (Exod. 15:3), and the battle is raging. In this war, people are experiencing great evil and harm. The comfort of the Word is that no matter what we are going through, we can be sure of this: God is working for the good of those who love Him.

**the called ones.** The Greek word translated “called ones” is klētos (#2822 κλητός; pronounced “clay-toss”), and it means “called.” In this sentence, “called” is an adjective used as a noun, which grammatically is referred to as a “substantive” [For more on substantives, see commentary on Matthew 6:13]. Furthermore, klētos is referred to as a “verbal” because even though it is an adjective, it always implies an action; it is impossible to “call” or “be called” without an action having taken place.

Although most English versions translate klētos as a verb, that is not accurate. In the New Testament Epistles, the substantive klētos refers, not to those who have only been called, but to those who have accepted the call. Thus, it could actually be loosely translated, “the ones who have accepted the call.” R. C. H. Lenski writes:

“[“called”]…it is a designation like agioi [holy ones], pistoi [faithful ones] (these two occur in that order in Eph. 1:1), agapētoi [beloved ones], eklektoi [chosen ones], etc. We have already noted that, while in Matt. 20:16; 22:14, klētoi is used with reference to those who simply hear God’s gospel call irrespective of whether they accept it or not, in the epistles the term is used in the pregnant sense and includes the acceptance; compare 1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Pet. 2:9.”

Lenski uses the phrase “pregnant sense” to refer to the fact that the call is no longer just an invitation, it has “conceived” and been accepted: the person has accepted the call and become saved. Meyer concurs with Lenski, and writes: “Therefore, when Paul terms the Christians klētoi, it is self-evident that in their case the call has met with success (1 Cor. 1:24).” [emphasis his]. Albert Barnes (Barnes’ Notes) writes:
“The word (klētos) is sometimes used to denote an external invitation, offer, or calling; Matt. 20:16; 22:14. But excepting in these places, it is used in the New Testament to denote those who had accepted the call, and were true Christians; Rom. 1:6, 7; 1 Cor. 1:2, 24; Rev. 17:14. It is evidently used in this sense here—to denote those who were true Christians. The connection as well as the usual meaning of the word, requires us thus to understand it” [emphasis his].

Richard Bauckham (Word Biblical Commentary: Jude) correctly identifies the phrase “the called” as “a technical term for Christians,” which it is. It is important for us to understand why, since the word “called” is effectively the noun “called ones,” and that almost every major version of the Bible translates it as a verb: “those who are called.” The reason is Calvinistic theology and the belief that God only calls those people whom He wants to be saved, and everyone that He calls will answer and get saved (the doctrine of irresistible grace). Thus, to many translators, since the “call” is irresistible, there is effectively no difference between the call and the “called ones” who accept the call: they are the same. The “call” is the guarantee that the call will be accepted; so not only does every “called one” get saved, but only the “called ones” get saved.

We wholeheartedly disagree with that Calvinist viewpoint. We believe that God actually wants “all people to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4) and has therefore called, or invited, everyone. However, not everyone chooses to answer the call and be saved. So in the New Testament Epistles, when “the called ones” refers to those people who have accepted God’s call and become saved, we should be aware that the “called ones” are saved because they made the freewill decision to answer God’s call and get saved. Romans 8:28 is an encouraging verse for every Christian: we have accepted God’s call, and God is at work on our behalf in every situation we face. [For more on “called,” see commentary on Romans 1:1].

8:29. “foreknew.” The Greek word is proginōskō (#4267 προγινώσκω) and it literally means “to know beforehand,” but it was also used idiomatically. We know that “foreknow” is being used in an idiomatic way in this verse just by reading it. If God has perfect foreknowledge, as is commonly taught, then He “foreknew” everyone, and since “those He foreknew” He predestined to be saved, that would mean that every person is going to be saved. But that is clearly not the teaching of Scripture, so what is the verse saying?

The idea of “knowledge of someone” is often used idiomatically to mean love and special attention. In fact, “remember,” “look” and “watch” are some of the words that are often used idiomatically and have what is sometimes called a “pregnant sense,” a meaning that is much more than just the typical meaning of the word.

So, for example, “foreknew” is being used in an idiomatic or pregnant way a few chapters later, in Romans 11:2, which says, “God did not reject his people [the Jews] whom he foreknew.” This verse is not saying that God simply knew about the Jews ahead of time. It is saying God “loved” or “paid special attention to” the Jews. Similarly, Ruth said to Boaz: “Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me” (Ruth 2:10; in the LXX the word is epiginōskō; also in Ruth 2:19). Ruth was not
saying that Boaz learned about her, but that he took care of her. Psalm 144:3 says God “takes knowledge” of man, meaning He loves him.

Places where “remembered” is used in a pregnant sense (and it can refer to God’s “remembering” for good or evil) include Genesis 8:1, where God “remembered” Noah, Genesis 19:29; 30:22; Judges 8:34; 16:28; 1 Samuel 1:19; Nehemiah 6:14; 13:31; Psalm 106:4; Hosea 8:13. The malefactor on the cross asked Jesus to “remember” him, which meant pay favorable attention to him (Luke 23:42).


“Watch” is used of much more than just watching in Matthew 25:13. There it means to keep watch and keep doing what you are supposed to be doing.

“in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” This phrase can be confusing because it can be read as if the emphasis is on “firstborn.” God did not foreknow and mark out believers “in order that” Jesus could be the “firstborn.” Jesus was the “firstborn” because he was the first to get up from the dead. The emphasis of the phrase is “among many brothers.” God foreknew and marked out people to be conformed to the image of His Son so there would be “many brothers,” many believers. If people did not believe, Christ would have been raised from the dead, but not many others would be, so Christ would have been the firstborn, but only among “a few brothers,” not “many brothers.” Thankfully, God acted in such a way that Christ will be the firstborn among many people.

8:30. “and those whom he marked out beforehand…” This verse contains the figure of speech “climax,” although it actually begins in verse 29. “Those he foreknew…he marked out. Those he marked out… he called. Those he called…he declared righteous. Those he declared righteous...he glorified. Reading the verse is like climbing a set of stairs, each step getting higher until the climax, that we are glorified” (cp. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*).

“glorified.” We have not been glorified yet in the full sense of which it is meant in this verse. This is an example of the prophetic perfect idiom (see commentary on Eph. 2:6). Although the verb “glorified” is in the aorist tense, not the perfect tense, the effect is the same.

8:32. “in place of us all.” From the Greek preposition *huper* (#5228 ὑπέρ). See Romans 5:6 commentary on “in place of the ungodly… for… in our place.”

“in addition to.” The Greek word is *sun* (#4862 σὺν; pronounced “soon”). Although it usually means “with” or “along with,” in some contexts it is better understood as “in addition to,” and that is the case here (BDAG). This verse is very important for our faith in God. Many people realize that God gave Jesus Christ so they could live forever, but then act as if God will not give them anything else and even withholds His blessings from them. This verse shatters that concept. How could it be that God, who gave His only Son, will not in addition to the gift of Christ, give us everything else we need?

8:35. “What.” The Greek is *tis* (#5101 τίς), and it is the opening word in both verses 33 (“Who will bring…”) and 34 (“Who is the one…”). It is most properly “who” in the Greek because all the nouns in the list, “tribulation, distress, persecution,” etc., are all masculine or feminine nouns. Because the nouns are masculine and feminine, saying “who” in Greek does not seem strange, but it seems very strange and can be confusing in English, which does not assign a gender to nouns. Paul is making his point have more
impact by repetition, tis...tis...tis. However, translating the last tis as “who” can confuse the English reader and make them think they do not understand what they are reading, so we felt that there was a strong argument for using “what” instead of “who.” Lenski agrees, and uses “what,” saying, “Since all of them [the nouns in the list] are neuters in English, we translate “what” (not “who”).

8:36. Quoted from Psalm 44:22.

“sheep to be slaughtered.” Literally, “sheep of slaughter.” A genitive of relation.

8:37. “No.” The Greek word alla, (“but”) is occasionally used as an adversative, “no.” This is the case here. The commentators are divided between those who see this as a “no,” and those who see it as a “but.” If you see it as a “but,” you are saying that we are considered sheep, “but” we conquer in our adversities. There is a problem with that. People in the OT could conquer in adversities too. So then, why the “but?”

In actuality there is a clean break between the Old Testament, in which a person could lose his salvation, and the Church, when one cannot lose his salvation. This is what is being conveyed here. The idea brought from verse 35 is “Who will separate us from the love of Christ.” Then there is a list of difficulties and hardships that have caused people to turn from God. The people of God even thought God would stand against them and consider them sheep to be slaughtered. That idea, and the idea that any Christian can be separated from salvation and the love of Christ, is shattered with a resounding “No!” Unlike what has been in the past Administrations, nothing will separate us from Christ’s love. The Christian’s salvation is secure. Some have said, “But the Christian can renounce his love for God and then lose his salvation.” That is clearly not what these verses say. They teach that “nothing” shall be able to separate a saved person from God. When a person is saved, his very nature is changed. He becomes a “new creation.” No person can undo that by a simple act of the will.

8:38. “am persuaded.” The Greek is peithō (#3982 πείθω; pronounced pay-thō), and it means “to be persuaded.” The verb is in the perfect tense, which normally would be translated as a past tense, but in this case the perfect tense has the sense of the present. It is an action that started in the past but is still true in the present, so “am persuaded” is the best translation. If we say, “I have been persuaded,” it could mean in English that Paul was persuaded in the past, but may not be at this present time, which is certainly not the case. Peithō is also in the passive voice, but this particular verb does not have an active voice, so whether the sense is active or passive must be determined from the context. Although many versions read “am convinced” (NASB; NET; NIV; NRSV), we feel that omits part of the deeper meaning of this verse. While it is true that “being convinced” is the end result of allowing oneself to be persuaded, it is important to recognize that each of us must allow himself to be persuaded by God. It is not the evidence that persuades a person. Jesus Christ did miracles that convinced some people but not others, but the miracles (evidence) were the same. The Egyptians saw the miracles that God did in Egypt, and some of them believed and even followed the Israelites out of Egypt (Exod. 12:38), while others, including Pharaoh, would not allow themselves to be persuaded by those same miracles. If the evidence does not convince people, what allows them to be persuaded? It all starts in the soil of the heart, and an honest person constantly seeks for truth, and holds that in the highest esteem. Then, if there is evidence that something he believes or is doing is not actually correct, he will leave his old ways behind and change. No wonder God exhorts us all to examine ourselves.
8:39. “the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The fullness of God’s love is “in” Christ Jesus. In this case, “in” expresses a fullness and connection that one must ponder to grasp. Romans 5:5 and 5:8 speak of the love of God, while 8:35 speaks of the love of Christ. This is the love of God that is “in Christ.” It is in Christ in the sense that that it is connected in every way with Christ. The true love of God for mankind is expressed in Christ. It is impossible to fully grasp the love of God without grasping what God did in, and in connection with, Jesus Christ. The word “in” means “in connection with” Christ (see commentary on Rom. 3:24), but in this context it also means more than just that, for God worked “in” Christ to manifest His love to the world.

Chapter 9

9:1. Romans chapters 9-11 are considered the most difficult in the book of Romans. However, they do not lose sight of the central theme of Romans. For example, there are a dozen or so references to righteousness in just these three chapters, and statement that Christ is the fulfillment of the Law for everyone who believes is in the heart of the section (Rom. 10:4). These three chapters are the castle of Calvinism in the sense that without them, Calvinism and the idea of predestination does not have a powerful central presentation. And yet these chapters are misunderstood by Calvinists and indeed, by most other Christians. Part of the reason for that is they represent the “perfect storm” of what it takes to make something difficult to interpret. Biblical idioms that must be understood and articulated; Old Testament references that must be understood both as to time and meaning of the original statement; Old Testament characters that must be understood; words that are difficult to translate; and arguments that interweave and can be hard to follow.

“in Christ.” Paul is speaking the truth “in Christ,” i.e., in his connection with Jesus Christ. (cp. “in” meaning “in connection with” in the commentary on Romans 6:3).

“in connection with holy spirit.” Paul’s conscience (and love) toward the Jews had been built throughout his childhood and was in agreement with what the Lord would communicate to him via the gift of holy spirit. He hurt for the Jews, even as badly as he had been treated by them. In fact, one speaking offhand might think that Paul would be hardened toward the Jews by the mistreatment he had received from them, but his heart was soft towards them.

“holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

9:3. “Indeed.” The Greek is gar (#1063 γὰρ), and is usually translated “for” and understood to communicate a reason for something. However, that use of gar does not fit this verse, because Paul does not have continual sorrow in his heart for Israel “because” he could wish that he could be accursed in place of them. Rather, this is what some scholars refer to as the “confirmatory gar” and confirms and clarifies what has already been stated. Other examples include Mark 11:13; Galatians 5:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:10; James 1:7.

“could wish.” The Greek is euchomai (#2172 εὐχόμαι), a verb, and the noun related to it, euche (#2171 εὐχή), means prayer in the general sense. The verb euchomai is used 7 times, and the noun euche 3 times. The semantic range of these words includes both
prayer to God and prayer in the general sense; and it can include the idea of wishing, i.e., to wish. The noun euche can also mean a vow, and of its three uses, twice it is used to mean vow (Acts 18:18; 21:23) and once to mean prayer (James 5:15). Here in Romans 9:3 euchomai more clearly means “wish,” although the idea of prayer is not totally excluded, simply because we sometimes pray for things we wish for. It is important to realize that here in Romans 9:3 the word euchomai is in the imperfect tense, and means “could wish.” Paul “could wish” to be accursed in place of his people, but he knows that is not possible, and so he does not actually ask God for that. The “could wish” expresses the willing condition of the heart, not something that is actually available to do. God gives each person free will, and people make their own choices. God honors those choices, and so must we, even when the bad choices others make cause us much pain. Christ died for everyone, and anyone who wants to can be saved through Christ. If people decide on death rather than life (cp. Deut. 30:19), although we may have great pain and may even get to the point that we “could wish” to die in the place of others, we do not act on our wish.

“were.” “Were” is both the singular and plural past subjunctive, and since it is controlled by “could wish,” “were” makes sense, which is why almost all versions use it. (here the imperfect verb is used to show the impossibility of this wish being fulfilled, and also to note the fact that Paul did not actually wish that he would be accursed for Israel; Cp. John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans; also Lenski.) Perhaps a more literal translation would follow Young’s Literal, and say, “For I could wish, I myself, to be accursed….” However, that makes it seem like Paul was not clearly wishing that he would be accursed, but rather that he was emphasizing that he himself was the one doing the wishing.

“in place of.” The Greek preposition huper (#5228 ὑπέρ) is typical of prepositions in that it has many different meanings and nuances, which are determined by the context. In this case, it means “in place of” or “instead of.” Wallace (Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, p. 387) concurs that in Romans 9:3 huper “is used in a substitutionary sense.” Paul, in a fashion similar to Moses many years before him (Exod. 32:32), would trade places with his people if he could. This is not boasting or wishful thinking on Paul’s part, or Moses’ part. These great men of God had intense passion and love for their people, and that gave them the strength and vision to endure and go forward day after day. If anything, this verse shows us that it is possible to love others more than we love ourselves, and we can give our lives in service to others. The ultimate expression of being accursed “in place of others” is the Lord Jesus Christ, who did in fact love us so much that he took our place. He became a curse for us (Gal. 3:13), and died in our place. Ministers must draw strength from God and from their love for people. If they do not, the daily fight will eventually become too much, and they will become embittered, quit, or do both. While the work of the Lord can be fun at times, it is a daily fight due to the spiritual battle and to human nature. We must love in order to endure

“kinsmen.” The Greek word is suggenēs (# 4773 συγγενής), and it means relative, kinsman. It is used eleven times in the NT, and only occurs in the Four Gospels, Acts, and Romans. In the Gospels and Acts it is used in the literal sense of a blood relative. In contrast, the four times it is used in Romans all are the wider sense of the word, and refer to “spiritual” relatives; just as fellow Christians are called “brothers” or “sisters” even if they are not related by blood. Literally, suggenēs means: of the same kin, akin to, related
by blood. However, it is used in a wider sense to of the same race, a fellow-countryman, or a spiritual brother or sister (Cp. Thayer). The other three “spiritual” uses are Romans 16:7, 11, and 21.

9:4. “adoption.” The initial recipients of God’s grace were the Israelites. They were the original children of Abraham and kingdom of priests, they were the first recipients of the gift of holy spirit we all enjoy today (Acts 2), they will be given the land of Israel in the resurrection (Ezekiel 37), and are the “olive tree” into which the Gentiles were grafted (Rom. 11:17-24). Thus it is not unusual that this verse would say that the “adoption” we enjoy, and in a fuller sense, the culmination of that adoption in the future kingdom, is theirs. For more on adoptions, see the note on Ephesians 1:5.

9:5. “Theirs are the fathers, and from them, according to the flesh, is the Christ.” This verse can, and has been, translated dozens of different ways. Trinitarians usually put a Trinitarian slant on it to the end that it says Christ is God. We thought the way the Revised Standard Version translated it hits the mark: “God, who is over all, be blessed forever. Amen.”

“according to the flesh.” This is a simple statement of fact, showing Christ was a true descendent of the patriarchs. It is the same phrase Paul uses two verses earlier to describe his genetic relationship to the Jews: “My brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (9:3). The Jews were Paul’s kinsmen “according to the flesh,” as opposed to his Christian brothers in the spirit (Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament).

Likewise, Christ came “from” (ek) the patriarchs according to the flesh—that is, as a direct human descendent through his mother Mary—but ultimately was “born from (ek) the holy spirit” (Matt. 1:20: γεννηθὲν ἐκ πνεύματός ἐστιν ἁγίου). Hence, Paul here is focusing on Christ’s physical line from Abraham, given to him by his mother, rather than his fathering by God.

The parenthesis is the figure of speech parembole—a parenthesis that is thrown in for emphasis, but is a complete thought in itself (Bullinger, Figures of Speech).

9:6. “failed.” It could seem as if the Word of God had failed, because so many Israelites rejected the Messiah. However, we learn that not all “Israel,” (believers) come from “Israel” (the nation). Here we have Israel used two different ways, one to refer to those who have faith in God, and one to refer to the nation of Israel.


“children.” This is an idiomatic use of the word “children,” and it means “descendants.” Just as “father” can mean more in biblical language than just a biological father, and can also mean “ancestor,” “originator,” “mentor,” etc., so “children” does not mean biological children in this context, but descendent, as “the children of Israel” are the descendants of Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel.

Although the Jews thought of themselves very highly just by virtue of the fact they were descendants of Abraham (cp. Matt. 3:9; John 8:39), if they would admit it, Abraham had eight children by three different women, so many other people shared the distinction of being physically “the children of Abraham.”


“the word; the promise.” The Greek text reads, “the word of promise,” but it is a genitive of apposition, and means, “the word, that is to say, the promise.” In this case, the word of God was the promise of God. Many of the modern versions are going with a translation similar to: “this is what the promise said,” and that meaning gets the point of...
the sentence across, but with less fidelity to the original text (on the other hand, it is somewhat easier to understand, which is important). Also, the wording of the Greek is an example of how even early Christians thought of what God said as “the Word.”

9:12. “The older will serve the younger.” This phrase is quoted from Genesis 25:23. This prophecy is not about the individual people, Esau and Jacob. The prophecy refers to the countries they fathered, Jacob fathering Israel and Esau fathering the country of Edom. The prophecy is saying that Edom would serve Israel, and actually, ultimately, that people (“Esau”) would serve the Christ (“Jacob”). The prophecy is speaking of the descendants of Esau and Jacob many years after the men themselves lived.

Although most translations of Romans 9:10-12 make the “older” and “younger” out to be the individuals Jacob and Esau, we must be careful not to read that into the text, because neither Romans nor Genesis says that. For example, the HCSB reads, “though her sons had not been born.” The NASB reads, “though the twins were not yet born” (cp. NIV). The KJV reads, “the children being not yet born” (cp. NJB). All these translations make the verse to be speaking of the individual children of Rebecca, i.e., Esau and Jacob. But Adam Clarke correctly makes the point that adding a reference to the individual children is unwarranted. He writes:

> As the word children is not in the text, the word nations would be more proper; for it is of nations that the apostle speaks, as the following verses show, as well as the history to which he refers.

> Neither having done any good. To merit the distinction of being made the peculiar people of God; nor evil, to deserve to be left out of the covenant, and the distinguishing national blessings which it conferred; that the purpose of God according to election might stand—that such distinctions might appear to depend on nothing but God’s free choice, not of works, or any desert in the people or nations thus chosen; but of the mere purpose of him who calleth any people he pleases, to make them the depositories of his especial blessings, and thus to distinguish them from all others.

When we look at the phrase this verse is quoting from Genesis in its context there, we can see that Clarke is correct even from that standpoint. The prophecy to Rebecca that is recorded in Genesis is not about the two men, Esau and Jacob, but about the nations what would come from them. When Rebecca became pregnant, the twins inside her were so violent she sought Yahweh (the LORD) to find out what was happening. His answer is in Genesis 25:23.

> Genesis 25:23
> The LORD said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”

Reading the prophecy above makes it clear that it is about the “nations” and “peoples” of Israel and Edom, not about Esau and Jacob, who are not even mentioned in the verse. As to the statement, “the older will serve the younger,” the Hebrew text literally reads, “the greater will serve the less.” We can infer that the “greater” means the elder or firstborn, but we do not have to make that about the man Esau being older than Jacob. Edom was formed as a nation before Israel was, and thus the nation of Edom was older than the nation of Israel. Esau had children and became the nation of Edom, while
Jacob, though having children, went with those children into Egypt where they were enslaved. Israel did not become a nation until after the Exodus. Even so, eventually Israel became more powerful than Edom, and then “Esau” served “Jacob,” such as under the reigns of David and Solomon when Edom was subservient to Israel.

As for the individual men Esau and Jacob, Esau never served Jacob. In fact, in the twenty years that Jacob spent in Mesopotamia away from his family (Gen. 31:38, 41), Esau became so rich and powerful that when Jacob tried to give him flocks and herds as a present, he refused them, saying, “I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself” (Gen.33:9). Esau had several wives and many sons (Gen. 36), and became the founder of the country of Edom, south and southeast of Israel (Gen. 36:43). Jacob also had many sons and a daughter, but instead of founding a nation like his brother Esau, which had both people and a land area, he left the country of Israel and went to Egypt, where he eventually died (Gen. 46:5-7; 49:33). The nation of Israel was being formed while the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, and they got a land area many years later when Joshua conquered Israel.

9:13. “This happened.” Most people are not familiar enough with the Old Testament to realize that the prophecy in verse 12 was given about 1,700 years before Christ, while the quotation from Malachi in verse 13 is not another prophecy but rather a proof that the prophecy in verse 12 was true and had been fulfilled at least in part. Adding the italics helps readers see and remember that point.

“Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” This is quoted from Malachi 1:2 and 3. As in verse 12, “Jacob” and “Esau” do not refer to the individuals, but to the countries they founded. Using the name of an individual instead of the name of the nation he founded is something we see many times in the Bible. In Genesis 9, for example, Noah’s sons Shem and Japheth, and his grandson, Canaan, were the subjects of a prophecy given by Noah. Noah’s prophecy was: “Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem” (Gen. 9:26, 27). This never happened to the individual men, Shem, Japheth, and Canaan. However, many years later those prophecies were fulfilled in those men’s descendants, in the nations of the Shemites (Israel), Japhethites (Gentiles, cp. Isa. 42:6), and Canaanites (cp. Josh. 9:27). The name “Jacob” is used for the nation of Israel many times in Scripture (cp. Num. 23:7, 10, 21, 23; 24:5; Duet. 32:9; 33:10; Ps. 14:7; 44:4; 53:6; 59:13; Isa. 27:6, 9; Jer. 10:2; Lam. 2:3; Hos. 10:1; Amos 7:5; Micah 1:5; 2:12; Nahum 2:2). Similarly, “Esau” is used for the Edomites (cp. Jer. 49:8, 10; Obad. 1:6). Israel is also called by “Isaac,” one of the names of the Fathers (cp. Amos 7:9). The nation of Egypt is called “Ham,” the man from whom the Egyptians descended (Ps. 78:51). The Amalekites and their nation are referred to by the name of their founder, “Amalek” (Num. 24:20; Deut. 25:17; Ps. 83:7). The name “Rachel” was used for her descendants (the Benjamites) who lived in the area of Jerusalem, close to Bethlehem (Matt. 2:18). Rachel was Jacob’s favorite wife who gave birth to Jacob’s youngest son, Benjamin, just outside of Bethlehem and died in childbirth (Gen. 35:16-18), so it was appropriate to say that when Herod killed all the children around Bethlehem, “Rachel” (actually, her descendants), sobbed for them.

The commentator Adam Clarke noted that “Jacob” and “Esau” actually referred to nations, and wrote: “That these words are used in a national and not in a personal sense, is evident from this: that, taken in the latter sense they are not true, for Jacob never did
exercise any power over Esau, nor was Esau ever *subject* to him. Jacob, on the contrary, was rather subject to Esau, and was sorely afraid of him, and acknowledged Esau to be his *lord*, and himself to be his *servant*; see Gen. 32:4; 33:8, 13" (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

It is important that we realize the phrase “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated,” is quoted from Malachi, who lived around 400 BC, some 1,300 years after Jacob and Esau were born, because it shows us that it is not a prophecy, but a statement of fact—proof the prophecy of verse 12 had been fulfilled. The statement was made because the obstinate and unbelieving Jews in Malachi’s time demanded of God, “How have you loved us?” (Mal. 1:2). God’s answer was that His love for the Jews should be obvious, especially when they are compared with other countries, such as Edom (Esau), and especially when we consider that Jacob and Esau were brothers. He had said the elder nation (Esau; Edom) would serve the younger (Jacob; Israel), and it happened just as God had foretold. So God’s answer to the Jews was that He loved “Jacob” (Israel), but “hated” “Esau” (Edom). Beale and Carson state it well: “The appeal to the words of Scripture as ‘having been written’ signals that God’s word to Rebecca already has come to fulfillment.” (*Commentary on the New Testament*).

“hated.” It is important that we understand the Semitic use of the word “hate” in this verse because it is not to be taken literally in our Western sense of the word, but is a biblical idiom meaning “love less.” The essence of the statement is, “I preferred Jacob to Esau” (cp. C. K. Barrett, *Romans*). Although one could make a case for that fact that by around 400 BC when the statement was made, history would support the fact that God did seem to “hate” Esau, that was due to their turning away from Him, and had nothing to do with the original prophecy made to Rebecca, which was only that the older would serve the younger. Esau was older than Jacob, and the nation of Edom was older than the nation of Israel. Nevertheless, the true meaning of the prophecy to Rebecca, and thus of direct relevance to God’s “loving” Israel and “hating” Edom, was that He chose that the Christ would come out of Israel. God could only choose one; therefore, before either was born or had done anything, the purpose of God was pleased to choose the nation from Jacob. This was a bestowing of great honor, so Esau, who did not receive this blessing, was said to be “loved less.” [For other examples of “hate” used in figurative, hyperbolic language, see: Gen. 29:30-31; Deut. 21:15-17 (KJV); Prov. 13:24; Matt. 6:24; Luke 14:26; 16:13; and John 12:25.]

That this verse is not about two people, but about two nations. C. H. Dodd writes that fact helps to explain that Romans 9 is not a reference to “God’s arbitrary predestination of particular persons to eternal happiness or misery, without any regard to their merit or demerit—a doctrine which some have most impiously fathered on God, who is the best of beings, and who cannot possibly hate, far less absolutely doom to misery, any creature that he has made: but that it means only his bestowing greater external favors, or, if you please, higher opportunities for knowing and doing their duty, upon some men, than he does upon others; and that merely according to his own wise purpose, without any regard to their merits or demerits, as having a right to confer greater or smaller degrees of perfection on whom he pleases” (C.H. Dodd, quoted in *Clarke’s Commentary* on Genesis 25:23). Clarke goes on to say, “The doctrine of unconditional predestination to eternal life and eternal death cannot be supported by the example of God’s dealings with Esau and Jacob, or with the Edomites and Israelites” (*Clarke’s Commentary* on Genesis 25:23).
It is important to realize that “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated [loved less]” is in reference to the Christ-line—the genealogy that would culminate in the birth of the Messiah (cp. v. 5). There was only one Messiah, and since there were two male descendants of Isaac, God had to choose one to be the line to the Messiah, and the other was not to be. Thus Jacob is said to be loved because his progeny led to the Messiah. The terms “loved” and “hated” need to be seen in the context of the chapter, which is the bringing forth of the Messiah. As to the individuals, Jacob and Esau themselves, a good case could be made for the fact that Esau did much better in his life than Jacob. Jacob lied to Isaac (Gen. 27:18-30) and as a result had to flee his home, and was gone for 20 years. During that time his mother died, and he spent 14 years as an indentured servant working off the dowry for the two women he married while away from his family. Not long after finally getting back home to Canaan, his sons sold his favorite son, Joseph, into slavery, and it was more than 20 more years before they were reunited. When they were, Jacob was uprooted from his home, the Promised Land, and spent his closing years in Egypt, where he finally died. In contrast, Esau stayed close to his family, married several wives, had many sons and daughters, prospered, and founded the country of Edom.

9:15. The quotation in this verse is from Exodus 33:19.

“Moses.” That Moses is mentioned by name is important, because he is a perfect contrast to Pharaoh. It is important to have both the vessel of mercy (Moses), and the vessel of destruction (Pharaoh), portrayed in the text. These two men are a concrete illustration of a major point God is making in chapters 9-11, which was that Israel was a vessel that had fitted itself to destruction and God had cut it off, while the “Israel of God,” including some Gentiles, was a vessel of mercy, that by its obedience had fitted itself to mercy.

Moses was a vessel who fitted himself to mercy, while Pharaoh was a vessel who fitted himself to destruction (cp. 9:22, 9:23). God came to both of them and made requests. His request to Moses was go back to Egypt, while his request to Pharaoh was let the People go worship. Both requests were difficult under the circumstances, and both were denied. Although we do not pay attention to it much because Moses turned out to be such a wonderful man of God, Moses refused God five times (Exod. 3:11, 13; 4:1, 10, 13), before he finally obeyed God. Moses only seems to have obeyed then because Scripture tells us the anger of Yahweh burned against Moses (Exod. 4:14), but we are not told in the Word exactly how that anger was manifested to Moses. Under the pressure of God’s anger, Moses decided to obey, and then under the tutelage of God he became a vessel of mercy. We must not make the mistake to think that after Moses decided to obey, things went well for him. He almost died on the way back to Egypt (Exod. 4:24-26), he was over-optimistic about how fast God would deliver Israel and became angry with God (Exod. 5:22), he continued to have doubts about God fulfilling His promises (Exod. 6:10-12; 28-30), and it was very painful for him to see the oppression of Israel as the ten plagues ran their course, which took longer than six months and perhaps as long as a year. Through all this, God endured Moses’ doubt and anger and continued to work with him, and in the process of the interaction and obedience to God, Moses became a vessel of mercy.

Like Moses, Pharaoh was also asked to do something difficult: let the People go, and like Moses, he also refused. Then, as with Moses, God began to deal with Pharaoh to get him to change his mind. He sent increasingly harsh plague-warnings to Pharaoh, and
at any one of them, Pharaoh could have repented and let Israel go, especially as the plagues became very severe, and here we see the difference between Moses and Pharaoh. Moses repented when God showed His anger, while Pharaoh did not. Instead, Pharaoh became harder and harder in his heart, and cared less and less for the welfare of his people and the nation of Egypt. The interplay between God asking Pharaoh to do something that caused Pharaoh to harden his heart, and Pharaoh hardening his heart to God’s requests, is why sometimes the OT says God hardened Pharaoh’s heart and sometimes it says Pharaoh hardened it. God never actually hardened Pharaoh’s heart, but was the occasion of Pharaoh hardening it. Note how the Exodus records the interplay, using three different words for “harden.”

1. Exod. 4:21: I will make his heart strong (#2388 חָזַק chazaq)
2. Exod. 7:3: I will harden Pharaoh’s heart (#7185; qashah)
3. Exod. 7:13: then Pharaoh’s heart grew strong (#2388 חָזַק chazaq)
4. Exod. 7:22: and Pharaoh’s heart grew strong (#2388 חָזַק chazaq)
5. Exod. 8:15: [Pharaoh] made his heart heavy (with stubbornness) (#3513 כָּבַד kabad)
6. Exod. 8:19: and Pharaoh’s heart grew strong (#2388 חָזַק chazaq)
7. Exod. 8:32: Pharaoh made his heart heavy (with stubbornness) (#3513 כָּבַד kabad)
8. Exod. 9:12: and the Lord made the heart of Pharaoh strong (#2388 חָזַק chazaq)
9. Exod. 9:35: and Pharaoh’s heart was strong (#2388 חָזַק chazaq)
10. Exod. 10:1: I (God) have made his heart heavy (with stubbornness) (#3513 כָּבַד kabad)
11. Exod. 10:20: the Lord made Pharaoh’s heart strong (#2388 חָזַק chazaq)
12. Exod. 10:27: the Lord made Pharaoh’s heart strong (#2388 חָזַק chazaq)
13. Exod. 11:10: the Lord made Pharaoh’s heart strong (#2388 חָזַק chazaq)
14. Exod. 14:4: the Lord made Pharaoh’s heart strong (#2388 חָזַק chazaq)
15. Exod. 14:8: the Lord made strong the heart of Pharaoh (#2388 חָזַק chazaq)

With both Moses and Pharaoh, God had the choice not to wait for them to change and obey, and that is the meaning of God “has mercy on whom he wants, and he hardens whom he wants” (v. 18). It is God’s choice to work with, or not work with, people who disobey. Lenski writes: “Who would have known about God’s mercy toward Israel if God had struck down Pharaoh on that first day when Moses demanded Israel’s release” (Lenski, Romans, note on 9:23).

9:17. “I raised you up for this very thing.” The quotation is from Exodus 9:16. As with the other quotations in this section, it is very important that we understand them in their Old Testament context, because the meaning there is being brought into Romans. When Romans 9:17 mentions Pharaoh and quotes the Old Testament, it is assumed that we know about them from the Old Testament, which is why, for example, Romans only mentions Pharaoh by his title and does not give an explanation of who he is and what he did. Therefore we must understand Exodus to understand this section of Romans. The whole context in Exodus is God asking Pharaoh to obey, and Pharaoh refusing to obey. Then, God makes this powerful point: He did not have to give Pharaoh plague warnings, He could have wiped out Pharaoh from the beginning. Nevertheless, He chose to give increasingly severe plague-warnings. God knew that if Pharaoh continued to resist Him and His plague warnings, a couple things would happen. For one thing, Pharaoh would have to become more and more hard hearted to continue to resist God, especially if he
Romans

had any compassion for his people and country, which were being ruined. For another thing, as Pharaoh resisted, God’s wrath and power were being made known more and more clearly. Let’s pay careful attention to the section of Scripture from which Paul is quoting (Exod. 9:16, which Paul is quoting, is in bold face type).

Exodus 9:13-17

13) Then the LORD said to Moses, “Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me,

14) or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people, so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth.

15) For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth.

16) But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

17) You still set yourself against my people and will not let them go.

This section of Exodus is after the sixth plague but before the seventh, and up until now the only real damage that had been done was the death of livestock. One thing we notice in these verses is God’s request that Pharaoh let Israel go. God’s request is not “fake” or disingenuous. Pharaoh could have let Israel go, but hardened himself against God (cp. v. 17). Verse 15 really helps us understand verse 16, and why Paul would quote verse 16. In verse 15 God states to Pharaoh that He could have already destroyed Pharaoh if He had wanted. This is certainly true. God did not have to give Pharaoh plague warnings. After the Moses’ first request to let Israel go, which Pharaoh refused, God could have just put Egypt in confusion by striking Pharaoh with a lightning bolt, and causing an earthquake and flood, and ushered Israel out of Egypt in the confusion.

When a person disobeys God, it forces God to make a choice: God can stop working with the person, or He can offer more chances to obey. If He offers more choices to obey, and the person obeys, wonderful. If He offers more choices to obey, and the person becomes even more disobedient, then often this means that God’s power is shown and His name glorified, which is what happened with Pharaoh. From reading Exodus we can see the progression of events and the effect they had. The plagues became more and more severe, Pharaoh became more and more hardened and unreasonable, and God’s power was shown more and more clearly, and His name was held in higher and higher honor. God did not want the people of Egypt to be destroyed, but in light of the freewill disobedience of Pharaoh, God worked some redemptive purposes from Pharaoh’s disobedience.

It is safe to say that when Moses first came back to Egypt and told Pharaoh that Yahweh, the God of Israel, said to let the people go, Yahweh was little respected by the Egyptians, and indeed, by the other nations on earth. The Egyptians considered Him only a god of slaves. After the third plague, even Pharaoh’s magicians had to admit that the plague was “the finger of God” (Exod. 8:19). After the sixth plague, even some of Pharaoh’s officials feared Yahweh (Exod. 9:20). After the seventh plague, Pharaoh’s officials said to let the Israelites go (Exod. 10:7). After the ninth plague, Moses was highly regarded in Egypt by both Pharaoh’s officials and the Egyptians themselves.
(Exod. 11:3). By the time Israel left Egypt in the Exodus, Moses and the Israelites were so highly regarded that a large number of Egyptians left Egypt with them (Exod. 12:38). The nations around Israel remembered the plagues and the power of God for years. Hundreds of years later, as the period of the Judges was coming to a close and just before Saul was anointed as Israel’s first king, the Philistines were afraid of God because of what had happened in Egypt (1 Sam. 4:8).

God righteously gave Pharaoh chance after chance to repent, and as Pharaoh refused God time after time, God was able to bring a redemptive purpose out of the situation, turning the hearts of the people of Egypt, and even Pharaoh’s officials, and magnifying His name by His display of power.

From the Old Testament account of Pharaoh, we know that God presented Pharaoh with a difficult, but godly, decision: “Let my People go” (Exod. 5:1). Pharaoh could have made the righteous and freewill choice to obey God, which would have been the righteous decision to make even though it would mean his slave labor would be gone, but he chose to “harden” his heart. Because it was God who put Pharaoh in that difficult position, the text, using the common biblical idiom of permission (see explanation at Romans 9:18), says that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. Of course God knew how selfish and cruel Pharaoh was and that he would not let Israel go, but God gave him opportunity after opportunity (plague after plague) to change his mind. Eventually, God “made His power known” (cp. v. 22) and delivered Israel from slavery.

In Romans 9, Pharaoh is a good example for the point that God is making, which is that Israel acted just like Pharaoh. Time after time God tried to get Israel to obey, and time after time they defied Him, over time becoming harder and harder against God, and more and more defiant. They ignored the Law, then perverted it completely, they ignored the prophets, then killed the prophets, then killed God’s only Son. God reached out to them over and over, but they just responded by becoming more and more calloused toward Him.

God is using Pharaoh as a specific and parallel example to the nation of Israel. Israel, like Pharaoh, had difficult choices (obeying God’s laws is not always easy) and, like Pharaoh they rejected God, hardening their hearts against Him. Then, just as God showed his power against Pharaoh by delivering His people in spite of Egypt’s military might, God showed His wisdom and mercy against the nation of Israel by “making known the riches of His glory” (9:23) upon the true “Israel” that He had prepared beforehand, an Israel He called from both Jews and Gentiles (9:23, 24).

God never forces someone to be hardened. Everyone has freewill, and people are only hardened when they resist God and harden themselves in the process of resisting Him. It is ironic that the more God shows His love to a person, the more hardened the person has to become to ignore or defy that love. God is said to harden people, but that is only due to the Semitic idiom of permission which attributes actions to God when actually He only allows them to happen (see commentary verse 18).

Pharaoh had to become very hard indeed to resist God. Pharaoh had unrighteously enslaved Israel by using his superior military strength. God made the righteous request that Pharaoh let Israel go worship in the desert. When he said “No,” God could have simply destroyed Egypt as He had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. But God continued to warn Pharaoh with plague after plague, demonstrating His power and intention that Israel be allowed to go. Pharaoh ignored the requests to let Israel go, and ignored God’s
plague-warnings. His heart had to become harder and harder to continue to resist God. Before He acts in power, God wants to offer many warnings and chances to repent, even when it is very unlikely someone will repent. He even did things like tell Pharaoh to order that all servants and livestock be brought under shelter to not suffer damage from the plague of hail (Exod. 9:19). He does this for a number of reasons. First, people have freedom of will and there is always the chance they may change and repent even if it takes a number of warnings. Meyer correctly asserts: "The vessels of wrath are borne with in mercy and long-suffering to give them opportunity for repentance,..." (Meyer’s Commentary, note CVII on Rom. 9:23).

Second, offering many chances to repent shows that God is righteous and loving, and not a punitive or demanding God who destroys people who disobey once or twice. Third, it shows that God’s love and mercy, though great, are not endless. God can and will put an eventual end to man’s defiance, so let us not tempt God by ignoring His requests. Fourth, God’s eventual use of His power shows that He will deliver the righteous, even if it is not as quickly as those who are suffering would like, and this is a great comfort to those people who are being dominated by evil authorities. God’s people are comforted knowing that God’s promise of a new and better life are not just empty words, but many times in history He has acted to deliver His people, and He will do it again in the future. Lastly, as God’s power becomes known, other people are greatly influenced to respect Him and believe in Him.

God warned Pharaoh over and over, and warned Israel over and over. As they ignored warning after warning, and got harder and harder in their hearts, they were indeed “fitted themselves for destruction” (see commentary on 9:22).

9:18. “has mercy on whom he wants, and he hardens whom he wants.” This phrase has been seriously misunderstood. In order to understand it, there are a couple things we must understand. We must understand the context, particularly verse 17, and we must understand the Semitic “idiom of permission.”

An idiom is “a phrase or expression whose meaning cannot be understood from the ordinary meanings of the words in it.” (The World Book Dictionary, “idiom”). Idioms do not always make sense when translated into other languages or understood by different cultures, but it is important that we do our best to understand them. The “idiom of permission” is an idiom that occurs in the Hebrew language (in fact, in Semitic languages). E. W. Bullinger summarises it well in his book, Figures Of Speech Used In The Bible, “idioma,” #4: “active verbs were used...to express not the doing of the thing, but the permission of the thing which the agent is said to do.” The idiom of permission is the reason why many verses in the Bible seem to attribute evil actions to God. Bullinger gives many examples, and a good one comes from Ezekiel 20:25, which says in the KJV: “Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good.” Bullinger comments: “God never gave Israel laws that were not good. What the verse is saying in idiomatic language is: ‘I permitted them to follow the wicked statutes of the surrounding nations, mentioned and forbidden in Leviticus 18:3’” (Bullinger, Figures, “idioma”).

It is widely recognized by scholars that in Semitic languages the active verb can used in a permissive sense. In The Emphasized Bible by Joseph B. Rotherham, the phrase often translated as, “I will harden his [Pharaoh’s] heart” is translated as “I will let his heart wax bold” (cp. Rotherham, Exod. 4:21). In defense of his translation, he offers the following in a footnote: “...the translation in the text above would seem fairer to the
average Occidental [Western] mind, and is thoroughly justifiable on two grounds: (1) of the known character of God, and (2) the well-attested latitude of the Semitic tongues, which are accustomed to speak of occasion as cause” (p. 87). Rotherham goes on in an appendix to say “...even positive commands are occasionally to be accepted as meaning no more than permission” and he cites Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar as more support for his translation.

Marcus Kalisch (May 16, 1828 - August 25, 1885) was a Jewish scholar who was educated at Berlin University where he studied classics, philology, and the Semitic languages, and he also studied at the Rabbinical College of Berlin. He was one of the pioneers of the critical study of the Old Testament in England. At one time he was secretary to the Chief Rabbi. In his commentary on Exodus he says:

“...the phrase ‘I will harden the heart of Pharaoh’ means ‘I know that I shall be the cause of Pharaoh’s obstinacy; my commands and wonders will be an occasion, an inducement to an increasing obduration of his heart.’ And the compassionate leniency of God, who instead of crushing the haughtiness of the refractory king with one powerful blow, first tried to reform him by various less awful punishments, and who generally announced the time of the occurrence of the plagues by the words, ‘Behold, I shall afflict tomorrow,’ in order to grant him time for reflection and repentance; this clemency on the part of God increased Pharaoh’s refractoriness; it was to him a cause of prolonged and renewed resistance.”

(quoted in the Appendix of Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible).

To be clear then, we see that the Semitic idiom of permission is when a person reacts to something God has said or done (such as Pharaoh hardening his heart in reaction to God asking him to let Israel go), but the idiomatic way of expressing that reaction is to say that God caused the hardening. Although God is said to cause the thought or action, in actual fact God does not override the freewill of man, and he neither causes people to sin, nor gives His permission for them to do so.

When the idiom of permission is used, we readers must search for the connection between God and the action or reaction (often a sin someone is committing), and sometimes that connection is very subtle. It has been said that one cannot “break” God’s laws, but only breaks himself against them, because they are “immovable objects.” God has set up the universe to function according to many laws and principles, which He said were “very good” (Gen. 1:31). In reality, God’s laws cannot be broken, and that is true in both the physical and spiritual world. A farmer who disregards God’s principles of sowing and reaping will not prosper, and via the biblical idiom of permission we might read that “God ruined him.” Similarly, a rock climber who disregards the worn-out state of his safety rope may fall to his death because of the God’s law of gravity if his rope breaks, and in the Semitic idiom it might be said that, “God killed that careless person.” Is God to blame because He set these laws in place? Of course not. [For more on the idiom of permission, see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, Don’t Blame God, Chapter 5, “God Is Good (with Figures)”].

9:19. “For who has ever withstood his purposes.” This phrase has to be properly understood if we are to understand this verse, the context, and how God works in our lives. First, this is a statement made by, “you” (“you will then say to me”) and the “you” is shown in verse 20 to be someone who argues with God, not someone who has faith in
God. Second, it gives the wrong impression to translate this verse, “For who can resist His will” (HCSB, ESV, NRSV), because, even as we see in this chapter, let alone the whole Bible, many people seem to resist the will of God and say “No” to God. In this chapter alone, the Jews resisted the will of God, and the Bible is full of examples of people who disregard and disobey God, and do not do what He wants them to do. So what is this verse saying?

The Greek word most English versions translate as “will” is boulēma (βούλημα), which refers to a plan, purpose, or intention. The BDAG lexicon translates it, “intention.” It is not the common word translated “will,” which is thelō (θέλω), which refers to what we “want” or “desire.” This verse is not saying, “Who has resisted the will of God and done something that God did not want them to do?” Many people do things God does not want them to do. This verse is saying, “Who has successfully withstood the plans and purposes of God?” The answer, of course, is no one. God is so resourceful and persistent that no one successfully withstands His purposes. God adjusts and adapts, and will always find a way to win in the end, even sometimes, as we see with Pharaoh, using the evil people do to show His character and magnify His glory.

The word “withstood” is the verb anthistēmi (ἀνθίστημι), and it is in the perfect tense, active voice. Wuest (Word Studies) writes: “The use of the perfect tense here speaks of a process of standing against God’s will which has come to a finished end, and the resulting state, that of a confirmed and permanent stand against God.” Vincent (Word Studies) writes: “The idea is the result rather than the process of resistance.” In other words, people can resist God and disobey Him, but because God always figures out a way to win in the end, no one can successfully withstand His purposes and intentions to the end that they are not accomplished.

We are now in a position to see what this verse is saying. Unbelievers and God-haters will accuse God of injustice, saying that because no one can successfully win against the plans and purposes of God, He should not find fault with people who sin. But let’s take the real-life example of Pharaoh and see if that is correct thinking. Although it is true that God found a way to show His power and elevate His name through Pharaoh, God did not want all that happened in Egypt to happen, even though Israel was released in the end.

When God first told Pharaoh to let Israel go into the wilderness (Exod. 5:1), there had been no plagues and no destruction or death of animals or people. Yet God’s words were not disingenuous or somehow fake—He wanted Israel to be able to go. Had Pharaoh released Israel at the command of God, God would still have been glorified—God always finds ways to bless people and glorify His name when people obey Him. Furthermore, had Pharaoh obeyed God and let Israel go before even the first plague, he would have continued to rule the most powerful nation on earth instead of destroying his nation and dying in a battle against God (although it does not make good movie script, and many movies show Pharaoh surviving after the Exodus, actually he died in the water along with much of his army).

Instead of obeying God and letting Israel go, Pharaoh hardened Himself against God. Our loving God then sent increasingly severe plagueWARNINGS to Pharaoh, but Pharaoh stood against Him time after time and ignored the destruction and pain his hard-heartedness was causing. In the end, Pharaoh did not successfully withstand the purpose of God, and Israel left Egypt. But can we say, like the unnamed antagonist here in
Romans 9:19, that because God’s purposes were eventually completed, that God should not find fault? Was Pharaoh, for example, without fault? Of course not! Pharaoh, and everyone else who defies God and sins against God, is at fault, even if God can find ways to bring glory to Himself and His people from their sinful actions.

9:20. “argue.” The Greek word is antapokrinomai (#470 ἀνταποκρίνομαι), and it means to reply or answer back, but because the verb is in the present tense, it portrays more of a back and forth dialogue, or as is clear from the context, an argument.

“What did you make me like this?” This question is linked to both the previous verse and the next verse, and we must remember that it is spoken by the man who is arguing with God. His accusation is essentially, “What did you make me hard like this, into a vessel of dishonor?” The fact that the Greek word translated “make” is in the aorist tense (a one-time action or “snapshot” of the situation) provides a key to understanding this verse. The verse is viewing the vessel as a finished product, not focusing on the process of making it, although the sinner could question that also. First, we must remember that God only “made,” i.e., completed the process of making, the person into a vessel of dishonor (v. 21) because of the person’s freewill responses. The perfect example of that is Pharaoh, who is mentioned right in this chapter. Although God used the person’s sinful behavior in a way that ultimately was redemptive and benefited Him in some way, it was the person’s own freewill decisions and sinful behavior that were responsible for the way God acted in relation to the person. Second, it is far too typical that, like the argumentative person in this verse, when the purposes of God win the day and the sinner is broken and defeated, he (or she) takes no responsibility for his actions, but blames God for what has happened, questioning God just like this verse says, “What did YOU [God] make me this way?” A humble and honest question would be: “What did I defy God the way I did and become so hardhearted?” God responded to the person’s sins in a redemptive manner, but that redemption destroys sinners.

When a person, like Pharaoh, is given the opportunity to obey God but defies Him, it is then God’s prerogative as to how to continue to work with the person or to end the relationship altogether. In that sense, God really is the potter and we are the clay. Like the example of the clay in Jeremiah 18:1-4, God can have a purpose for a person, but if that person will not cooperate then God can work to make something else of his life, or He can stop working with the person altogether.

The Bible is full of this interplay between God and people, although many times it is not clearly written. God worked with Moses to get him to go to Egypt and lead the Israelites. Moses refused God five times (Exod. 3:11, 13; 4:1, 10, 13), but finally gave in to God. God had the choice not to wait for Moses to obey. He could have delivered Israel some other way when Moses refused the first time, but God chose to keep asking Moses, and eventually Moses did obey God and go to Egypt. The Bible does not say what God would have done had Moses continued to refuse, but we can be sure God would have found a way to deliver Israel from slavery.

God asked Gideon to deliver Israel from the Midianites (Judg. 6:14), but Gideon was not confident, and in the next months God and Gideon went back and forth, asking things of each other, testing each other, but God kept working with Gideon, slowly making him into a vessel of honor as Gideon kept struggling to obey God. King Saul behaved differently. He never truly obeyed God. God installed him as king, but character flaws soon began to show themselves. When Saul disobeyed concerning the Amalekites,
God made the decision to take the kingdom from him, and Samuel brought the message to him, saying, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today” (1 Sam. 15:28). Unlike Gideon, who had problems but overcame them and became a vessel of honor, Saul never did fully obey God, and his continual disobedience resulted in him becoming a vessel of dishonor, even trying to murder David and eventually dying in a war with the Philistines.

Solomon followed King Saul’s footsteps. He had the potential to be a vessel of great honor, but later in his life began to ignore the Word of God. He tried to pay part of the debt for building the Temple by giving away towns in Israel (1 Kings 9:10-13). He broke commandment after commandment. In defiance of God’s commands in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, he amassed gold and horses, bought horses from Egypt, and took many wives. He also married pagan women and built places of worship for many pagan gods (1 Kings 11:7, 8). He did evil in God’s sight (1 Kings 11:6). God continued to warn Solomon as he traveled on his path of sin (1 Kings 11:9, 10), but as with Pharaoh, those warnings only further hardened Solomon. God’s warnings, and Solomon’s defiance of them, were forming him into a vessel of dishonor. Eventually, God stopped trying to reform Solomon and said He would tear the kingdom from him (1 Kings 11:11), which He did.

The Bible does have some examples of God apparently not offering people “chances” to change and repent, but dealing with their sin right on the spot. One example is the soldiers of Ahaziah, who came to arrest Elijah. Fire from heaven burned them up right then, with no “second chances” (2 Kings 1:10). Examples like that in the Word of God show us that while God is slow to anger and abounding in love (Num. 14:18), He is not one to tempt or toy with. It is always God prerogative to deal with sin and disobedience immediately or offer chances for repentance.

Over and over the Bible shows how God works with people in relation to the freewill decisions they make, but ultimately whether a person is a vessel to honor or a vessel to dishonor is the person’s choice. At this point we should remind ourselves that the focal point of this chapter is Israel, and God’s dealings with them and the true “Israel,” the Israel of God (cp. v. 6). God came to the nation of Israel over and over again, but they were stubborn and defiant. They ignored and killed His prophets, and eventually killed His only Son. It was God’s prerogative to work with them the way He did century after century as they became a vessel to dishonor instead of cutting them off early in their history and working with the Gentiles. It was also His prerogative to “cut them off” when He did and deal with the Gentiles (9:24, 30; 11:13-18).

That it is a person’s freewill decisions that are primarily responsible for him being either a vessel of honor or a vessel of dishonor is a point that is also made in 2 Timothy 2:20-22. Those verses point out that every house has some vessels that are honorable and some that are dishonorable. Here in Romans we see that vessels of dishonor make the freewill choice to be sinful, stubborn, and disobedient. The dishonorable vessels in Timothy are dishonorable for those same reasons. So Timothy says, “if anyone cleanses himself from these [dishonorable vessels], he will be a vessel for honorable use.” Verse 22 then states: “So flee youthful passions and diligently pursue righteousness....” We need to realize that whether a person is a vessel of honor or dishonor is up to that person. God starts with the “same lump” of clay (v. 21), and works with it as it will allow Him, deciding how to move forward with it to accomplish His redemptive purposes.
9:21. “into a vessel of honor and another into dishonor?” The translation and understanding of this phrase is vital to the understanding of this whole chapter, and it hinges upon the translation of Greek preposition eis (#1519 εἰς) and our understanding of vessels of honor and dishonor.

The Greek word translated “dishonor” is atimia (#819 ἀτιµία). The word atimia is from the Greek word timē (#5092 τιµή; pronounced tee-may') with the prefix “a” (“not”) in front, making it literally, “not honorable.” Although atimia usually means “dishonor,” it can carry a neutral sense and simply mean, “not honorable,” or “ordinary,” which explains the translations such as “common” (NRSV, NASB, NIV), or ordinary” (NET, NJB, NRSV). However, we believe “ordinary” and “common” are not the correct translations of atimia in this context. The context is not about “honorable” and “ordinary” vessels. The chapter is about Israel, and God uses the example of Pharaoh, illustrating through him how some vessels are honorable, having done the will of God, and some are dishonorable, having defied God. When we insert the concept of “common” or “ordinary” into the chapter, we cause confusion because there is nothing in the chapter to connect it with. Furthermore, in the end, no vessel is “ordinary.” People either believe and obey God and are honorable vessels, or they disobey God and are dishonorable vessels. Even believers whom we might think have no special honor, have special honor given to them by God (1 Cor. 12:23-26), so every person who believes and obeys God is a vessel of honor, while people who ignore God or disobey Him are vessels of dishonor.

We readily understand that our loving God makes some vessels into honorable vessels, but we need to understand what God means when He says that some vessels are made into dishonorable vessels. As with other words and phrases in this section of Romans, a knowledge of the context and biblical idiom is important (see 9:17). God never forces people to do dishonorable things, but God does place people in situations that reveal their true nature and intentions. As was pointed out in the commentary on verses 18 and 20, God never “hardens” people by taking their freewill from them or forcing them to make an evil decision. However, He does harden them by actively loving them over and over again, each time putting them in the position to refuse Him. Although a person could change from rebellious to repentant at any time, as they continue in rebellion and refuse God over and over, they become harder and more calloused as a result. It is in that sense that God “makes” some people into dishonorable vessels, letting them act dishonorably in response to His actions towards them.

It is God’s prerogative whether or not to keep reaching out to someone who is resistant and “make” them harder and harder, acting in a dishonorable way and becoming themselves dishonorable. We get a clearer picture of how a person becomes an honorable vessel or a dishonorable one by studying people in the Word. For example, it seemed that Solomon was destined for great honor, but ended his life by over and over again doing evil in the eyes of God (1 Kings 11:6, cp. note Rom. 9:20). The same could be said for many people who had the potential and positioning to be great, but turned away from God.

The other thing in the phrase, “into a vessel of honor and another into dishonor,” that we must understand if we are to understand both this verse and the chapter, is the Greek preposition eis (#1519 εἰς). Greek prepositions typically have many meanings, and the meaning we assign to eis in this verse make a huge difference in how we understand this section of Scripture, because eis can indicate purpose or it can refer to a destination
or end result. If *eis* in this verse refers to purpose, then God makes people to be good or evil—it is just part of His plan. This verse would then be saying that God’s purpose in making people was to make some for honorable uses and other people for dishonorable uses, doing as He wished with no reference to any action or desire of the person.

In contrast to understanding *eis* as meaning purpose, *eis* can refer to a destination or end result. Then the verse would be saying that the end result of God’s working with people is that some of them are honorable vessels and some are dishonorable vessels. They reach their place of honor or dishonor by the process of interacting with God. This is the position we believe is correct.

Calvinists and others who think that God predestinates people to be saved or damned prefer the translation, “for,” because in it they see “honorable” or “dishonorable” as God’s purpose for people. They assert God has a plan for people, to save them or damn them, and He does so without reference to anything the people want or do. This position is well expressed in many commentaries, but a statement by Hendriksen says it well: “God, our Maker, has the right...to elect some to everlasting life, and to allow others to remain in the abyss of wretchedness [i.e., be damned to eternal hell].” This seemingly unfair and unloving treatment of people is defended by Calvinists and others who believe in predestination. They say that since everyone is a sinner, it is not unfair of God to damn anyone because everyone deserves to be damned, and when God decides to save some people just because He wants to—well, that is undeserved grace for them (cp. James Boice, *Romans*; 9:19-21).

R. C. H. Lenski, who uses the word “for” in his translation but does not believe that God saves or damns men without respect to their freewill decisions, points out that “for” can indicate the finished character of the vessel, and not just “their purpose.” He writes: “A vessel for honor—for dishonor, designates the character of each, designates the finished product, the one being fit of honor, the other fit for dishonor, the one fit for heaven, the other fit only for hell; it certainly does not designate only some circumstance or condition that existed when the vessels were made.” While we agree with Lenski that “for” can refer to the ultimate purpose of God and the state of the finished product, we think the most natural reading of “for” in English refers to purpose, and therefore most people reading the word “for” will think that God’s original purpose for making the vessel was so it would be honorable or dishonorable. The truth is that people act of their freewill and are on a path to be a certain way, and God works His purposes both with, and around, the person. God never designs anyone to be evil or unsaved and have no choice about it, but there are times when He can and does act in such a way that His power and glory are more clearly seen against the backdrop of evil. Furthermore, as we saw in verse 18, God can continue to interact with a person who defies Him and who becomes more and more calloused as the interactions and rejections continue, and over time the person forms into a vessel of dishonor.

With that understanding, we can see the great value in translating the Greek word *eis* as “into,” particularly since in this verse it is conjoined with “made” (*poieō*; #4160 ποιέω), and we are used to materials being “made into” something. God, the potter, has the right, the authority (*exousia*; #1849 ἐξουσία), to continue to work with people, offering them opportunities to repent, interacting with them, and allowing them to be made into vessels of honor or vessels of dishonor, knowing full well that if they become vessels of dishonor He has the ability to bring something redemptive out of their evil.
9:22. “What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make his power known, endured….” The key to understanding this verse is the word “endured,” because it shows the pain that evil causes and that even though God, in all His resourcefulness, can bring some redemptive things out of evil, He still has to endure the evil that people (and demons) do. This verse is not saying that God wants to show His wrath and power so therefore He forces people to do evil, or refuses to deliver them from their sin, just so He can then punish them publicly. God is not a God of wrath, however, wrath is part of His justice and He can and will use it on some occasions when it is deserved.

If God caused people to do evil, or if He refused to help them get out of their sin and evil ways, then He cannot be said to “endure” evil any more than a sadist “endures” the pain he is causing another person. God endures evil because it is the result of people’s freewill decisions.

As we have seen from the previous verses and the scope of Scripture, God’s first desire is that people would obey Him so He can bless them. However, if someone is determined to do evil, then God is challenged with how to bring something redemptive out of that evil. Once a person is evil and defiant towards God, God then has to choose how He will deal with the person. He can respond to the person immediately as He did with Miriam when she complained about Moses and was immediately smitten with leprosy (Num. 12:10). In that case, there was no, “Do not do that again” warning from God. She sinned egregiously, and God responded publicly with power and wrath, no doubt in part to protect Moses and the national unity of Israel.

In contrast, when Pharaoh sinned and defied God, instead of destroying him with one hard-hitting plague, He offered him ten plague-warnings. God “endured” Pharaoh and the evil he was doing to people, showing mercy to Pharaoh and giving him chances to repent and save himself and his people, but also knowing that because He was enduring Pharaoh’s continued defiance, when He finally decided to show His wrath and power, He could do it in a way that would accomplish some redemptive purposes. It is from the scope of Scripture we see that God does not ever want His wrath to be a “first response,” because His nature is love and He wants people to repent, obey, and be in a relationship with Him, but there are times when He wants to show His wrath and His power because there is profit in it. God would never show His wrath without a reason. He is never wrathful without just cause.

That people have free will often puts God in a dilemma. If He gives people warnings and chances to repent and change, and they do repent, then His longsuffering and endurance had great profit. However, if the person refuses to change and repent, then the warnings simply force people to go on defying God, which only makes them more calloused and hard-hearted over time. Yet God, being loving and merciful, tends to give people chance after chance to repent, knowing that He can and will find a way to bring some redemptive purpose out of the evil people do.

There are a number of redemptive aspects to God’s showing His power and wrath. For one thing, it often puts an end to the evil being done in that situation. For example, both the Flood and the fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah put an end to the evil those people were doing. A reason that one of God’s laws is the death penalty is that it puts an end to the activities of evil people (cp. Exod. 21:12-17; Lev. 24:17-22; Num. 35:16-31; Deut. 19:1-11. Cp. John Schoenheit, The Death Penalty).
Another redemptive benefit of God’s wrath is that it shows people that God’s patience and mercy are not endless. God can and will put an eventual end to man’s defiance, and His use of wrath makes that point (cp. 2 Pet. 2:6). Furthermore, God’s use of power and wrath being employed against the wicked is a great comfort, and can even be a source of joy, to those people who are being dominated by evil authorities. As the Psalm says, “The righteous will be glad when they are avenged, when they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked” (Ps. 58:10. Cp. Deut. 32:43; Job 22:19; Ps. 52:4-7; Jer. 11:20; 20:11-13; cp. the commentary on Rom. 9:18). These reasons help explain why Scripture would say that God is “desiring to show his wrath and to make his power known.” It is not as if God “desires” to show His wrath, but rather, given how horrible evil would be if it were allowed to continue unchecked, God “desires” to bring it to an end by His wrath and power.

“fitting themselves.” The Greek verb is katartizō (#2675 καταρτίζω) and means to cause to be in a condition to function well, thus, to put in order or restore; or to prepare, make, create, equip, or outfit. For example, the Greeks used it of the fitting together of bones in the body and outfitting or equipping a ship or an army. In this verse the verb is a participle, and the form can be either passive voice or middle voice. Whether this verb is in the passive or middle voice makes all the difference in the world in this particular verse, and is central to the debate about freewill or predestination. If katartizō is in the passive voice, it means the vessels were fitted by an outside force that acted on them. In this case, God would have made the vessels to be vessels of dishonor. If, on the other hand, the verb katartizō is in the middle voice, it means the people fitted themselves for destruction. In that case the verb means the vessels caused their own problem and deserve the destruction they will ultimately receive, and that is what many commentators say this verse is saying. Meyer, although he himself disagrees, lists many such commentators. Hendricksen notes that it is possible “…that here, in verse 22, the people themselves—in co-operation with Satan—were the active agents.” Adam Clarke notes: “…they had fitted themselves for that destruction which the wrath, the vindictive justice of God, inflicted.” John Bengal did not go so far as to say that the verb should be understood to be in the middle voice and that the people fitted themselves, but notes that even if the people “were fitted” (passive voice) to destruction, the text does not say that God fitted the people for destruction. He rather states the verse “is only stating in what condition God finds them, when He brings upon them His wrath.” Lenski also believes the verb is passive, not middle, but notes that in the Greek text, “a perfect passive participle is used: ‘fitted for destruction,’ which hides the agent who, therefore, is not God—Satan fitted them.” The words of Bengal and Lenski should be important to those people who insist this text supports predestination, because even if the verb is in the passive voice (and we do not think it is), it is an assumption to say that God did the fitting. The Greek text does not say that.

Although Meyer and some commentators assert that “fitted themselves” is opposed to the context, we disagree. The verse clearly says that God “endured” with “much longsuffering” these vessels. But it hardly makes sense that God would have to endure these people with longsuffering if He is the one fitting the vessels for destruction. In that case, the people’s obstinace and eventual destruction would have been His plan and His work, and He would be accomplishing it, not enduring it.
As with Pharaoh, God is working His purposes of love and mercy, which cause a hardening in obstinate people—they harden themselves rather than yield and obey—and God endures this hardening rather than bringing immediate judgment because He wants everyone to have an opportunity for salvation (2 Pet. 3:9). Adam Clarke writes: “…He [God] had endured their obstinate rebellion with much long-suffering; which is a most absolute proof that the hardening of their hearts, and their ultimate punishment, were the consequences of their obstinate refusal of His grace and abuse of His goodness.”

“destruction.” The Greek word is ἀπώλεια (#684 ἀπώλεια; pronounced ah-pō-lay-ah), and it means “the destruction that one experiences; annihilation” (BDAG). Jesus said that the road is narrow and the gate small that leads to “life,” while the broad road and broad gate leads to “destruction” (ἀπώλεια). Philippians 3:19 and 2 Peter 3:7 say the end of ungodly men and the enemies of God is “destruction,” and Hebrews 10:39 says that the end of ungodly men is “destruction.” — The Greek word is ἀπώλεια (#684 ἀπώλεια; pronounced ah-pō-lay-ah), and it means “the destruction that one experiences; annihilation” (BDAG). Jesus said that the road is narrow and the gate small that leads to “life,” while the broad road and broad gate leads to “destruction” (ἀπώλεια). Philippians 3:19 and 2 Peter 3:7 say the end of ungodly men and the enemies of God is “destruction,” and Hebrews 10:39 says that the end of ungodly men is “destruction.”

9:23. “lavished upon.” The Greek preposition ἐπί (#1909 ἐπί; pronounced ep-ee') generally does not mean “to” but “on” or “upon,” and it does not mean “to” here, as if God was showing his glory “to” Israel so they could see it. God was showing his glory that was lavished upon Israel, the glory they participated in, and indeed, the glory was in part shown by what they themselves experienced.

In Romans 9:22 and its commentary we saw reasons why God endured the behavior of the vessels of wrath. One of them was so that the obedient people of God would see, and draw strength and joy from seeing, the power of God in operation. That is the main point of this verse. God “endured,” “in order to make known the riches of his glory lavished upon the vessels of mercy.” The plagues in Egypt are just an example of this, because it happens all the time all over the world as evil tries to dominate good. As the plagues progressed and while Pharaoh was hardening himself against God, Israel experienced God’s mercy. During the fifth plague, the death of livestock, none of Israel’s animals died (Exod. 9:4-6). During the seventh plague, the plague of hail, no hail fell in Goshen where the Israelites lived (Exod. 9:26). During the ninth plague, the darkness that could be felt, the Israelite homes had light (Exod. 10:23). During the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn, Israel was protected when they obeyed, while in Egypt “there was not a house without someone dead” (Exod. 12:30). The mercy of God continued even after that as Yahweh guided and protected Israel with a pillar of fire and then by dividing the Sea, which opened for Israel but closed upon, and destroyed, the Egyptians. It is never easy for believers to endure the evil that wicked people do, but through those difficult times God’s mercy is often profoundly manifested.

“prepared beforehand for glory.” The Greek word translated “prepared beforehand” is προετοιμάζω (#4282 προετοιμάζω; pronounced, pro-et-oy-maad'-zō), and it means to “prepare beforehand, make ready ahead of time,” and it is only used here and in Ephesians 2:10. God is preparing us now, ahead of time, for the eternal glory which will surely come.

Since these vessels of mercy are contrasted to the vessels of wrath who fitted themselves to destruction (a process we saw modeled by Pharaoh), we need to ask why
these vessels are “prepared beforehand” for glory. The answer is not that God predestines them to glory and they have no choice about it. That does not fit with the scope of Scripture or this context, nor does it properly contrast with the vessels of wrath who fitted themselves to destruction. The answer lies in part in that “for glory” (eis doxan; εἰς δόξαν) is not as much referring to the immediate glory of Israel being rescued from Egypt (although that is glorious too), but to the ultimate glory of salvation and everlasting life, which is a future event. This is confirmed by the contrast of the glory of the vessels of mercy to the “destruction” of sinners in verse 22. It is even more effectively confirmed by the inclusion of “us” and “the Gentiles” in verse 24, and the description in verses 25-31 of the righteousness (“salvation”) of the Gentiles. Lenski agrees, and says the glory being referred to is “the glory of heaven.” Meyer asserts that the glory is “the everlasting Messianic glory.”

Reading the full phrase from 9:23 and 24, without the verse break in the middle to distract us, is helpful. The subject is “the vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory, including us, whom he called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles.” Now it is easy to see that the “vessels of mercy” did not just include Israel in Egypt who escaped from Pharaoh, but also all the vessels who escaped “destruction” in the lake of fire and are prepared beforehand for glory. Why does God have to prepare us “beforehand” for the glory? Because we live now, but the glory we will participate in comes later.

It is important to note that in verse 22, people “fitted themselves” for destruction, while in verse 23 God “prepared beforehand” the vessels of mercy. The two different Greek words meaning roughly “fitted,” and “prepared,” can be close in meaning in some contexts, but here the emphasis is very different. God does not want, nor plan for, anyone to be unsaved and miss the blessing of everlasting life. People who go “to destruction” do so because they “fit,” or “outfit” themselves for it. In contrast, God has planned and prepared for everyone to have everlasting life, and helps us achieve that as we obey Him. It is safe to say that no one would get everlasting life without God’s help and God’s doing the work of salvation. Also, in the end, no dead person can raise themselves from the grave or grant themselves everlasting life, and it is God who brings the Kingdom on earth. God does all that in fulfillment of His promises, and thus He is the one who has prepared people beforehand for everlasting life, which is future.

9:27. Quoted from Isaiah 10:22.
   “on behalf of Israel.” In verses 25 and 26, Hosea spoke about the Gentiles. But Israel is not left out. Isaiah cries out on their behalf (the Greek is huper, “on behalf of,” not really “concerning” in this instance). Isaiah states a warning that any Israelite should have taken seriously, and repented of any evil ways to become part of the remnant who will be saved.
   “fulfill his Word.” The Greek is literally, “do [the] Word,” but that seems to be unclear to the modern reader. The meaning is that God will do what He said, thus “fulfill” His Word. God had said many times that He will destroy the evildoer, but save the meek who believe in Him.
9:33. Quoted from Isaiah 28:16

“See!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“but.” The Greek reads kai, normally “and,” but here it is showing that the two parts of the quotation are connected, but we can do that more naturally with “but” than “and yet.”

“put to shame.” The verb is kataischunō (#2617 καταίσχυνω). Notably, it is in the passive voice, meaning the action of shaming comes upon the person, rather than describing their internal state. It is not “be ashamed,” which would imply these feelings rise up in the person himself; rather, the shaming comes upon him from the outside, he is “put to shame.” We must understand that ancient Rome, as well as Palestine, was an honor and shame based society. There were elaborate social norms and expectations placed upon the members of society, and when they were broken, the society induced shaming as a means of social control.

Chapter 10


10:4. “with the result.” The Greek word eis (#1519 εἰς) in this verse indicates that righteousness is the result of belief (Cp. NET). A more literal, but not as clear, translation would be “resulting in righteousness for everyone who believes.” This truth fits precisely with verse 10: “with the heart man believes resulting (eis) in righteousness.”

10:5. “the person who does these commandments will live by them.” Paul is referring to Leviticus 18:5. Not an exact quotation, but it is not stated to be one.

10:6. “speaks this way.” The one speaking is “righteousness.” This is the figure of speech personification, and in this case God’s righteousness is portrayed as a person trying to win the hearts of the doubters. Thus Paul is not so much quoting Moses as he is using the principles in the Law to make his point. First, “righteousness” addresses the doubts of those who think that righteousness is difficult and even far away—perhaps even that Messianic salvation has not yet come from heaven (v. 6) or that the Messiah has not risen from the dead (v. 7). Then it affirms that the message of faith is close at hand, even in our hearts and mouths (v. 8). In this section, Paul calls to remembrance a very similar situation during the time of Moses. The Israelites had the Law, but were despairing of keeping it, thinking it was too difficult. Moses answered them, saying:

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 (NIV)

11) “Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach.

12) It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?”

13) Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?”

14) No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

Just as the Old Testament proclaimed that obeying the Law was not too difficult a task, attaining righteousness by faith is not difficult either. What the Apostle Paul does,
however, is modify the statements somewhat so that they fit in the context of the promised Messiah. The gift of the Law has now been superseded by the gift of the Messiah.

“Do not say....” This is a reference to Deuteronomy 30:12, which reads “It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?” It is not an exact quotation, and it should be noted that Paul does not write: “Moses said,” or “the Law says,” but rather that “righteousness” says. Thus Paul is not so much quoting Moses as he is using the principles in the Law to make his point.

“ascend into heaven.” When Moses used this in Deuteronomy 30:12, it was in the context of going into heaven to get the commandments from God. In the context of Messianic expectation however, people would not get the Law from God, but would get the Messiah from Him and then bring him back down with them. Thus the explanatory parenthesis, “that is, in order to bring Christ down.” Getting Christ from heaven would be, as Deuteronomy 30:11 notes, both difficult and beyond their reach. Furthermore, it contains a denial of the fact that the difficult work of God had already been done. Human effort, no matter how satisfying and empowering to those who need to feel in control of their own destiny, is worthless. God had sent the Messiah, and if we reject him and wish to go to heaven and get another, it is not only too difficult (impossible!), but a rejection of God’s gracious provision.

“(that is, in order to bring Christ down).” The figure of speech, Epitrechon, which is a type of parenthesis (Cp. Bullinger, Figures of Speech). An Epitrechon (which means “running along”) is a short parenthetical insertion placed in the text as an explanatory remark. It is not complete in itself, but needs the rest of the sentence to be complete.

10:7. “descend into the abyss.” The meaning of this phrase might be considered unclear except that it is explained clearly in the parenthesis, which lets us know that in this case, the “abyss” stands for the grave and the state of being dead. In Deuteronomy 30:13, Moses did not use “abyss,” but “sea,” but Paul modifies the words of Moses and adapts them for the Messianic situation. In verse 6 he spoke in reference to those who thought that the Messiah had not yet come and who would therefore have to go to heaven to get him. In this verse he speaks of those who doubt the Messiah is raised from the dead, and they must help God with that task. The use of abyss makes sense in this context because of the associated meanings of sea, “abyss,” and the place of the dead. For example, Job 28:14 compares the abyss and the sea, both of which in that context contain the dead. Thus, Paul’s changing Moses’ “sea” to the word “abyss” would not have struck most readers as being as drastic as it seems in English. As in verse 6 and going into heaven, the task of helping God with raising the dead illuminates the absurdity of human effort. We simply cannot do what God requires, we have to submit to His provision and accept his gift. Even during the Administration of the Law, there was an element of faith that was necessary for salvation.

“(that is, to bring Christ up out from among the dead.)” The figure of speech, Epitrechon, which is a type of parenthesis (Cp. Bullinger, Figures of Speech). An Epitrechon (which means “running along”) is a short parenthetical insertion placed in the text as an explanatory remark. It is not complete in itself, but needs the rest of the sentence to be complete.

“out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24.
10:8. “in your heart.” On the surface this seems to be untrue because the Word of God was not “in the heart” of the unbelievers, which is why they were said to ignore God’s righteousness (v. 3). However, there are deeper issues involved here. First, Paul is quoting Deuteronomy 30:14, and the Jews were taught the Law from the time they were little children. The knowledge of the Law was clearly in their hearts, i.e., in the depth of them. Beyond that, the Law, indeed, all God’s commands, are holy and good, and mankind has an inherent knowledge of good and evil that is part of our basic nature (Gen. 3:22: “man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil”). Romans 2:14 notes that even without the Mosaic Law, the Gentiles can do “by nature” the things contained in the Law. This inherent knowledge of good and evil is the reason that what is considered right and wrong, and crime and justice, are similar in every culture. For example, every culture treats lying and stealing as wrong. It is precisely because people do know good from evil that God can judge all mankind to a set of righteous standards. Although we all have a sin nature that makes us selfish and self-centered, which is why children need to be taught to share, we also know instinctively, from the pain we feel when we are mistreated, that love is the correct path and hatred hurts and is wrong.

In a similar vein, we all know that we sin. Everyone knows he makes mistakes. Therefore, at a fundamental level, we all know that if we are going to be “right,” it must be done for us. So in a very real sense, the “message of righteousness” is in our hearts, and if we diligently seek it, we will find it.

10:9. “because.” The Greek word hoti (#3754 ὅτι) can be “because” or “since,” or it can be “that.” In this case, the meaning “because” best fits the context and scope of Scripture.

Romans 10:9 is one of the very succinct and clear verses in the Church Epistles that shows how to get saved, and also shows how easy it is to get saved. We get saved by confessing Jesus is Lord and believing God raised him from the dead. It is that simple. Salvation is easy to receive because it is a free gift. Jesus paid for our salvation so now we just have to take it, just like when someone buys us a Christmas present and we just have to take it to have it.

Once we confess Christ as Lord and believe God raised him from the dead, our salvation is guaranteed and is never in doubt [for more on the guarantee of salvation, see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation.”]. One thing that it is important to know about our salvation via the New Birth is that we receive the gift of holy spirit and get a new divine nature, but our flesh does not change. In fact it fights against our spirit (Gal. 5:17). Because our flesh does not change, and we cannot “feel” the spirit inside us, many Christians doubt their salvation, especially when they have sinned or are feeling disconnected from God. That is why it is important to properly understand our new nature and also outwardly manifest the gift of holy spirit, especially by speaking in tongues. When a person gets saved, he gets “born again,” and something is actually “born” inside the person—and the thing that is born is the nature of God. God is holy and God is spirit, and the person who is born of God receives the gift of holy spirit. However, like God, the holy spirit nature of God is invisible and cannot be “felt” by our natural bodies. Therefore we must bring our spiritual nature, the gift of holy spirit, into the senses world so we can see it and know it is there. That is a primary reason God gave the Christian Church the manifestation of speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 12:10). Speaking in tongues is the external manifestation of the internal presence of the gift of holy spirit, and
it proof that we have the gift of holy spirit and are saved [For more on speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5].

We believe the translation “because” that opens Romans 10:9 is very important because it clearly connects verses 8 and 9. The point God is making in verse 8 is “the message is near to you.” But how do we know the message is near to us? The answer is “because” all we have to do to be saved is confess and believe. A summary of verses 6-9 is: “Righteousness from God is not difficult to obtain. Do not say you have to go to heaven to get it, or down to the grave. It is near you, because if you just confess Jesus is Lord and believe God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

“confess.” The Greek word is homologeō (#3670 ὁμολογέω), which means “to say the same thing as another,” and in this case the person must speak the same thing as the truth on the subject, i.e., that Jesus Christ is Lord. It could be argued that because we normally think of confess in a negative context, such as when someone confesses he stole something, that “profess” or even “declare” would be better translations. However, while they may be good, the negative pressure against Christ and Christianity in the world seems to make “confess” a good translation, and sadly, many are afraid to openly confess Christ because of the pressure against it. Also, using “confess” shows that a person previously had another lord (be it themselves, greed, etc.) and that they have “confessed” that previous negative lordship. In this verse, the word homologeō and the word pisteuō (“believe” [#4100 πιστεύω]) are both in the aorist tense, which is very important. The aorist indicates a one-time action, and usually in the past. In fact, a very good case could be made for the translation: “If you confessed with your mouth…and believed in your heart…you will be saved.” There are many people who think that a one-time confession of Christ does not get a person “saved,” but rather Christians must continue to confess Christ as Lord over and over again. If that were the case, then “confess” and “believe” would be in the present tense, active voice, but they are not. The Greek text supports the fact that a person confesses Jesus one time and believes one time, and at that time becomes born again and is thus guaranteed everlasting life. A person can sin, or even live an immoral lifestyle after becoming born again, but that does not undo his guarantee of salvation. We do not work for salvation (Eph. 2:8), and just as good works cannot get us saved, evil works cannot undo our new birth [for more on the permanence of salvation, see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation.”]

“Lord.” Almost every time the word “Lord” occurs in the New Testament, it is a translation of the Greek word kurios (#2962 κύριος). Kurios is a masculine title indicating respect and position in society, and it is used many times in the New Testament.

It confuses some modern readers that God is called “Lord,” Jesus is called “Lord,” and other people are called “Lord,” but that would not confuse anyone in the first century. The word kurios was a general term for someone who was above you in some way, like “boss” or “captain,” and sometimes it was used simply as a term of respect, just like we sometimes use the word “sir.” If we need to ask a question to a stranger, we might start by saying, “Excuse me, sir,” even though the person is certainly not nobility and may not even be a good person.

One thing that complicates the study of the word “Lord” (kurios) is that many translations of the New Testament only translate kurios as “Lord” when it refers to Christ or God, when it refers to others they use “master,” “sir,” “owner,” etc. This complicates
what would otherwise be a simple study, and it falsely strengthens the belief that if both Jesus and God, and only Jesus and God, are called “Lord,” then Jesus must be God. That is simply not true. Kurios was a commonly used word in Greek, and, as was previously stated, was a masculine term of respect and social standing.

- God is called “Lord” (Matt. 1:20; 11:25; Acts 2:39; 1 Tim. 6:15; James 5:10).
- Jesus is called “Lord” (Matt. 7:21; Acts 10:36; Rom. 1:4; Eph. 4:5).
- Property owners are called “Lord” (Matt. 20:8; 21:40; Mark 12:9; Luke 20:13; Gal. 4:1, “owner” = kurios).
- Heads of households are called “Lord” (Mark 13:35; Luke 16:3; “owner” = kurios).
- Slave owners are called “Lord” (Matt. 10:24; 18:25, 31, 32, 35; 24:45; Luke 12:43; Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1, “master” = kurios).
- Husbands are called “Lord” (1 Pet. 3:6, “master” = kurios).
- A son calls his father “Lord” (Matt. 21:30, “sir” = kurios).
- A wife sometimes referred to her husband as “Lord” (1 Pet. 3:6).
- “Lord” was used in respectful address. The Greeks called Philip, “Lord.” Mary Magdalene called the person she thought was the gardener, “Lord.” Cornelius called the angel, “Lord.” John called one of the elders, “Lord.” (John 12:21; 20:15; Acts 10:4; Rev. 7:14, “sir” = kurios).
- The Roman Emperor is called “Lord” (Acts 25:26, “His Majesty” = kurios).
- Roman authorities are called “Lord” (Matt. 27:63, “sir” = kurios).

When Romans 10:9 tells us that we must confess Christ as kurios (Lord) to be saved, it is saying that we must recognize Jesus as boss, one who has authority over us. Both God and Jesus have authority over us, because Jesus sits at God’s right hand and administers His work.

There are Trinitarians who assert that saying Jesus is “Lord” makes him God. This is poor scholarship, and cannot be the case because if calling someone “Lord” made them God, then all the other people we saw above who were called “Lord” would be God also. Furthermore, the Bible says it was “God” who made Jesus “Lord.” Acts 2:36 says: “God has made this Jesus...both Lord and Christ.” If “Lord” equals “God,” then somehow God made Jesus “God,” which is something that even Trinitarians do not teach, because it is vital to Trinitarian doctrine that Jesus be co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. The fact that the Bible says God made Jesus “Lord” is an argument against the Trinity. That God, Jesus, property owners, slave owners, Roman authorities, fathers, husbands, and even strangers are called, “Lord” caused no problem for first century Greeks. They knew kurios was a word that communicated respect and social position.

“out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “from among the dead.”

“will be saved.” The Greek is sōzō (#4982 σωζω), which means to be saved, or be rescued, and in this context means saved from death by being given everlasting life. In this verse, sōzō is in the future tense, which is very important, especially when it is contrasted with “confess” and “believe,” which are aorist tense, which normally refers to an event in the past. Thus, Romans 10:9 accurately points to the fact that our “salvation” is a future event. Romans 10:9 could be accurately translated, “Because if you confessed
with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believed in your heart that God raised him out from among the dead, you will be saved.”

Christians are not “saved” yet in the full sense of the word. We are still subject to sin, sickness and death. When we are “saved” in the full sense of the word, we will be in our new, everlasting bodies, no longer subject to sin, sickness, and death. What we have now is a promise of salvation; a guarantee of salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14). There are some verses that say we are saved, and they are idiomatic. The idiom that some scholars refer to as the prophetic perfect occurs when a future event is so certain to occur that God speaks of it as already past. That is the case with the Christian’s salvation. The guarantee of salvation is so certain that God sometimes speaks of our salvation in the past tense. See the commentary on Romans 8:24, and for more on the prophetic perfect, see the commentary on Ephesians 2:6.

The New Birth and being “saved” or guaranteed salvation is referred to by different terms that emphasize different aspects of salvation. The word “saved” emphasizes the fact that a person who is born again and “saved” is “saved” from death and given everlasting life.

The term “new birth” or “born again,” is a good translation of the Greek word ἀναγεννᾶω (anagnénnáō; from the Greek prefix ana, “again” or “up,” and gennaó, “to give birth”), and it refers to the fact that the person who is “saved” has been “born” a second time, literally “born again.” This is very important to properly understand, because God does not use the word “born” haphazardly. “Born again” is not just a colorful metaphor; it describes a spiritual reality. In life, when there has been a birth, something has actually been “born.” When a human is “born again,” the “thing” that is born in him is the very nature of God. God is holy, and God is spirit, and a person who is “born again” (1 Pet. 1:3, 23), receives the nature of God, which is “holy spirit.” A person who is “born again” is “born of God” (1 John 5:4), and is a child of God (1 John 3:2). God also emphasizes our being born a second time by the Greek word ἀποκυέω (apokuèō; from the Greek prefix apo, “away from,” and kueó, “to be pregnant”), which means “to give birth to” (James 1:18).

Another way God refers to our salvation is that it is a new origin. Our first origin was in the flesh. When we get born again, we have a new origin, a spiritual one. God tells us this by using the word παλιγγενεσία (paliggeneśia; from palin, “again” and genesis, “genesis” or “origin”), which means to have an origin again, a new origin or new “genesis,” (Titus 3:5).

Another aspect of our new birth is that we have a new, divine nature. This makes perfect sense because the child always has the nature of the parents. Since God is now our Father, Scripture says we are partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

Another term that describes an aspect of our salvation is the term “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). We are new creations because in the new birth, the gift of holy spirit was created inside us and we literally are “new creations.”

Another term that describes an aspect of our salvation is “baptized in holy spirit” (Acts 1:5). This term emphasizes the spiritual power that the presence of the gift of holy spirit which is born inside us brings. Furthermore, the phrase “baptized in holy spirit” shows that God gave us an abundance of spirit, not just a small amount.

Another term that describes an aspect of our salvation is “holy one.” Every Christian is a “holy one” because of the divine nature of God, the gift of holy spirit,
which is born in him. In many English versions, the Greek word for “holy one” is translated “saint.” Christians are “holy,” not because of their behavior (which may be unholy), but because of their holy spiritual nature (see commentary on Philippians 1:1).

Another term that refers to our salvation is the term “Christian.” The name “Christian” was first coined when Paul and Barnabas were ministering in Antioch of Syria (Acts 11:26), and it occurs three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26, 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16). Its basic meaning is “follower of Christ” (see Bromiley, International Standard Bible Encyclopedia; under “Christian.” The Latin and Greek evidence about the term “Christian” is so strong that scholars generally agree as to its meaning). Most scholars recognize that “Christian” was not a name the believers coined about themselves, but rather it was a name given to the followers of Christ by others as a way to easily refer to them. Sadly, today the term “Christian” is not used properly. Instead of being used to refer to people who are actually born again of the spirit of God, it is used of people who are “cultural Christians” and not actually saved. In fact, today people who have been raised in a family that goes to church or have been baptized when they were a baby are often called “Christians” even though they have never had faith in Christ.

Modern dictionaries give a number of meanings for the word “Christian,” including a member of a Christian Church, a person who follows the example of Christ, or even a good and decent human being. From God’s perspective, however, a true Christian is a person who makes Jesus his Lord, which means each Christian is saved. No one is a genuine Christian because of the church he attends, or because he was baptized in water, or because he does good works. Unbelievers can do all those things. A Christian is someone who is saved and thus has been baptized in holy spirit and therefore has spiritual power. The loss of the true meaning of “Christian” has caused a lot of confusion in the Church today.

10:11. Quoted from Isaiah 28:16.

“put to shame.” See commentary on 9:33.

10:12. “call on him.” This is a prayer formula, and refers to prayer to Jesus Christ (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:2).

10:13. Quoted from Joel 2:32.

“calls on the name of the Lord.” This is a prayer formula, and refers to prayer to Jesus Christ (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:2).

10:15. Quoted from Isaiah 52:7.

10:16. “not all.” Figure of speech tapeinosis, “understatement” (Bullinger, Figures of Speech). It is not that “not all” believed. The majority of Israel, like the majority of all mankind, has rejected God. The figure of speech, by understating the truth, actually emphasizes the point, and emphasizes the fact that very few Jews believed.

“obey.” The Greek word is hupakouo (#5219 υπακοέω; pronounced hoop-a-kooy-ō), from akouo, to hear, to listen. Hupakouo means to listen and then to act, or “to obey,” but it is based on the fact that the person first listened. Thus there is a richness in the Greek that is hard to capture in English. When the text says they did not “obey,” it is saying that they did not pay any attention to what they were hearing and so they did not obey.

Quoted from Isaiah 53:1.

“what they heard from us.” The Greek is the noun akoē (#189 ἀκοή), and it refers to what is heard. While it can be translated “report,” since it occurs twice in the next verse (v. 17) as “hearing,” if it is “heard” in v. 16, there is more of a recognizable flow to
this section of Scripture. In fact, if all the “hearing” words are translated as such in this section, we get something like:

16 (But they did not all obey the Good News they heard. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed what they heard from us? [From Isa. 53:1]) 17 So trust comes from hearing, and hearing by the message of Christ.

10:17. “So.” After making the case that people need to hear to believe, he sums up, “so” (cp. NIV), the faith (the Christian faith) comes through hearing.

“faith.” The Greek contains the article “the.” It is not just “faith” in general that comes by hearing, but “the” faith, meaning the (Christian) faith for a person’s salvation. The context of this section starts in 10:1 with Paul’s desire that the Israelites would be saved; he then moves in verses 8 and 9 to the word of faith spoken for salvation, then on to calling on the Lord to be saved (v. 13), and then the need for missionaries to speak of this great salvation (vv. 14-15). Thus, by verse 17, it is clear from all this context that “the” faith being spoken of is the Christian faith in all its aspects.

“message of Christ.” Primarily a genitive of relation, the message about Christ, but it certainly includes the words “from Christ,” (Genitive of origin). The word about Christ, and the words of Christ, both lead men to salvation and “the faith.” When one word (of) has two applicable meanings, it is the Figure of Speech amphibologia, “double entendre.”


Chapter 11

11:2. “petitions.” This is a historical present, using the present tense to speak of an event that happened in the past. This usage portrays the event vividly, placing us in the middle of the action as though we are there to see Isaiah petition God, and hear the divine answer “say” (present tense, v. 4) back to Isaiah, essentially, that all of God’s people have not been cast off, there is a remnant of true Israel that remains (cp. 9:6, “not all those who are descended from Israel are truly Israel” [NET]). The question Paul was concerned with in present time was whether Israel had been cast off (11:1-2). By employing the historical present, Paul vividly resurrects Isaiah’s conversation with God from the past and brings it to bear on this question in the present, concluding with, “Even so, then at this present time there is also a remnant…” (11:5).

11:3. Quoted from 1 Kings 19:10, 14.

“life.” The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), often translated “soul.” The Greek word psuchē has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. [For a more complete explanation of psuchē, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

“divine response.” This is from *chrematismos* (#5538 χρηματισμός), the noun form of the verb *chrematizo* (#5537 χρηματίζω). See entry on “divinely instructed” in Matthew 2:12.

“men.” The Greek is *anēr* (#435 ἄνήρ), “men,” not the generic for “people.” The reference to “men” was no doubt to be a comfort to Elijah, because it meant that part of God’s army on earth was still intact. Gideon only needed 300 men and God’s help to defeat the Midianite army of 135,000.

11:5. “choice made by grace.” Compare NASB: “according to God’s gracious choice.” The Greek literally reads, “according to the choice of grace.” To translate “choice of grace” as a remnant “chosen by grace” could be confusing, as though God specifically chose each member of the remnant “by grace.” This is not the idea. Rather, that fact that there exists a remnant at all from national Israel is due to God’s gracious choice.


11:9. “dining table.” The Greek is *trapeza* (#5132 τράπεζα), a table, but it is clear from the context of Psalm 69:22 that the table being referred to is a dining table. Of course we must remember that the “dining table” of the eastern biblical world, even in Roman society, was not like our modern “table” around which people sat in chairs, but rather it was a cleared flat area, usually on a rug, or else a very low table that people reclined around, or, as in the Roman world, a low table with flat couches on 3 sides, and the diners reclined on the couches.

The context of Psalm 69:22 is very important to understanding why this quotation is used here. The enemies put poison into David’s food and gave him vinegar, not wine to drink, so David asks for vengeance. In this case, the Jews have ignored God and thus were bringing God’s vengeance on themselves.

“deathtrap.” The *skandalon* was the trigger of the trap, which then killed the victim.

“due retribution.” The people spurned God, and had a retribution coming to them (cp. Lenski.)

11:11. “resulting in falling beyond recovery.” This phrase is a result clause with *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood (cp. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, pg. 473) (See Matt. 2:15 entry, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled”). Paul is asking (using *me* which expects a negative answer) if Israel stumbled with the result that they have fallen irrevocably (cp. NET translation: “they did not stumble into an irrevocable fall, did they?”). The word for fall is *piptō* (#4098 πίπτω), which here has the sense of “be completely ruined” (BDAG). Robertson says this is the “effective aorist” of *piptō*, meaning “to fall completely and for good” (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*). Our translation captures both the sense of result and the irrevocableness of the fall in question.

“in order to.” The Greek is *eis to* with the infinitive, which here clearly indicates God’s purpose or intent.

11:15. “out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “from among the dead.”

11:19. “so that.” In the Greek this is a *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood purpose-result clause. The branches were broken off for the purpose of grafting in Gentiles, and his breaking them off resulted in room for the Gentiles. See Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.”

11:20. The English does not let us exactly reproduce the meaning of the Greek, or the Semitic understanding behind it. In both Hebrew and Greek, “fear” had the two meanings: of being in awe of something, and being afraid. The idea was that God was so
holy and powerful that, while we are in awe of Him, there is also an element of fear. We are not to be arrogant, but we are to “stand in awe” (NAB; RSV; NRSV) and “be afraid [if we disobey] (HCSB; NIVO). Most versions, like the REV, use the word “fear” and try to educate the reader of its two different meanings.

11:25. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]


11:32. “imprisoned.” The Greek word is sugkleioi (#4788 συγκλείω; pronounced soon-clay’-ō), and it means, to enclose on all sides, imprison, encage. Everyone alive has been trapped by sin and disobedience. No one can escape on their own, it has to be the work of an outsider, Jesus Christ. This applies to both the Jews and Gentiles. All men, due to sin nature, have a natural tendency to defy God; we are all caged together in defiance.

11:34, 35. Quoted from Isaiah 40:13 and Job 41:11.

Chapter 12

12:1. “reasonable service” The Greek word for reasonable is logikos (#3050 λογικός), and the exact meaning in this verse is quite hard to pin down. Thayer points out that the word was a favorite of ancient Greek philosophers, who used it in the sense of “rational,” from the use of logos as “reason.” Thus if it were used that way in the verse, “your reasonable service” would be a good translation. However, logikos was also used in a sense that referred to what belonged to the realm of words and logic versus the realm of matter. If used in that sense, “reasonable” stands opposed not to that which is foolish or unreasonable, but rather to that which is material, external, or of the flesh, such as the ritualistic and outward worship of the Jews. This is why many versions go with the translation “spiritual service” or “spiritual worship.” We felt, however, that to English speakers, “spiritual” was more misleading than “reasonable.” For us as Christians, our service and worship should come from within, not from without, and thus with our mind and spirit, not our flesh. Nigel Turner (Christian Words) sets forth one more possibility for the meaning of logikos, and that is “of the Word,” due to the Christian community beginning to associate logos with the Word. That is a possibility also. The only other time that this word is used is in 1 Pet 2:2 as “milk of the word” (see commentary). We think that all three of these possible definitions are true to an extent, but think that “reasonable service” makes the most sense in an English translation. Furthermore, since the concept of “reasonable” is an important part of the Greek word, it seemed important to bring that out into English.

12:2. “conformed to the pattern.” The Greek word translated “conformed to the pattern” is suschēmatizō (#4964 συσχηματίζω), which means to be formed or conformed to a mold or pattern. The Devil has an agenda to make the world, and the people in it, more and more ungodly. Christians will be rewarded for not conforming to the pattern of the age, but remaining godly. Nyland (The Source New Testament) has not to “go along with” the current age.
“age.” The Greek noun translated “age” is aiōn (ἁίων). The Greek word aiōn gets translated “age,” most of the time, but it is important that we think of “age” the same way the Greeks did. Generally, when we think of “age,” we mean a period of time. Although the word did refer to a period of time, it referred to the thinking and attitudes that existed in that age. Richard Trench writes that aiōn refers to “All that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world, which it may be impossible to cease and accurately define, but which constitutes a most real and effective power, being the moral, or immoral, atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale, again, inevitably to exhale,—all this is included in the aiōn…” (Synonyms of the NT).

Just as the owners of a Mexican or Chinese restaurant work hard to create an “atmosphere” that represents their home country, the Adversary works hard to make sure that this world has an “ungodly atmosphere.” We need to think through the implications of the statement that we are not to be conformed to the pattern of this “age,” i.e., the pattern of the ungodly atmosphere in which we are immersed. It helps a lot to understand and acknowledge that this “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4) is not an accident. The Adversary has worked hard for generations to put in place customs and ways of doing things that are contrary to God’s love and commands. This evil age did not “just happen.” Also, we must then realize the pressures that the culture puts on people to conform to those ungodly ways, and the price a person will have to pay to not conform to the ways of the world. There is serious pressure brought from the culture against people who want to live truly godly lives. That is why Scripture can promise: “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). As children of God, Christians should be willing to pay the price to serve and obey God, and we know that we will be richly rewarded in the Kingdom for our work for God now.

“be transformed.” The Greek verb is metamorphoō (μεταμορφώω), “be transformed” and it is in the passive voice. We do not actively transform ourselves. We control our thinking, and as we do, transformation takes place.

“test and approve.” The Greek word is dokimaζō (δοκιμάζω) “to draw a conclusion about worth on the basis of testing” (BDAG). Although we generally try to stay away from using a phrase to translate a Greek word, in this case the meaning is clear enough that a general exception needs to be made. In many situations, the Christian does not start out by knowing the will of God. Too many Christians who do not know the will of God in a situation either do nothing or pray for an inordinately long time, waiting for a clear answer. Often the will of God is “Try something!” We are to test (and many tests fail) and then finally be able to approve, the will of God.

12:3. “of himself.” This is supplied from the context, which is our relation to others in the Body of Christ.

“ought.” The Greek is dei (δεῖ; pronounced “day”), and refers to what is necessary. From God’s perspective, it is necessary that we think sensibly and not more highly of ourselves than is right.

“That measure of faith.” The Greek does not say that each person has the same measure of faith. On the contrary, although some versions say, “the measure of faith,” there is no word “the” in the Greek, and “a measure of faith” would be more accurate. Each person has a function in the body and a service (“ministry”) to perform, and God makes sure that each person has the faith potential to do the ministry God gave them. One
person may not have the faith to do what another person does, but he or she has the faith potential to do what God has called him or her to do.

12:7. “teaching.” The Greek word is didaskalia (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse we felt “teaching” was better than “doctrine,” because the verse is speaking of the person who is a teacher using his gift and teaching.” For more on didaskalia see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13.

12:8. “liberality.” The Greek word is haplotēs (#572 ἡπλότης), and literally means, “singleness.” It the same Semitic idiom Jesus used in Matthew 6:22, when he said if your eye was “single,” then your whole body would be full of light. Idiomatically, the “single eye” is the generous eye. Christians are to give generously, liberally (see commentary on Matthew 6:22).

“The one who leads and cares for people.” The Greek word translated “leads and cares for” here is proístēmi (#4291 προϊστήμεν; pronounced pro-hiss-ˈ-tay-me), and it has two very important meanings. Proístēmi means to lead, preside over, rule. However, it also has a very significant second meaning: to be a protector or guardian, to give aid and attention to, to care for. Both the BDAG and Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicons suggest this second definition is the primary meaning in Romans 12, and while other lexicons and translations may not go that far, good Greek-English lexicons have the second meaning of proístēmi. Anyone reading the Greek text sees both meanings at once.

In the Greco-Roman world it was a well-established custom that leaders, especially civic leaders, were also to give aid to and care for the people under them. Although most English versions feel that “lead” is the primary meaning in Romans 12:8 and thus have that in their versions, the Amplified Bible has both meanings (the Amplified Bible reads: “he who gives aid and superintends”) and we felt both meanings were important enough to have in the text as well, and thus the REV reads, “the one who leads and cares for people.” In contrast to most versions and the Amplified and REV, some versions have the meaning about giving aid as the only meaning in the text. Thus The Inspired Letters of the New Testament by Frank Laubach, has: “He who helps others, let him do it with all his might.” Similarly, The Source New Testament by A. Nyland has: “Let the person who gives aid do it eagerly.”

We felt that having only the definition about helping or giving aid and omitting the definition about being a leaders would mislead the readers. Anyone in the Greco-Roman world grew up knowing that being a civic leader and giving aid went hand in hand, but that is not clear in today’s world. In our modern world, people who care for others typically don’t lead, and leaders far too often do not care for others, even when they are supposed to. Thus we felt that to bring the meaning of the Greek into the English we had to follow the example of the Amplified Bible and include both meanings.

The take-home message of this verse is important to anyone who believes he or she is called into a leadership position in the Body of Christ. From God’s point of view, service in the ministry is civic service and leadership involves actually getting with people and helping them. Christian leaders are not to “lead from behind the lines,” by just telling people what they should do, they are get with people and lead in a personal and meaningful way, giving help, support and aid where it is needed.
12:9. “(abhor that which is evil; cling to that which is good).” The structure of this verse in the context of verses 10-13, which are structured the same way, seems to dictate that the phrase in parenthesis is explaining what it means to have love without hypocrisy, rather than starting a new thought. Love that does not abhor evil and cling to good is not love, but hypocrisy.

12:10. “As to” (see Lenski).

“brotherly affection.” The Greek is philadelphia (#5360 φιλαδέλφεια), a compound Greek word made up of philos (#5384 φίλος, a strong liking, a friendship; see commentary on John 21:15) and adelphos (#80 ἀδελφός), which means “brother.” It is the strong bond of friendship that exists between brothers.

“family affection.” This Greek word is philostorgos (#5387 φιλόστοργος), which is a compound word made up of philos (the noun form of philē; see commentary on John 21:15) and storgē. The Greek verb storgē does not occur as a single word in the NT, but is used in compound form. It is the mutual love of parents and children, and wives and husbands. Storgē is the love that naturally exists between family members. A mother may not know why she loves her child, she just does. Family love is often unexplainable and very strong. God wants Christians to have that kind of love for each other. The negation of family love, being without affection, is the compound word astorgos (#794 ἀστοργος), found in Romans 1:31 and 2 Timothy 3:3. For an explanation of the other types of love in the Bible, see the commentary note on John 21:15.

“leading and outdoing.” The Greek word is proēgeomai (#4285 προηγέομαι). We agree with Friberg’s lexicon which lists leading and outdoing as meanings, and see both those meanings in this verse. When it comes to honor, we are not to be content just to be part of the crowd, but we are to lead, and even outdo each other, in the good sense of never being satisfied with how we honor God and man.

12:11. “not procrastinating” “Pertaining to shrinking from or hesitating to engage in something worthwhile, possibly implying lack of ambition” (Louw-Nida, Lexicon, and cp. Lenski.).

12:13. “As to hospitality.” The biblical customs concerning hospitality differ greatly because the Bible takes place over thousands of years and involves many cultures. However, throughout the Bible there is a consistent message that people should extend hospitality to each other. This was very true in the Roman world, and the New Testament instructs Christians to extend hospitality to others. Besides Romans 12:13, the Bible specifically tells Christian leaders to show hospitality (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8), and 1 Peter 4:9 says, “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.”

One of the major aspects of showing hospitality to others was opening your home to overnight guests. In fact, a number of homes had guestrooms just for that purpose. One of the many reasons Christians were to show hospitality to others was because the inns in the Roman world were almost always unpleasant, ungodly places. Travel has always been difficult, and in fact, our English words “travel” and “travail” not only come from the same Latin root word, they were once the same English word and were differentiated only recently; English writings from as late as the 1700’s show “travail” being used when today we would say, “travel”. In the Roman world, the condition of the inns only added to the travail of travel.

The inns were so unpleasant that people who could avoid them usually did. Most wealthy people and dignitaries were able to stay in the private residences of friends and
contacts, but sometimes they just camped beside the road. Friends and associates often had an “I’ll stay at your place and you stay at mine” agreement, and sometimes formalized it with a *tessera hospitalis*. The *tessera* was a small clay tablet or a clay flat-figure that came in many shapes and sizes, but was often in the shape of a pig, cow, lion, or shaking hands. The *tessera* was broken in half, and each party to the agreement kept a half. The traveler carried his half, which gave him entre to the other home even if the owner was away—if the halves matched, slaves or servants who watched over the house immediately granted room and board to the traveler.

In many cases sleeping outdoors would have been nicer than staying in a Roman inn, but the danger of robbers was usually so great that people sought out the “safety” of an inn. The general exceptions were wealthy people and groups. The wealthy usually traveled with a small army of servants who would carry the tents and food and act as bodyguards, while groups were generally protected by virtue of their size.

As a class of people, the innkeepers were of such ill repute that Roman law forbade them from joining the army or forming a trade guild. They were generally cheats and thieves, and suspected of spying on their clients and selling the information, which was very likely since they and their prostitute staff were in a good position to find out lots of juicy information from the clientele. Innkeepers’ wives also had a bad reputation (although many innkeepers were women), and St. Augustine warned travelers about innkeeper’s wives who were witches and who would add magic potions to the food and turn the traveler into a mule.

The standard clientele of the inns were usually equally as rough as the innkeepers. They were peddlers, muleteers, sailors or soldiers, slaves or freedmen running errands, runaway slaves, and the like. Roman graffiti is just one thing that reveals the rough character of the low class Roman. The excavation of Pompeii reveals a lot of graffiti on both private and public buildings, and perhaps a third of it is scatological, and a number are curses.

Although inns in the Roman world all differed somewhat, just as our modern motels do, they also had a lot of similarity. A standard Roman inn was a courtyard surrounded by rooms. Baggage and animals stayed in the open yard, while people spent the night in a room (or beside their animal if they thought it would be stolen). Almost all inns had a kitchen and a dining room, although sometimes the cooking and eating occurred in one big room. Some inns converted the dining room into a dormitory for sleeping at night or used it for sleeping if the rooms were all full.

Innkeepers made money most any way they could, so many inns had some kind of shop attached, such as smith’s shop, where travelers could have repairs made to animal tack, carts, etc., and some inns offered medical treatment, if it could be called that, to people who got sick on the road.

Winter cold and summer heat are always hard on travelers, and most inns offered only a little comfort. To fight the winter cold, some of the more expensive inns had a hot air duct system under the floor or in the walls (the same basic system that was used to heat the *caldarium*, the “hot pool,” in the Roman baths). The average inn, however, would have had some kind of brazier or fireplace that heated with coal or wood, or else no heat at all. However, there was no reliable relief from the heat of summer. The only way to cool rooms during the summer was any breeze coming through the door or a
window. Many inns had second story rooms that better caught the daily breezes and were more comfortable than lower rooms.

Unlike modern hotels, the average inn did not rent a whole room to the traveler, but rather rented a sleeping space in a room. In nicer inns a person could rent a bed with a straw mattress, but often the “bed” was just a spot on the floor with straw or grasses cut from a field. The obvious question anyone renting a place in the inn would ask themselves was, “With whom (and with how many) will I be sharing a room tonight?” One had to guard his person and belongings very carefully. Roman records show that a number of people who stayed at the inns were murdered for the goods they were carrying, and stealing was very common.

Every experienced traveler also became an expert at inspecting bedding for bedbugs and other creatures, such as fleas, spiders, lizards, etc. No telling how many people had already slept on the matting that was the bed. Bedbugs were so common that they had a nickname: cauponarum aestiva animalia, “the summertime creatures of the inn.”

The inns were not usually very desirable places to eat, so most travelers carried at least a little something to eat on their journey, making Jesus’ specific instruction to his Apostles not to take food with them when they traveled an unusual request (Mark 6:8). The ancients watered down their wine, and that included the Romans. Unscrupulous innkeepers, however, watered it down a lot to increase their profits. Paul refers to this practice in 2 Corinthians 4:2, and says he is not “adulterating the word of God” (cp. NASB), that is, he did not water down the Word for his own profit, but taught it full strength, even though sometimes that cost him dearly.

Much more ghastly than watering down the wine was the cheating of some innkeepers (actually, the Roman physician Galen said he knew of many) who stole dead bodies from the Coliseum and cooked them in order to boost profits. Inn food was usually in the form of spicy soups and stews so apparently clients rarely noticed. One cheating innkeeper was discovered, however, when a human finger bone showed up in the stew.

All inns had gambling—it just came with the clientele who stayed there. However, there were locals who frequented the inns to take part in the gambling and perhaps enrich themselves with some of the travelers’ purses. In fact, just as today people go “bar-hopping” or on a “bar-crawl,” occasionally some of the more well-to-do townsfolk would go from inn to inn, gambling and carousing through the night. The noise from the raucous partiers could make sleeping in the inn difficult.

Most inns were staffed by male and female slaves who, along with their everyday chores, made money for the owner by being rented out as prostitutes. So if the person or persons the traveler was sharing the room with had the money to pay for sex, well, that would be an added distraction in the room.

Since innkeepers were often dishonest, savvy travelers agreed upon the price they would pay ahead of time. A writing found in southeast Italy speaks of some of the services in an ancient inn, and the guest had obviously agreed upon the prices before paying (quoted from Lionel Casson, Travel in the Ancient World, p. 207).

Guest: “Innkeeper, let’s reckon up the bill.”
Innkeeper: “One sextarius of wine [about a pint] and bread: one as. Food, two asses.” [The assarion, or as, was about a tenth of a denarius, so a laborer would earn about ten asserions or “asses” as it was abbreviated, per day].

Guest: “Correct.”

Innkeeper: “Girl, eight asses.”

Guest: “Correct again.”

Innkeeper: “Hay for the mule, two asses.”

Guest: “That mule will be the death of me!”

To avoid the inns and the ungodliness associated with them, Christians tried to find other Christians with whom they could stay. Thankfully, many Christians knew about the believers in other towns and where to find them, and people usually willingly opened their homes and hearts to brothers and sisters on the road. God commanded Christians who had food and shelter to provide hospitality for others, and that is something we should still be willing to practice today.


“seeking to show it.” That phrase is translated from the one Greek word διώκω (#1377 διώκω), which is used in both Romans 12:13 and 12:14. Διώκω occurs some 45 times in the New Testament and is used in both a good sense and a bad sense. When used in a good sense it means to run quickly and decisively toward something, to run after something in order to obtain it, to pursue. When used in a bad or negative sense it means to persecute, or to cause to run or flee (thus drive out or drive away).

Paul uses διώκω very effectively to get his point across in Romans 12:13 and 14, using the definitions of διώκω against one another (in Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, Bullinger notes this as one of the occurrences of antanaclasis, when a word or word is used in the same sentence but has two different meanings). The meaning in 12:14 is obvious to us: we are not to curse those who persecute us, but are to bless them. When contrasted with that use of διώκω, by using it in verse 13 the Word emphasizes that we are to “chase after” hospitality, “pursue” it, “run after it in order to obtain it.” It should go without saying that this command still applies to Christians today. Although our motels and restaurants are nicer today than in the Roman world, Christians should still “seek to show hospitality.” Ecclesiastes 5:13 warns us of wealth that harms its owner, and that can be the case today. Sometimes we are afraid to open our homes to others because we fear what might happen to our things—things we have usually worked hard for. While we want to be wise, true wisdom lies in the eternal verities of valuing relationships, helping others, and fellowshipping around the Good News. These are the
things we should be seeking. We should never be so materialistically minded that we put our “stuff” ahead of the chance to share and spread the Good News of Jesus Christ.


12:16. “Have the same regard for one another.” The Greek is literally, “the same thing toward one another thinking.” We believe Lenski is correct when he says, “This is not…‘harmonious mutual relationship’ but something far more definite: having in mind for another the same thing that under like circumstances one has in mind for oneself.”

The New Jerusalem Bible says, “Give the same consideration to all others alike,” in other words, do not pay attention to the social status of people when you are dealing with them. Many people act differently toward others depending on their social status, and we are not to do this. Treat everyone the same. This guidance is expanded in the context.

“do not regard that which is ‘high.’” It is easier to express possible multiple meanings in Greek than in English here, and the Greek simply says, “not thinking [about] the high.” Thus it can be thinking about, or regarding people of high standing (NJB, “social standing”) or “high things,” (as the KJV), those things we think of as higher or more valuable. Our life is not better or godlier if we associate with rich people rather than poor people, or live in a mansion rather than a hut. God looks on the heart of people, not their wealth or social status, and He pays attention to how we use the things that we have for His purposes, no matter if they are prestigious, very valuable, or ordinary. We are not to be captivated by that which is “high” in the world.

“associate with the lowly.” As with “high” in the previous phrase, the Greek “lowly” can refer to lowly people or lowly things.

12:17. “Think ahead of time.” The Greek is pronoëō (#4306 προνοέω), which is a compound word from the prefix pro (before) and noeō (to have in the mind). It can mean “to consider” and “to think about beforehand.” Interestingly, the KJV says “provide,” which in the English of the time period meant, “to exercise foresight in taking due measures in view of a possible event” (Oxford English Dictionary), or “to think about beforehand.” Over time the meaning of “provide” became “furnish for use.” While we certainly are to “consider” how to do what is honorable for men, the verse is deeper than that. We are to think ahead of time how to be honorable to God and men. Especially in the context of not repaying evil for evil, thinking ahead of time how to act can keep us from acting out of emotion and the heat of the moment. We can do what is honorable if we plan ahead.

12:19. Quoted from Deuteronomy 32:35.

“give place to the wrath of God.” This phrase contains the figure of speech Ellipsis. Leaving out “of God,” which is clearly implied in the context, places the emphasis on “wrath.” Evildoers will not go unpunished. The Christian does not need to avenge himself, but can pray and wait for God’s wrath to manifest itself. The verb, “give place” is in the imperative mood; it is a command. God forcefully commands us to not avenge ourselves. Our part is to love and bless those who persecute us, and to step aside to allow God to avenge His people.


“for by doing this you will heap coals of fire on his head.” The meaning of this phrase is not immediately obvious, and so there have been many suggestions as to what it means. A large part of the problem in interpreting the verse is that there is no literal custom like it referred to in the ancient sources.
The most common interpretation of the phrase about coals of fire, and the one that best fits the context, history, and examples from ancient writings, is that the coals are not literal, but refer to a mental burning; a burning that occurs in the mind of the enemy when a kindness is done to him. We must keep in mind that Rome was an “honor/shame” society, and that people loved honor and sought after it. If a believer did an honorable thing by being kind and helping an enemy, it could create a mental conflict in that enemy because quid-pro-quo would say do something honorable back, or be shamed for failing to do so. That mental shame or conflict might prompt the person to change and come to Christ.

The burning coals on the head represent something such as the burning shame that arises in a person who is helped by an enemy, or the burning mental conflict that being helped by an enemy produces. Thus, much more in the honor-shame society of Rome than in our modern society, doing good for an enemy would indeed heap coals of fire on his head. Lange writes: “The most immediate effect of such expressions [of love] is burning shame, a religious and moral crisis. He will bend his head as if fiery coal lay on it.” The key to the section is recognizing that shame and crisis produce change, and it is the goal of the coals of fire to produce genuine change in the enemy and win them over. Did not Jesus Christ win us to himself even when we were hostile to him (Rom. 5:6-10), by giving himself for us? And Scripture says it is the kindness of God that leads people to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Telling believers to do good to an enemy in the hopes that the goodness would produce shame or mental conflict that would lead to change fits with the message of Romans and the flavor of the entire New Testament.

Most commentators agree that the burning coals refer to the burning shame, or some kind of mental conflict in the person who has been helped, but they differ on how to understand the shame. Some commentators have felt that showing kindness to enemies in contexts such as this is a way to draw down upon the person severe Divine wrath, or make clear to the person there will be divine wrath in the future since the context includes “vengeance is mine, says the Lord” (cp. Chrysostom, Theodoret, Zwingli, Beza, etc.). This explanation, however, contradicts the spirit of the chapter, and indeed the spirit of the entire NT. We do not bless people so the wrath of God can come, or to make people aware the wrath of God will be poured out in the future. Also, it is the believer who is doing the kindness, and thus would be the believer who was wreaking some kind of vengeance. If being good to an enemy was a type of vengeance, then the believer’s motives would not actually be to love and help the enemy, but to attack him, although in a seemingly strange and generally unproductive way, since the history of doing kindness to enemies, while it sometimes warms an enemy’s heart, is often simply ignored and taken advantage of, and produces no change at all.

Church Fathers such as Augustine and Jerome spoke the coals of fire on the head in terms of the pain of penitence (repentance). This is true, but we must be sure to take the illustration of the coals of fire to its full conclusion. It is true that there often is a feeling of shame and remorse when we recognize we have been wrong, but it is not the goal of kindness to produce the pain of repentance, even though repentance is part of the process of change. The goal of kindness, as we see from God’s and Christ’s undeserved kindness to us, is to produce change in the person to whom the kindness is shown. The kindness will produce the burning feeling of shame or mental conflict, which leads to repentance (which also often has shame), which results in being won to Christ.
It has been suggested by some Bible teachers that the Romans must have tortured people by putting burning coals on their head. However, there is simply no historical evidence of a practice like that. Also, that interpretation does not fit with the context. The believer is not doing good to enemies to torture them, but rather to be like Christ and to win them over by kindness.

K. C. Pillai, a native of India who taught on oriental customs, understood the verse in a totally different way, and said the coals on the head referred to a biblical custom. Pillai taught that in biblical villages, someone, usually a young boy, would be appointed to carry hot coals from tent to tent or house to house in the morning so families could easily start their morning fires. The boy would carry the coals in a clay vessel on his head and the hot coals would warm him in the cool morning air. In the same way, our good deeds would be coals on the head and warm up the heart of an enemy.

Unfortunately, as plausible as Pillai’s suggestion seems, there is no evidence in any ancient source that it actually occurred, and especially in Rome, where people lived in tight quarters. That fact, along with our knowledge that Pillai taught other things that were just modern interpretations of biblical verses, causes us to discount his interpretation as not being accurate.

The history of Christianity is a wonderful history of people doing good to those who have done nothing to deserve being treated well, and winning over those unbelievers by the very good they do not deserve. This, of course, started with God, who so loved the undeserving world that He gave His only Son. This example was followed by Christ, who so loved us that, while we were still enemies, He gave His life for us. The early Christians followed God and Christ, and through the centuries Christians have followed those examples, and done good to the undeserving, and by that good have won some of them to Christ. If we are going to help God change anyone, then we must be as Christ was, and give up ourselves for the benefit of others. If we can be kind to others, we have a chance of helping them change and come to Christ.

Chapter 13

13:1. “soul.” Here, “soul,” psuchē, means “person,” but there is an emphasis on the fact that the people need to control their thoughts and emotions. It is very easy to become mentally and emotionally agitated to the point of sin by what our leaders and representative do, and God warns us against that ungodly behavior. See commentary on Romans 2:9.

“for there is no authority except of God, and the powers that exist have been instituted by God.” This verse can be confusing to the average reader, who can assume from it that every government and governmental authority figure is from God. We only have to look at the Word of God to tell that is not what the verse is saying. Many godly people rebelled against their governments. Moses rebelled against Pharaoh’s evil leadership, and had God’s help doing it; including the plagues on Egypt, the death of Pharaoh himself and the destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. Rahab the prostitute lied to her king (Josh. 2:2-6), but was rewarded for it and is even in the genealogy of Christ (Matt. 1:5). Many of the Judges fought against oppressive government, and had God’s help doing it. For example, the Bible says God raised up
Ehud as a deliverer, and he not only rebelled against the Moabite government, he assassinated Eglon, the king of Moab (Judg. 3:12-30). David rebelled against King Saul, and had the help of God’s prophets when hiding from Saul. Jeroboam rebelled against King Rehoboam (Solomon’s son), and when Rehoboam got his army together to fight with Jeroboam, Yahweh’s prophet said not to fight, that the rebellion was from God (1 Kings 12:24). The religious leaders in Jerusalem had an arrest warrant out on Jesus, but he did not turn himself in, he ignored it (John 11:57). The Apostles openly disobeyed the commandments of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling body in Israel, and told the leaders, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29; cp. Acts 4:19). Since the Bible says a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, it cannot be that God puts governments and people in place and then helps others fight them or tear them down.

So if the verse is not saying that every government and ruler is from God, what is it saying? God is a God of order, and not of disorder or confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). In that light, God has established that there would be governments by which people’s lives could be governed. For example, in the Old Testament He provided for leadership in the Wilderness (Deut. 1:13ff), then local leadership over the towns of Israel, usually referred to as the elders of the gate. When Israel wanted a king, God selected Saul. In the future, the Millennial Kingdom and Everlasting Kingdom will be ruled by a king: Jesus Christ.

We can see that God has established that there would be an organization to society, and thus there have to be governments, and in doing that He has set the general principle in place that people obey their governments; God is not an anarchist. It goes without saying that governments that are run by humans are not going to be perfect, and God is not going to tolerate rebellion and civil disobedience just because some people do not agree with what the government is doing. The general biblical principle is that God has set things such that there is, and in fact has to be, authority to govern mankind and that authority is invested in the government, so we should obey the government, even when we do not agree with its laws. Therefore, when the Bible says, “and the powers that exist have been instituted by God,” it does not mean that every individual leader has been put in place by God, or every governmental institution has been put in place by God. It means that God is the one who decreed that governmental powers exist, and so Christians are told to obey the government (Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13, 14), which is, of course, a general command, not an absolute command.

Although Romans 13 says that governmental authorities have been appointed by God, it cannot be divorced from the scope of Scripture, and so from other scriptures we learn several things about government. For one thing, just because a government leader is in a position of authority because God ordained government does not mean that he (or she) is not being held accountable by God for his thoughts and actions. In fact, God holds leaders to a higher standard and higher level of accountability than the average person being governed. God’s Word and His Law are still the standard by which people are to relate to each other, and are the standard from which governments are to construct their laws. That is why when God told Israel some things about having a righteous king, one of them was:

“When he [the king] takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully
all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left” (Deut. 17:18-20).

If the king takes the time to write his own copy of the Law by his own hand, he will become more acquainted with what it says—a good thing since God will hold him accountable to govern his people by God’s laws. While godly leaders will be blessed, government leaders who take advantage of their authority will find themselves in serious trouble on the Day of Judgment.

Government leaders need to know that the decisions they make, and influence others to make, are being weighed by God, and if the leaders of a country lead that country and its people away from God, the country itself will suffer, as both history and the Bible show. Deuteronomy 28 is written to Israel, but much of it applies to any nation, because it is God who blesses and protects those who love Him, and cannot protect and bless those who turn from Him.

Lastly, we need to realize that when government leaders decide to abrogate their innate responsibility to obey God, their creator, and pass laws and regulations that are contrary to His laws, godly people find themselves in the position of the Apostles: we ought to obey God rather than men. Because God has ordained government, those people who disobey their government almost always suffer to some extent, even if their disobedience is for a godly cause. Israel suffered in Egypt when Moses stood against Pharaoh, David suffered in the wilderness when rebelling against Saul, and the Apostles were jailed and beaten when opposing their ungodly religious leaders. Thus, even when rebellion seems to be called for by godly people, it is not without a price.

13:3. “the one in authority.” Although this can be rendered as an abstract noun, just “the authority,” the context shows that it refers to someone in authority (cp. v. says that he is God’s “public servant”).

13:4. “carry the sword.” Often the Romans in charge of keeping peace carried a sword, certainly the Roman soldiers did.

13:6. “taxes.” The Greek is phoros (#5411 φόρος). “That which is brought in as payment to a state, with implication of dependent status, tribute, tax” (BDAG) “A payment made by the people of one nation to another, with the implication that this is a symbol of submission and dependence” (Louw-Nida, *Lexicon*)

13:8. “Do not keep on owing.” The verb “owe” is opheilō (#3784 ὀφειλέω), and it means to owe, or be in debt to. The conjugation of this verb is important. Grammatically it can be present indicative, or a present imperative. If indicative, it would be saying, “You do not owe anyone anything except to love...,” but that cannot be the sense, because we can owe people, and the context has just said that we have to pay people what we owe (vs. 6 and 7). That means opheilō is a present, active, imperative, verb. The fact that it is a present active means that it can have an ongoing force, which it does in this context (cp. Hendriksen, *Romans*; “Do not keep on owing...”). This verse is not contradicting the other verses in the Bible that say people can lend when they have extra, or borrow when they have need (cp. Exod. 22:25, 26; Deut. 15:7-11; 24:6; Neh. 5:3-5; Ps. 37:26; Matt. 5:42; lending is included, because if it is a sin to borrow, then it would be a sin to cause another to sin by lending to him).

This verse is not saying that a person cannot borrow if he has a need, or a person cannot borrow longer term or for larger items (house, car) if the debt is being repaid. The
verb, “do not keep on owing,” shows that this verse is a condemnation of those who borrow and who do not repay or repay slowly and grudgingly, forcing the person who has kindly helped when there was a need to come and ask for what is rightfully his.


13:10. “love does no wrong.” Is that what it is to love someone, to do him no harm? If I do not harm someone, therefore I love him? No, a thousand times no. This is the figure of speech tapeinosis, or demeaning. It is the deliberate demeaning, or lessening of something in order to elevate or increase it. It often comes in the form of an understatement. We are aware that sometimes the most powerful way to emphasize something is to understate it. The understatement is subtle, and therefore this tapeinosis is often not noticed, but love is much more than just not harming someone. Without the tapeinosis, a more literal understanding of love is that it does good to its neighbor.

13:12. “the day is near.” The word “near” is from the Greek word eggizō (#1448 ἐγγίζω), which is a common word that means “near,” “nearby,” or “close at hand,” and can refer to near in space (Luke 18:40) or near in time (Matt. 26:45). Here it is near in time. God said that the end was “near” even though it has now been some 2000 years without the end coming. In both the Old Testament, Gospels, and New Testament, God said the end was near ( Isa. 13:6; 29:17; 51:5; Zeph. 1:7, 14; Ezek. 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:14; Obad. 1:15; Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Rom. 16:20; James 5:8; Rev. 1:1). We do not know the reason for this, but the effect is that we should always be ready for the Lord. In contrast with “night,” “the day” (the Greek has the definite article, “the”) is the time of light and goodness, and in this context it is also a reference to the “Day of the Lord,” when the Rapture of the Church occurs ending the Administration of the Grace of God and beginning the Tribulation, which will culminate with the Second Coming of Jesus and the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-21).

13:13. “daytime.” In contrast with verse 12 in which the Greek word hèmera (day) has the definite article (“the day”), this verse has hèmera without the definite article, so it means “daytime.” The Roman world had only oil lamps and torches to produce light after dark and these were not very effective. Thus many people did things in the dark when they could not be seen that they would never have done in the daylight when they would be easily recognized. God wants us to “walk with decency” in the nighttime just as we do in the daytime. The Christian is not to live a double life, living in sin when he can get away with it, then pretending to be godly when others can see. Christians are to live as if they were being watched by other godly people all the time.

“orgies.” The Greek word is kōmos (#2970 κῶμος), it usually translated as “orgies,” “reveling,” or “carousing.” The word originally meant something like “merrymaking” but came to be associated with wild religious festivals where drunken, frenzied mobs would parade the streets after dinner hours with torches accosting people, singing, and carousing. This was associated with orgies and self-mutilation.

13:14. “and do not think ahead.” The Greek is simply “to do” in the imperative present middle and the Greek word for “forethoughts,” but the translation “do not do forethoughts” is awkward. We have rendered the phrase “do not think ahead.”

“forethoughts” is the Greek noun pronoia (#4307), what is thought about beforehand. The flesh has desires, and many people follow those desires instead of bringing their thoughts captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). How many, many times our sin starts by our paying attention to what our flesh desires, thinking ahead about what it
wants, what it is pressuring us to do that is outside the will of God. We start with the faintest forethoughts, which become stronger and stronger as we dwell on them and as the forethoughts take shape into ideas and plans. We dwell on the desires, then can become consumed with them to the point that we begin planning to fulfill them, finally acting on what our flesh craves. This verse is the way out: do not think ahead about how to fulfill the desires of the flesh.

“flesh.” The “flesh,” which in this context represents both our flesh and our sin nature, produces desires in us that are not godly. These can be as simple as oversleeping or overeating, desires of the flesh of our body, or they can be desires that are very depraved in nature. The more ungodly a person becomes, the more mental time he or she spends thinking about and planning how to fulfill these ungodly desires. God tells us to bring our thoughts captive to Christ, to not allow ourselves to think ungodly thoughts (2 Cor. 10:5). The book of James describes the downhill course of ungodly thinking. First, we are enticed by our own desires or lusts (epithumia; the same Greek word as used here in Rom. 13:14). The lust then “conceives” as it is incubated in our minds, and then it gives birth to sin. Sin eventually ends in death (James 1:14, 15). In the Greek, the verb “to do” in this verse is in the imperative mood, the mood of command. God knows that if we think about how to satisfy our fleshly desires, we will end up in sin, so He commands us to not allow ourselves to think ahead of time about how to satisfy our fleshly desires.

Chapter 14

14:1. “for the purpose of.” The purpose clause comes from the Greek preposition eis, which can indicate purpose. We are to “welcome” those who are weak in the faith (not just “accept” them), but we are not to welcome them just so we can debate with them about why they believe what they believe.

“to the end of quarreling.” The Greek word is diakrisis (#1253 διάκρισις) and it comes from the root word krinō, which is “to judge.” Thus, the word can refer to passing judgment, or that which came from passing judgment, i.e., a quarrel. This verse says that we are to welcome people who differ from us, and we should, with open arms. But too often Christians receive each other, but have secret motives of changing each other, which often just leads to fights. The Greek preposition eis generally means “to” or “with the result that,” (sometimes “for the purpose of”), and here it seems to be saying that we should receive weaker Christians, but not to the end that we begin quarreling about their opinions. If we receive them, let’s continue in that love. If God opens a door for discussion, fine, but we do not start with that purpose.

14:3. “The one who eats everything must not treat...with contempt.” This seems to be the best rendering of the verb exoutheneō (#1848 ἐξουθενεῖ), “to look down upon; to treat with contempt,” which is in the third person, present imperative. In other words, the meaning here is that each person is to be careful how they treat others. If the verse is rendered something like “Let the one who eats not...” as many versions are, then the understood subject of the verb (the Church, perhaps?) is to make sure that people do not treat others with contempt. But there is no guidance about how to stop people from looking down on others, and no guidance as to what to do with someone in the Church who looks down on others.
“treat…with contempt.” From exoutheneo (§1848 ἐξουθενέω). See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:20.

“accepted.” The Greek is proslambanō (§4355 προσλαμβάνω) and it means to accept, as God or Christ would accept someone, but often more than that, to welcome someone, to take the person into one’s home. It occurs in verse 1 and here in verse 3. In verse 1 we translated it “welcome” because it was one person welcoming another. In the context of verse 1, “accepting” seemed too cold for the context; as Christians, we are not just to “accept” one another, but to welcome each other. However, we do not usually think of God as “welcoming” us, but rather we feel blessed to know that we are “accepted” by God. Although we recognize that “welcome” and “accepted” are the same word in Greek, we thought it communicated the sense in English better to say “welcome” than “accepted.”

14:4. “someone else’s.” The Greek is “another’s.” We thought the phrase “someone else’s” captured that thought into English very clearly.

“household slave.” The Greek is oiketēs (§3610 οἰκέτης) and means a slave who is part of the household, or it can refer to a domestic. The emphasis here must not be missed. This is not simply doulos, slave (or servant; §1401), or another Greek word for servant. The emphasis is that this person is part of the household. A household slave was a slave, certainly, but also part of the household. He or she was not a hired servant who could come and go, but a part of the household. That God would use the word oiketēs here brings our minds back to the fact that each Christian is part of God’s household, a slave in His house. Just as no Roman would go to another man’s house and pass judgment on his slaves, we are all God’s slaves in His household and are not to pass judgment on one another.

14:5. “above another day.” We are not to judge others for the time, or days, they set aside for special activities or rest. See commentary on Colossians 2:16.

14:8. “we live…we live…we die…we die.” A beautiful figure of speech, epadiplosis, which is the name of the figure of speech that occurs when the figure epanadiplosis occurs in successive phrases or sentences (Bullinger, Figures).

14:9. “became alive.” When used with “died,” the word zaō, live, has the force of “become alive” or even “become alive again.”


“judgment seat of God.” Every person will be judged in the future, and rewarded or punished according to what he deserves. Although this verse says “judgment seat of God,” Jesus will do the actual judging, and 2 Corinthians 5:10 says “judgment seat of Christ.”

It is much easier to understand verses that speak about the judgment seat or of worship if we have an Eastern mindset and do not think like a Westerner. Eastern rulers almost always had a vizier, a “second in command,” who ran the daily affairs of the kingdom. There are many examples of this in the Bible. Joseph was the vizier, or second in command, for Pharaoh (Gen. 41:38-45), and Haman and Mordecai were for Ahasuerus, the king of Persia (Esther 1:1, 3:1, 8:2). King Darius planned to make Daniel his second in command (Dan. 6:2). “King Belshazzar” (Dan. 5:1) was actually the vizier, the second in command acting as the king de facto. The real king was Nabonidus, which
is why Belshazzar could only make Daniel the third ruler in the kingdom, because he himself was already second ruler (Dan. 5:7).

Much of the time, the true regent was not available to the public. Oriental rulers spent a lot of time in pleasure with women, sports and hunting, eating, receiving dignitaries, etc. They were often considered gods on earth and were simply not available to the general public. The book of Esther tells us of one time when king Ahasuerus was in his private quarters and had not come out for a month (4:11). The king’s vizier would have been running the kingdom during that time. If we understand the king-like authority of the vizier, and that in a very real sense he often ran the kingdom, we can better understand verses about the judgment seat of Christ and why Christ is worshipped.

Regarding the judgment seat: sometimes it is called the Judgment seat of God (Rom. 14:10), and sometimes the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). Revelation 20:11-13 describes what we refer to as the “White Throne” judgment, and although the one doing the judging is not stated, we can tell from the scope of Scripture that it is Jesus Christ (the more accurate Greek texts read “throne” in verse 12, not “God”). No one from the ancient Middle East would be confused by sometimes saying the judgment seat of “God” and other times saying the judgment seat of “Christ.” God is the power behind the judgment, which is actually done by the vizier, in this case, Jesus Christ. Thus, it is God’s judgment seat because it has His ultimate authority. However, it is Christ’s judgment seat because he does the actual judging. Jesus Christ made it clear that he would be doing the actual judging when he said: “the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son...And he [God] has given him [Christ] authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. 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” (John 5:22, 27, 30).

Regarding worship: In the kingdoms of the ancient Middle East, the king was worshipped, but so was the vizier (and so were the gods of the kingdom). Oriental people did not see worship as a “god only” thing. Worship consisted of things such as bowing or prostration, acts of respect, etc., and they were given to any god or person who was due that kind of treatment. In Persia, for example, people worshipped their gods, and the king, and the vizier. Note in the book of Esther that the king commanded the vizier be respected, and the people “bowed, and reverenced” Haman (KJV). The Hebrew word translated “reverenced” is most often translated “worshipped” when the subject is God, and it confuses the issue of worship when the same word is translated “worship” when the subject is God, but “reverence” or “give honor to” when the subject is humans. The English reader loses the fact that both God and people were worshipped, but the worshippers knew who was a god, who was the king, and who were simply officials in the kingdom. John was perfectly comfortable worshiping the angel (falling down prostrate before him; Rev. 22:8), but the angel said not to do it because “I am a fellow servant,” not because worship was not due to those who are “worth it.” Both God and Christ are due “worship,” and both should be by Christians, who also should know who is God and who is the vizier.


14:14. This verse is the figure of speech Parembole, which is a form of parenthesis. A Parembole occurs when the interposed sentence is independent and complete in itself. It would make sense if it were separated from the sentences before and after it.
“in.” The Greek word en in the phrase, “in the Lord Jesus” refers to Paul’s connection with Christ. It means, “in connection with.” The word en can mean “by” in some instances, but it is less likely that it means “by” here, since Paul was likely not personally instructed by Jesus about clean and unclean things, but rather came to that knowledge, part by the instruction of others, part based on Scripture, and part due to spiritual insight and revelation. Thus, he was persuaded “in connection” with the Lord Jesus. See commentary on Romans 6:3.

14:15. “walking in love.” In place of “in” the Greek reads kata, “according to love.” In English usage, however, to walk in love is to walk according to love.

14:16. “defaming talk.” The Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

14:17. “joy in holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

14:23. “condemned.” The one who acts against his own conscience and without faith is condemned both by himself (self-condemnation) and by God, for what he is doing is sin, as the verse says.

“based on trust.” The Greek simply has the phrase ek pistis, more literally, “from trust,” but it means that what we do must be “out from our trust,” or we would say more clearly, based on our trust (cp. The Complete Jewish Bible; A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Romans, by Newman and Nida). This is a stern warning for Christians to be clear about what they believe and then base their actions on that. Too many times we Christians get swept up in the moment or “go along with the crowd” and end up doing things that we really do not want to do. We have to know what we believe and then act in accordance with those beliefs.

Chapter 15

15:1. “weaknesses.” The Greek is adunatos (#102 ἀδύνατος), and means without strength, impotent, powerless, weakly, disabled. In this case the context makes the meaning clear. The context of Romans 14 is the weak in faith not walking in the freedom they have in Christ, and those who are strong in the faith learning to live in peace with them, not leading them to sin against their conscience. It could be said that the chapter break between Romans 14:23 and 15:1 breaks the context and causes the majority of Christians to misunderstand the meaning of 15:1-3. Romans 14 and 15 are clear: we who are strong in the faith have an obligation to help, and bear, those who are not. We have an obligation to not please ourselves, but to do what blesses others.


15:4. “to teach us.” The Greek word “teach” is didaskalia (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (almost as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or the teaching. (See commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13). Here it is used with the preposition eis, which is an indicator of purpose: thus, “for teaching us,” “for our instruction,” “to teach us,” etc. The KJV translates didaskalia as “learning” in this verse, which has caused some people to misunderstand it, and worse, to use it to make an artificial division between what God
gave us to “learn” from, in contrast to what God gave us as instruction “to” us. Of course there are some things we learn from that are not written for us to obey, and other things that are written to us for us to obey, but that is not the point of this particular verse. Didaskalia is used 21 times in the NT, and this is the only place the KJV translates it “learning.” Had the KJV translated it “teaching” here, we could have seen its relation to verses such as 2 Timothy 3:16, where “all” Scripture, both Old Testament and New Testament, is profitable for “teaching.” Christians are to be taught from the whole Bible. God changes some of His rules from Administration to Administration. For example, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were to eat only plants (Gen. 1:29). After the Flood, God changed His rules about eating and told mankind we could eat meat also (Gen. 9:3; for more on Administrations in the Bible, see commentary on Eph. 3:2). On the other hand, some of God’s rules do not change. We all know that commandments of God such as “do not steal” or “love your neighbor” are applicable through all administrations. Charles Ryrie wrote: “...certain principles...are often carried over into succeeding ages, because God’s truth does not cease to be truth, and these principles become part of the cumulative body of truth for which man is responsible....” (Dispensationalism, pp. 35, 36). How do we know what commands of God we are to obey and what commands have been superseded by other commands? The only way is to read and study the whole Bible and see if and when God changes. On certain subjects, such as what we are to eat, or regulations about marriage, the changes are clear. On other subjects, the changes are not as clear, but can be discovered by diligent study. One thing we must keep in mind is that the Church Epistles are specifically addressed “to” the Church, so commandments in them are like a trump card: if God gives us a command in the Church Epistles, that trumps the commands of God in other Administrations. Thus, when God says in 1 Corinthians 7:2 that marriage is a one-man-to-one-woman relationship, that trumps the Law, which allowed a man to have more than one wife.

All of God’s revelation is to teach us. That is the lesson here, and in 2 Timothy 3:16, which both use the word didaskalia. However, there is a difference between being “taught” by something and obeying it. We are taught by the Levitical rules of animal sacrifice, but we are not to obey them. That is why it is imperative for anyone who wants to obey God to know what commands are “to” him and what commands he only learns from. There are some people who overly emphasize the fact that the Church Epistles are written “to” the Church, and downplay the rest of God’s revelation to mankind. We must never do that. Even commands of God we are not to obey, like the instructions in Leviticus on how to do animal sacrifice, teach us about God and His ways. More importantly, however, there is much in the Old Testament and Gospels that are “to” the Church by virtue of the fact they are commands of God that were never superseded by any revelation in the Church Epistles. Many subjects covered in the Old Testament or Gospels are never again mentioned in the Epistles: God said it once, and that should be good enough for us. For example, “love your neighbor” is a command that applies in all Administrations. But only in the Law does God give us examples of how to do that in many specific situations; for example, how to structure a righteous society by having building codes, specific civil penalties for lawbreakers, regulations about lending and borrowing, and much more. These regulations are “to” us as much as the information in the Church Epistles by virtue of the fact that God gives them once and never repeats them. They are His one-time revelation for building a godly society. When it comes to
prayer, the Church Epistles emphasize prayer (Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2, 1 Thess. 4:17), but it is in the sermon on the mount we have a sample prayer with instructions on things like making sure we are not praying in order to be seen by people. That revelation is still “to” us because it is never superseded by anything in the Church Epistles. Like 2 Timothy 3:16 says, “All Scripture is God-breathed,” and every verse of it is to teach us. Furthermore, much of it is directly applicable “to” us.

Here in Romans 15:4, it seemed clear to say “to teach us” (being internally consistent in the REV, translating didaskalia as either “teach,” “teaching,” etc., or as “doctrine” [that which is taught]). It seemed more confusing to say that the things written earlier were “doctrine,” because that could confuse people about whether we should try to obey all the Law, which we obviously cannot in light of later revelation.

15:8, 9. “Christ has become a servant…” The Greek syntax of verses 8-9 can be read in several ways. Either there are two subjects, Christ who becomes a servant and the Gentiles who glorify God, or Christ is the singular subject throughout. We have translated the passage with Christ as the continuing subject. Rather than the Gentiles, it is Christ who glorifies God, as verse nine illuminates with the quotation: “I will praise you among the Gentiles.”

The main clause of these verses is “Christ has become a servant,” while the rest of 8-9 fleshed out exactly how. It is fleshed out in three senses: who is Christ a servant to, why is he a servant, and towards what end does he serve. First, concerning the who, he is a servant of the circumcision (i.e., the Jews. This is a genitive of reference), then he is a servant with respect to the Gentiles (where τὰ δὲ ἔθνη is the accusative of respect [Beale and Carson, Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament, 687-88]). Thus there are two categories of people with respect to which Christ serves—Jews and Gentiles. This encompasses all of humanity.

Next, we are given two parallel huper clauses [#5228 ὑπέρ “for the sake of”] telling us why Christ is a servant to each group: to the Jews it is for the sake of the truth of God, namely to confirm that God is faithful to his promises to the Jewish people; and to the Gentiles it is for the sake of mercy, likely because these promises also come to Gentiles by God’s mercy alone.

Lastly, there is a purpose expressed for Christ’s service to each group. This is communicated through eis to and the infinitive, which expresses purpose (or it could also express result [Wallace, Exegetical Syntax, 611]). These two purpose clauses give us a greater sense of the “why” contained in the huper clauses mentioned above. They work together with the huper clauses, adding on to them. For the Jews, we have already seen, it was in order to confirm the promises made to the fathers. For the Gentiles, Christ’s purpose was to glorify God (the Greek only has the infinitive “to glorify” at this point, dropping off the eis to in an ellipsis, since the Greek readers would easily supply it in their minds). Not only would Christ glorify God by bringing mercy to the Gentiles, even the Gentiles themselves would bring much praise and glory to the Father on account of Christ’s work as well—which is seen in the following verses that call the Gentiles to rejoice, praise, and hope in God (vv. 10-12).

15:9. Quoted from Psalm 18:49.
15:10. Quoted from Deuteronomy 32:43.
15:12. Quoted from Isaiah 11:10 (from the Septuagint).
“the shoot from Jesse.” Jesus Christ is the shoot that came up from the stump of Jesse. The title “shoot from Jesse” refers to the hope the Messiah gives us as well as the fact that he provides nourishment and stability. Most English versions have “root” instead of “shoot,” “root-shoot,” “scion,” “descendant,” etc. However, when it comes to determining the meaning of a title (and “Shoot from Jesse” is a title of the Messiah), we have to use the context in which the title occurs. In this case, both the introduction of the title in Isaiah 11, and the last use in Revelation 22, show us that it refers to a shoot or sprout that comes up from the root. The phrase, “Shoot from Jesse” occurs two times (Isa. 11:10; Rom. 15:12), but Romans 15:12 is a quotation of Isaiah (from the Septuagint). Similarly, the phrase “Shoot from David” occurs two times (Rev. 5:5 and 22:16). Jesse was the father of David (Ruth 4:22; 1 Chron. 2:12, 13), so the phrases are basically equivalent. However, the name “Jesse” is more closely associated with the whole royal lineage and the people of God, while the name “David” is more directly associated with the kingdom.

There are some Trinitarians who assert that the translation should be “root” and that this title proves that Jesus is God, but that is not the case. First, we do not have to draw that conclusion even if we think the translation should be “root,” because there are other meanings of “root” besides being the source of something, but the context of when and where the title appears shows it does not refer to the Messiah being the source of David. This is why even many Trinitarian scholars do not think it refers to “source.”

The Hebrew word translated “root” or “shoot” is sheresh (#8328 שׁוּרֶשׁ) and the Greek word is rhiza (#4491 ῥίζα) pronounced hreed-zah). In both Hebrew and Greek the words can refer to either a “root” or a “shoot” that comes up from a root. Furthermore, in both Hebrew and Greek the words are used both literally and metaphorically. For example, a literal use of the Hebrew word occurs in Job 14:8, while Job 5:3 and Proverbs 12:3 use the word metaphorically as a source of supply and stability, and Deuteronomy 29:18 uses it metaphorically to refer to the source of something. The same thing happens in Greek. The word rhiza can refer to a literal root (cp. Matt. 3:10; Luke 17:6), or it can be used metaphorically as the source of supply and stability (cp. Rom. 11:18), or it can be used for the origin of something (1 Tim. 6:10).

Given the two possible translations, “root,” or “shoot,” the better translation of both the Hebrew and Greek word is “shoot,” i.e., a shoot that comes up from the root. This is clear from the first use in Isaiah 11:10 and the last use in Revelation 22:16.

The context of Isaiah is that the Jews lived in a time when it seemed their kingdom was in ruins and the hope of Israel seemed gone. The kingdom of Israel, represented by the words “Jesse” or “David,” was just a stump of what it had been under David and Solomon. The once-great united kingdom of Israel had split into two rival countries; Israel to the north and the much smaller Judah in the south. Furthermore, both countries has been attacked by foreigners, including Egypt, the Syrians, and the Assyrians. In fact, during Isaiah’s day Assyria captured Israel and carried the people away, replacing them with foreigners. It did not look as if there would ever be a kingdom of Israel again. The people needed hope. At that time the word of the Lord came to Isaiah and promised that a shoot would indeed come up out of the stump of Jesse. That prophecy is Isaiah 11.

**Isaiah 11:1-9 (ESV: abridged).**
There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse…And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

After those wonderful verses came the powerful verse about the Messiah himself: "In that day the Shoot from Jesse shall stand as a banner for the peoples. All the nations will inquire of him, and his resting place shall be glorious." The context makes the title, “Shoot from Jesse” very clear. The Messiah will come from Jesse and restore the kingdom, indeed, he will restore the entire earth to its Edenic state. He will start out as a “shoot,” with humble beginnings, but he will eventually rule and restore the earth.

Notice that there is no hint in this context that the Messiah somehow started Israel or was its source. There is no hint of the Trinity. The Messiah is shown to be a descendant of Jesse; he comes from the stump of Jesse (11:1). As for the translation “shoot,” many lexicons, commentaries, and versions prefer the translation “shoot” or some equivalent to it, and not the translation “root,” even though most English versions still read “root.” For example, the BDAG Lexicon lists Romans 15:12 saying, “that which grows from a root: [a] shoot, scion.” Commentaries by scholars such as Lenski and Thomas Schreiner concur. Meyer’s New Testament Commentary says “root-shoot,” referring to a descendant (and points out that the Hebrew word sheresh (#8328 שֹׁרֶשׁ) can also refer to a shoot from a living root). Newman and Nida understand that the text is referring to someone who comes from Jesse and think perhaps the best translation should be “descendant” (*A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Romans*). R. C. H. Lenski writes in his commentary on Romans 15:12:

The word ῥίζα refers to a live root that sends up a sprout, hence “the root-sprout,” the article designates the one person referred to. Jesse was David’s father; in Rev. 5:5 and 22:16 we have “root-sprout of David.” The royal house that sprang from David was cut down; from the root Jesse (appositional genitive) only a tender young sprout would grow up, so tiny and apparently so weak compared with the old royal tree. …Here is the hand of God: a mere root-sprout, small, lowly, from the defunct royal Jewish house, is the Lord and hope of the world of all nations.

A number of English versions have “shoot” or something equivalent, including what the “shoot” is, a “descendant.” *The New English Bible* and the *Moffatt Bible* have “Scion,” which is a shoot or bud. *God’s New Covenant*, the translation done by Heinz Cassirer, has, “the scion sprung from Jesse.” The New Testament by Edgar Goodspeed says, “The descendant of Jesse will come,” and *The Good News Bible* has “A descendant of Jesse will appear.” Charles Williams (*The New Testament in the Language of the People*) translated the phrase, “The noted Son of Jesse will come,” showing that he felt rhiza referred to the descendant of Jesse, the Son of Jesse.
Isaiah is clear that the Messiah comes from Jesse, and thus “shoot” is a better translation than “root,” but Revelation 22:16 also shows us that the translation should be “shoot from David” or an equivalent phrase. Jesus Christ is speaking, and he says, “I am the rhiza and offspring of David.” Jesus is highlighting who he is by phrasing it two different ways. He is not using the terms in an opposite manner, as if he were both the source of David and the offspring of David. For one thing, his audience would not have understood that. He was using the title “shoot from David” just as Isaiah used “shoot from Jesse.” Furthermore, in typical Semitic fashion, he was stating something twice in slightly different ways for clarity and emphasis. Thus he said he was the shoot that came from David, the offspring of David. This is closely related to the Messianic title, “Son of David.” As the Messiah who came from David and would restore Israel and the earth, it is fitting that Isaiah and Romans show that Jesus will be someone whom not only the Jews, but the Gentiles, will look to for leadership.

The fact that both the Hebrew word sheresh and the Greek word rhiza can refer to either a root or a shoot from the root allows for one more possibility: that the text contains the figure of speech amphibologia, double entendre, and both meanings are included in the verse. Although the context dictates that “shoot” would be the dominant reading, we cannot rule out the fact that God chooses words very carefully, and the Messiah is also our stability and source of sustenance. Thus while we are to focus on the fact that the Messiah is the “shoot from Jesse” (and David) and is our hope when hope seems lost, we are not to lose sight of the fact that our sustenance and stability are also provided by the Messiah.


“as you continue to believe.” The sense of the Greek en is “through,” or perhaps even better, “in connection with.” The joy and peace do not “just happen” to the Christian, but are in connection with his continuing faith, his continuing believing.

“abound in hope through the power of holy spirit.” In this verse, God connects the reality of the hope in the life of a believer to the power of the holy spirit. The gift of holy spirit makes the hope more real in many ways. First, there is the effect the holy spirit has in us as it works to conform us into the image of Christ (Gal. 5:16–25). Perhaps more to the point is how, when we see the power of holy spirit at work in us as we receive revelation, speak in tongues, and manifest the spirit in other ways, God becomes more real to us, and thus his promises about the future (our hope) abounds in us as well. The verse immediately before 15:13, (Rom. 15:12), speaks of the hope of the coming of the Messiah, the root of David, which is one of the great promises of God that we can hope for. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of Spirit”].

15:16. “a servant.” The Greek is leitourgos (#3011 λειτουργός). It is used of a public minister, a servant of the state, and it is also used of a minister in a sacred manner. Many think that the word always connotes a sacred minister, but there is much to argue that in this context the word can mean a secular minister. There are aspects of both meanings that are true, and this is one of the advantages of the Greek text—it packs both meanings into one word. In the Roman world, public servants bore the expense for festivals, celebrations, games (including the gladiator matches), etc. By addressing himself as a public servant one would immediately note that he was the one who bore the expense of
his own efforts in bringing the Gentiles to Christ, something he points out at other places in the Epistles. Both public servants and sacred ministers did what they did on behalf of others, which was certainly the case with Paul.

“my offering, namely, the Gentiles.” The Greek, “offering of the Gentiles” is the objective genitive and thus has the force of “the offering, that is to say, the Gentiles.” Paul’s offering to God was the Gentiles.

“made holy by holy spirit.” The gift of “holy spirit” that is born inside each believer “sanctifies” them, i.e., it makes them holy. Thus the Gentiles, when they get born again, become holy to God. God is holy and spirit, and like any parent, when He gives birth, His children get his nature, so they are holy too. The way it works is that when a person gets “born again,” he or she receives the gift of God’s nature, which the Bible calls “holy spirit” (1 Thess. 4:8), and because God’s children have God’s holy nature, they are holy and are called “holy ones.” (See commentary on Philippians 1:1, “holy ones.”) [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.
15:19. “power of holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.
15:20. “all the way around to Illyricum.” Scripture never mentions Paul traveling in Macedonia further west than Berea (Acts 17:10ff), and the logical place for him to travel west to Illyricum would have been from Thessalonica. From there he could have taken the Egnation Way west to one of its two ports on the Adriatic Sea, Dyrrhachium or Apollonia. Thus it is likely that when Paul was in Thessalonica on his 3rd Missionary Journey. He made the decision to go through Macedonia (Acts 19:21) and it is likely that when he was in Macedonia (Acts 20:2) he took some time and traveled west. He did not have the time to travel west on his return journey through Macedonia (Acts 20:3), because he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem.
15:24. Although many commentators see an anacoluthon in this verse, for us there is no need for it (Cp. Lenski).

“once I have first enjoyed your company for a while.” The Greek reads somewhat differently, saying that Paul would like to “fill up” his “measure” with them, which is very unclear in English. When we say we have “had our fill” of a guest, it means we are unhappy with the situation and it is time for him to leave. Thus we believe the REV has the correct sense of the verse.
15:26. “Macedonia,” “Achaia.” This is the figure of speech, metonymy. This is a common use of metonymy, the regions being put for the people who live in them. The Gentile believers had made a contribution to help their Jewish brothers, and Paul was eager to deliver this gift, no doubt in part because he hoped it would help alleviate some of the division between the Jewish and Gentile Christians.
15:27. “minister.” The Greek is leitourgeō (#3008 λειτουργέω), and it means to serve the state at one's own cost, or to do a service or perform a work. It was a word used specifically of the priests and Levites who performed sacred rites in the Temple, and is used in the NT of Christians serving Christ. Therefore this word brings to mind the specific service of the Levitical priests to God, and by being used here of the Gentiles, it is as if just as the Levites have served as priests to God, now the Gentiles serve as priests to the Jews, who in a way represent God to them (they would be the representatives of God, having brought the Law, the Christ, the Old Testament, etc.).
15:28. “myself made sure that they have received this fruit.” The Gentile churches that Paul founded had given a gift to the Jewish Church in Jerusalem. That is one of the reasons Paul felt that he must take the gift personally, and not hurry on to Rome and Spain right away from Corinth or Macedonia. Paul had directed that there be a financial gift sent to Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4) and had encouraged the people to give (2 Cor. 8 and 9). Paul felt very strongly that the Jewish church needed to know that even as the Word went out first from them to the Gentiles, now the blessings of the Gentile churches were coming back to the Jews. That is why the verse says “myself made sure.” The text more literally reads “myself having sealed to them this fruit” (the verb being in the middle voice), using the custom of the seal to make the point. The “seal” was the assurance that the job was done completely. When a letter was completely written and addressed, then it was “sealed.” In this case, Paul wrote that he would “seal” the money to the believers in Jerusalem, i.e., make sure it was securely received by them. Anyone could have taken money to Jerusalem, but Paul felt his presence was essential to communicate the essence of the message that went with the blessing.

“by way of you.” Paul would travel through Rome on his way to Spain.

15:31. “that I may be delivered from those who are defiant in Judea.” Paul wrote this to Rome from Corinth on his third missionary journey (covered in Acts 18:23-21:17). In his first two missionary journeys, Paul departed from Antioch of Syria and ended there. This journey he departed from Antioch but never returned, because he was arrested in Jerusalem. It is clear from this verse and verse 32 that Paul planned to take the financial blessing he was traveling with to Jerusalem, securely transfer it to the believers there, and then travel to Spain by way of Rome (cp. 15:28). At some point during his travel God started to try to tell him not to go to Jerusalem, but he went anyway, against the will of God (see commentary on Acts 21:12, 14). As a result of his disobedience, he spent more than 4 years as a prisoner. He spent more than two years in Caesarea (Acts 24:27), then months traveling to Rome (Acts 27:9; 28:11), and then at least two years under arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30). Paul disobeyed the will of God and went to Jerusalem, and his ministry was severely curtailed as a result.

“service.” The Greek word is diakonia (#1248 διακονία), and generally it means service or ministering, the office of those who serve in the church, the office of the deacon in the church, and the service of those who prepare and present food. In this case in Romans, the context shows us it refers to the “service” of bringing a gift, in this case, money, to the believers in Jerusalem. This explains why translations such as the New Jerusalem Bible translate it, “the aid I am carrying.”


15:32. “rest.” The Greek word is sunanapauomai (#4875 συναναπαύομαι), and it means to relax in someone’s company, or rest with (BDAG). The Romans were so familiar to Paul, and so at ease with him, that he could genuinely rest with them.

Chapter 16

16:1. “introducing and commending.” The Greek word is sunistemi (#4921 συνίστημι). It has a number of different meanings, but in this context, the BDAG Greek lexicon notes
that it means “to bring together as friends or in a trusting relationship by commending/recommending; to present, introduce or recommend someone to someone else.” In this verse, both the idea of introducing and recommending are equally important, so we conflated the text in the REV to include both meanings. Paul did not just introduce Phoebe, he recommended her to the Romans. However, as the Roman church did not know Phoebe, he also introduced her.

“deacon.” The Greek word is diakonos (#1249 διάκονος; pronounced dee-á-kah-nas), which means servant or “deacon.” In general the word means a servant or an assistant, but in the Christian Church it came to be an official title of an office in the church of those who were not “overseers” (actually running the congregation), but in charge of important duties. This is clear from a study of the word in the New Testament, particularly as it is used in 1 Timothy 3:8, 12; Philippians 1:1. There have been endless debates about whether God would allow a woman to hold the office of deacon in the church. Those who say that women cannot hold offices of authority in the Church say that in this verse diakonos should be translated “servant.” In contrast, those people who say that women could hold offices in the Church say that diakonos should be translated “deacon.” We assert that in the Church there is neither male nor female in Christ (Gal. 3:28), and that Phoebe held the office of a deacon in the church at Cenchreae. There is much evidence that women played a very important role in the early church (cp. notes 1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:12). One important piece of evidence that Phoebe was a “deacon” and not just a “servant” is the fact that she is called “a deacon of the church at Cenchreae.” There is no other place in the New Testament where a person is called a “servant” of a specific church. Christians are servants of God, or servants of Christ, but not servants of a specific church. In contrast, deacons were appointed to be deacons in specific churches. No person was a “deacon” of the Christian Church at large.

Phoebe was a deacon in the church at Cenchreae, which was a port of Corinth on the Aegean Sea, about 7 miles (11 km) southeast of Corinth. She must have been a very spiritual and trusted woman in the first century church, because Paul trusted her to take the Epistle of the Romans to the Church at Rome, even though the Christians at Rome did not know her.

Romans 16:1 is one of the verses in the New Testament that shows that women were elevated in the Christian Church in a way that they had never been in the Jewish or Greco-Roman culture. [For more on how the NT elevated and empowered women, see commentary on 1 Cor. 7:2; 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12; 3:11; 5:14; 1 Pet. 3:7].

16:2. “receive her in the Lord, in a manner worthy of the holy ones.” The two phrases appear to be appositional, such that “receive her in the Lord” is the same as “in a manner worthy of the holy ones.” We might expand it to be, “receive her in the Lord, that is to say, in a manner worthy of the holy ones.” The idea seems to be that the Romans receive Phoebe “in” in connection with, the Lord, in a godly way. This verse does not seem to be using the phrase “in the Lord” as descriptive of Phoebe, as if it were saying, “receive Phoebe, who is in the Lord, in a manner worthy of the holy ones,” although the wording of the Greek text certainly allows for Phoebe to be a believer who is “in the Lord.”

“help her in whatever she may need from you.” This phrase has led many to believe that Phoebe had business in Rome and needed to go there anyway, and that may
be true. It may also be that what she needed was hospitality and help getting back home after delivering the Epistle of Romans.


16:7. “Junia.” The identity and role of “Junia” has been hotly debated from a number of angles. It was once insisted that Junia could be a masculine name, but that argument has been pretty much conclusively settled by a study that showed there were over 250 uses of the name Junia in the Greek sources extant today, and not one of them was masculine. (Cp. New International Biblical Commentary: Romans, by James Edwards). Another angle of the argument arose because there are Greek manuscripts that have the masculine name Junias instead of the feminine Junia. However, those manuscripts were shown to be of a later date and not representing the original text, and thus what they actually showed was the anti-feminine bias of the Church at that time, and scribes would rather alter the text than admit to a feminine apostle. Today there are many commentators who recognize that Junia is indeed a woman’s name, but assert that the proper translation of the text is not that she was an apostle, but rather was “noteworthy in the eyes of the apostles” (HCSB) or “well known to the apostles” (ESV). However, although the Greek text can read that way, is that the most common and logical reading? The reason commentators assert that is the way the Greek text should be translated comes from bias, not a simple reading of Greek. Lenski, usually a very reliable commentator, but one who feels that women should not be leaders, writes that if Junia were an apostle, “such an apostle would be strange indeed” (The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans). The simple and straightforward reading of the Greek text is that Junia was an apostle. Thus, Romans 16:7 is one of the many verses in the NT that elevated women in the family, society, and Church [For more about women’s position in the family, society, and Church, see commentary on Acts 17:12; 18:26; Rom. 16:7; 1 Cor. 7:2; 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12; 3:2; 5:14; and 1 Pet. 3:7. Also, see Appendix 12: “The Role of Women in the Church”].

16:17. “keep on the lookout for.” The Greek is skopeō (#4648 σκοπέω), and it means to pay careful attention to, notice, watch. It is in the active voice, present tense, so it means to continually keep doing it. In this context, it seems like “watch out for” was not exactly the meaning, because that phrase is more akin to “be careful of” or “guard yourself against,” than “keep your eye on those” (NASB). The context seems to be that God is warning Christians to keep an eye out for people who cause division rather than to “be on guard against” people who cause division. The context makes it seem like the congregation at Rome had not yet been infected by people causing division (cp. v. 19), but Paul was telling them to make sure they pay attention in case anyone does start to sow division.

“cause.” The Greek is poieō (#4160 ποιέω), which is to do or to make, and in the phrase with the definite article is a substantivized present participle, which means “those who are making.” There are people who, out of ignorance or on purpose, because of their pride, stubbornness, or evil hearts, cause division and create obstacles, temptations, and pitfalls. Destroying someone’s spiritual walk can have everlasting consequences, and people who do that to themselves or others need to be dealt with swiftly and decisively.

“Stay away from them!” The Greek is ekklíno (#1578 ἐκκλίνο), and it means to avoid association with someone, to shun, to keep away from. This is a verb in which the tense and mood communicate volumes, and the word itself and wording of the phrase augments the verb. The verb is in the imperative mood, and thus is a command, so we
placed an exclamation point at the end of the sentence. Further, the aorist tense points to the fact that people who cause division are to be decisively and once and for all avoided. Lenski translates the phrase, “definitely incline away from them!” He adds, “definitely, decisively, once for all, incline away from them—‘from them,’ not merely from their teachings” (Lenski; Romans). People who cause divisions are to be dealt with quickly and decisively, not allowed to linger in the congregation and spread their poison.

16:18. “serve.” The Greek verb is douleūō (#1398 δουλεύō), from the noun doulos, a slave. It means to serve as a slave, or serve, and metaphorically can also mean to obey or submit to. An argument could be made that in this verse douleūō should be translated, “to serve as a slave to,” or “be a slave to.” As it is used here, douleūō can refer to the fact that the individual works very hard, like a slave. Just because a person serves himself does not mean the work is easy, although some people do serve their own appetites by trying to make their lives easy. Many people work to please themselves, but work very hard, some even to the point of destroying their health, family, friendships, etc. The word douleūō can also refer to “serving as a slave to,” in the sense of being a slave to one’s appetites, like a drug addict is a slave to his addiction. Some people are slaves to their desires rather than being in control of their desires. Even in that case, however, the people are working to please themselves. In this verse the Scripture is pointing out the motivation for the work—to please themselves instead of the Lord Jesus.

“belly.” The Greek is koilia (#2836 κοιλία), and it has various meanings, including, belly, womb, stomach, and the inner parts of a person. It refers to the emotional life of the person. Modern science is now learning that the enteric nervous system is integrally involved with our emotions, and thankfully this is reflected in the biblical languages, both Hebrew and Greek. It is why we talk about a “gut feeling,” or have an upset stomach when we hear bad news, or why our bowels sometimes release when we are really afraid or shocked. Here the word “belly” paints a graphic picture and includes many meanings, such as emotions and intentions, and shows that these kind of people just serve themselves and do what they feel like doing. They are not serving Christ. “Belly” harkens all the way back to the garden of Eden, when Eve served her own “belly” and not God, and did what she “felt like doing.”

“smooth talk.” The Greek word is chrēstologia (#5542 χρηστολογία), a compound word from chrestos (“kind”) and logia (“speech”). In this case, used in a bad sense, it is “smooth talk,” meant to deceive unwary listeners.

“nice-sounding words.” The Greek is eulogia (#2129 εὐλογία), a compound word from eu (good) and logia (speech). In the Bible it is used in both its good sense of a “good saying,” thus “blessing, eulogy, etc.” (cp. Rom. 15:29), and in its bad sense of flattery, as it is used here. These liars speak “nice sounding words,” but they do not mean them, so they are really just lies and flattery. Nevertheless, they are effective because people are naive or unsuspecting. The Adversary tries to stop Christians from being discerning by labeling them as “judgmental,” and often that ruse works. Sometimes a teacher will be speaking a mix of truth and error and someone listening will try to point out the error that is mixed in with the truth, but get accused of being picky and judgmental. It is never wrong to separate truth from error. Scripture tells us to “...test everything and hold fast to what is good” (1 Thess. 5:21). Paul got very upset with the Church at Corinth when they did not correctly discern the motives and teachings of the
false apostles: “For if someone comes who preaches another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or if you receive a different spirit, which you did not receive, or a different Good News, which you did not accept, you put up with that easily enough” (2 Cor. 11:4). Yet we know that the false apostles who had infiltrated the church at Corinth did not teach only error. They, like all false teachers and even the Devil in Genesis 3, mixed truth and error, and Christians must be discerning enough to separate them. Not all smooth talk and nice words are godly and true.

“thoroughly deceive.” The Greek is exapataō (#1818 ἐξαπατάω). It is the verb apataō (#538; “deceive”) and the prefix ek as an intensifier, thus, “thoroughly deceive.”

“unsuspecting.” The Greek is akakos (#172 ἄκακος), a word made from the prefix a (“not”) and kakos (bad, of a bad nature, morally bad), and it means without badness, harmless, innocent, free from guilt. In this context it means unsuspecting (BDAG). People who are morally upright get taken advantage of when they remain unsuspecting. It is not that the righteous have to be suspicious of everyone, but on the other hand they need to keep their eyes open for inconsistencies in people’s lives and words.

16:19. “untainted.” The Greek is akeraios (#185 ἀκέραιος), meaning unmixed or pure, as in unmixed wines or metals; without a mixture of evil, free from guile, innocent, simple. Thus, in this context, “untainted” (Louw-Nida; Greek Lexicon). There are commentators who think that the meaning of akeraios here has to be contrasted to “wise,” so that we are “wise about what is good and about what is evil.” Thus, some versions use “innocent” (HCS; ESV; NASB), and others use “guileless” (NRSV). There is a problem with those translations, however. To be contrasted with the mental quality of wisdom, “guileless” and “innocent” have to be mental qualities too, and thus mean “ignorant” or “naive.” For example, the Bible in Basic English translates the phrase, “without knowledge of evil.” But there are verses that tell Christians not to be ignorant of Satan or his devices (cp. 2 Cor. 2:11). The Christian is to be wise about both what is good and what is evil, and also is to keep from getting involved in evil. The contrast in this verse is between “good” and “evil.” The Christian is to be wise about what is good, and at the same time, not be “mixed” (tainted) with evil. There are versions which pick up this sense of the word. For example, Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible translates it “pure,” and GWN (God’s Word to the Nations) translates it, “to avoid what is evil.”

16:20. “God of peace.” The phrase “God of peace” is a common one in the New Testament (cp. Rom. 15:33; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20). This is undoubtedly due to the fact that peace is so important to a blessed life, and it is so absent in the world around us. God is here called the “God of peace” because the context is those people who are causing divisions and problems among the believers (v. 17). God is not a God of division and strife, but of peace, and although people influenced by Satan are causing problems now, that will go away very soon.

“the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

“swiftly.” The Greek phrase translated swiftly is en tachos (ἐν τάχος), literally meaning, “in speed.” The main idea of the verse is that very soon God will crush Satan. The Bible says exactly that in many other places as well—that Satan’s end will be soon
Another implication of the phrase is that when Satan’s end comes, it will come quickly. The rule of the Devil will be destroyed very quickly when the Lord Jesus appears (2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 19:11-20:3). It will not be a lingering death, but will be destroyed in hours when the Lord appears to fight the Battle of Armageddon. There is one more overtone in the verse that we must pay attention to, and that is that this verse also includes the believers’ victory over Satan now if we will obey God and do what He tells us to. We do have many victories over Satan in this life (cp. 1 John 2:14; 4:4). We must note that the verse says that Satan will be crushed “under your feet,” i.e., the feet of the believers. Of course this will be more fully fulfilled when we participate in the Battle of Armageddon (cp. Rev. 19:14), but we also have victories over Satan’s plans now. In this case in the Church at Rome that involved people causing division, if we are wise about what is good and untainted by evil (v. 19), and if we watch for, and stay away from, people who cause divisions, then we will quickly defeat Satan’s plans to divide our congregations. It is never easy to confront and dismiss those who cause divisions, in part because we want to allow people to have their own opinions. However, there are people who step over the line in that area, and we must deal with them quickly and decisively, as God says to. If we do, Satan’s plans will be quickly stopped. If we do not obey God in this matter, the word of those who cause division will spread like gangrene and overthrow the faith of some (2 Tim. 2:17, 18).

“grace of our Lord Jesus.” A textual variation (notably in the Western Texts) adds the word “Christ” to this benediction (cp. ESV; NRSV; KJV; ASV). However the original was most likely the shorter reading found in the earliest manuscripts and represented in the REV and most modern versions. The addition is explained by the principle called “the expansion of piety,” which is the tendency of scribes to continue to enlarge names, titles, doxologies, etc. over time, often due to misplaced reverence. In this case, the original “Lord Jesus” gets expanded to “Lord Jesus Christ.” It is much more likely that “Christ” was added than that it was omitted by copyists. [For more on “the expansion of piety,” see, James White, The King James Only Controversy, pp. 43-46].

16:21. “my kinsmen.” The Greek word is suggenēs (πυγευνής), and it refers to people who are related by blood, or in a wider sense, are of the same country or race. In this case it refers to Paul’s fellow Jews. See commentary on Romans 9:3.

16:22. “greet you in the Lord.” This does not mean, “I greet you, who are in the Lord,” but rather, “greet you in connection with the Lord.” It is Tertius’ way of letting the Christians at Rome know that he is a fellow Christian, and is greeting them as such. The same basic format is found in 1 Corinthians 16:19. It seems certain that Paul would not let a non-Christian scribe write down the Epistle of Romans as he dictated it. Given the circumstances and confines of writing as a prisoner in Rome, it is certain that Paul and Tertius had a wonderful working relationship.

16:24. Omitted from the REV. The textual evidence is very strong that the phrase that appears in the KJV is an addition, which is why almost all modern versions omit it. If it were original, there seems to be no reason why a scribe would have omitted it, and the general tendency was to expand liturgical formulations, such as the ones found at the end of epistles. Other good evidence that it was an addition comes from the fact that the phrase does not appear in the same place in all the manuscripts. Some place it earlier, and some manuscripts place this verse after verse 27 so the book ends with the benediction.
16:25. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

16:26. “by the command of.” The Greek is a technical phrase that means “by the command of; by order of.” See commentary on 1 Timothy 1:1.

16:27. “forever.” The literal Greek is “to the ages,” which in this context, which is the glory of God, means “forever.”
1 Corinthians

Chapter 1

1:1. “a called apostle.” See commentary on Romans 1:1.


“call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In this context, to “call on the name” of the Lord means to pray to him, to ask him for something. Christians are to call on the name of the Lord Jesus, that is, pray to him for help in life. Throughout the Old Testament, when people “…called upon the name of the LORD,” it was to pray to, appeal to, or ask for help from God.

Abraham was in the habit of praying to God, and he “called on the name” of Yahweh (cp. Gen. 12:8; 13:4). Isaac “called on the name” of Yahweh (Gen. 26:25). In 1 Kings 18:24, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal and said, “you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of Yahweh.” Then the prophets of Baal “called on the name of Baal,” meaning they prayed to Baal (1 Kings 18:26), and after that, Elijah prayed to God, and God answered with fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:36-38). The Syrian general Naaman was angry when the prophet Elisha did not come out and personally pray to God for him: “Naaman went away angry and said, ‘I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy’” (2 Kings 5:11). David also prayed to God, he “called on the name of Yahweh,” and was answered by fire from heaven (1 Chron. 21:26). Psalm 99:6 indicates many people called on the name of Yahweh and their prayers were answered by Him. In Zechariah 13:9, God says, “They will call on my name and I will answer them.”

The New Testament uses the same terminology to refer to praying as the Old Testament does. When a person calls on the name of Yahweh, he prays to Yahweh. When a person calls on the name of the Lord Jesus, he prays to Jesus. So we see that 1 Corinthians 1:2 mentions prayer to Jesus: “To the church of God in Corinth…together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours.” This is clearly the same phrase used in the Old Testament, and is applied to Jesus as well as God.

In Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament, Vincent writes about the phrase, “call upon the name of” in 1 Corinthians 1:2. He says, “It is used of worship, and here implies prayer to Christ.” R. C. H. Lenski writes in The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians, “‘To call on him’ means to praise, bless, thank, worship him, and to ask of him all that we need for body and for soul.”

The context of Romans 10:12 and 13 show that the word “Lord” refers to Jesus, and verse 12 says, “For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him.”

Romans 10:13 says, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” This verse is a quotation of Joel 2:32, which is a prophecy of people calling on the name of God for help and deliverance—definitely prayer to God. The fact that the Word of God takes the quote about prayer to God from the Old Testament and applies it to Jesus in the Church Epistles is very solid evidence that God is showing us we can pray to Jesus.
2 Timothy 2:22 also shows believers calling on the Lord: “Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” Old Testament believers called upon the name of Yahweh to get help, and we today can call upon Jesus for help. The fact that the same phrase for prayer and supplication is used in both the Old and New Testaments shows that as Old Testament believers prayed to God, we can pray to Jesus and expect him to answer our requests.

Another verse that shows that Christians prayed to Jesus is Acts 9:14, where Paul was sent to arrest those people who called on the name of the Lord. Stephen also called on the name of the Lord as he was being stoned to death. He had a vision of Jesus standing for him, and then prayed to him for help (Acts 7:59). [For more on praying to Jesus, see Appendix 15: “Can We Pray to Jesus?”]

1:4. “because of” (epi with the dative; see Lenski).

1:5. “through union with him.” The Greek simply says, “in him,” but it is referring to our connection with, our union with, Christ. (See commentary on Rom. 6:3; Eph. 1:3). The New Testament by Williams reads, “through union with him.” Some versions simply take the Greek word en (“in”) as an instrumental dative, and read, “by him,” but the truth the verse is expressing is deeper than that.

1:6. “even as the testimony about the Christ was confirmed in you.” This verse is a parenthesis, the figure of speech Epitrechon, a sentence incomplete in itself but thrown in for explanation. (cp. Bullinger, Figures; cp. Lightfoot, Notes).

1:7. “trailing behind the others.” (cp. Wuest, Expanded Translation). The Greek means that the Corinthian church was enriched so that they did not have less measure than others, be “left behind” (Thayer). Christ will enrich all Christians, if they will let him.

1:8. “that you may be blameless.” Cp. Lightfoot, Notes.

1:10. “in the name of Jesus Christ.” This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority. [For more on the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6].

1:23. “deathtrap.” The Greek is skandalon, the trigger stick of a snare or trap. Christ is more than a stumbling-block, as if someone could trip and move along. He is the trap-trigger, a deathtrap to those who refuse to believe. (Cp. Lenski).
1:24. “called ones.” In the Epistles this phrase refers to those who have accepted God’s call and are saved. See commentary on Romans 1:1 and Romans 8:28.
1:26. “not many…not many…not many.” The figure of speech ellipsis is used powerfully here. Ellipsis emphasizes what is in the text, while de-emphasizing what has to be supplied (in italics). “Not many” of those who would be valued by the world are called, but God, by those He calls and works with, puts the world to shame.

Chapter 2

2:1. “secret.” We believe that “secret,” not “testimony” is the correct reading. The reading musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) seems better supported textually than marturion (#3142 μαρτύριον) (see Metzger, Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament), and it has good contextual support. The next ten verses are about the Administration of the Secret. We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]
2:2. “to know.” This is the figure of speech Heterosis (Intransitive for the Transitive; see Bullinger, Figures of Speech). Paul decided not to “know anything among them,” actually, “make known [preach] anything among them” except Christ.
2:7. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]
2:11. “things.” The word “things” is missing for both men and God, only the definite article “the” being in the Greek text (this is the figure ellipsis). The context shows that it refers to all the deep things: thoughts, motives, etc. We could say “heart,” but that would be too restrictive.
2:14. “natural.” The Greek word, an adjective, is psuchikos (#5591 ψυχικός; pronounced psoo-key-kos'). The adjective psuchikos comes from the noun psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced, psoo-kay'), which is usually translated as “soul.” In order to properly understand psuchikos, it is important that we understand psuchē, soul. Psuchē has a large number of meanings, as any good Greek-English lexicon will show. Although some of the definitions are found more clearly in Greek literature than in the Bible, many of them are clearly in the Bible. Meanings of “soul” (psuchē), that we find in the Bible include:
• The life force that animates the body, both human and animal. Thus “soul” often equals “life.”
• Our emotions, attitudes, thoughts, and feelings.
• The person himself or herself; the individual.

[For a much more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

The adjective psuchikos means “of, belonging to, somehow relating to, the ‘soul,’ psuchē,” and as such it can have a lot of different shades of meaning, depending on the context in which it is used. Psuchikos can be a characteristic of the earthly body, in which case it is “physical,” “natural,” but that is not the emphasis in this context. In this context is relates to the person as he is being governed by sensual appetites. Thus it means “natural; unspiritual; fleshly; worldly; governed by soul; soul-oriented.” It “pertains to behavior which is typical of human nature” (Louv-Nida Greek English Lexicon). It means, “governed by the ψυχή, [psuchē], i. e., the sensuous nature with its subjection to appetite and passion” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon).

It will help us to see the impact of this section of Scripture had on early Christians if we realize that in secular Greek, psuchikos was a word of honor, much like today in the secular realm a person who is well educated, well-traveled, and well experienced might be called “worldly,” whereas we Christians use the word “worldly” in a negative sense to mean someone who is not oriented toward God but to the world. Aristotle, for example, used the word psuchikos to refer to the higher things of the soul versus the lower things of the soma, body. The New Testament, introducing the truly higher things of the spirit of God, pneuma, takes the world’s vocabulary and puts it in the proper perspective from God’s point of view. Being psuchikos, “of the soul,” was not a good thing, because it related to the lower, natural and earthly things of man, not the higher spiritual things.

Sadly, although the New Testament placed psuchē and psuchikos in their proper place as primarily belonging to the flesh and lower order of things (although our attitudes and emotions can certainly be godly), as the doctrine of the “immortality of the soul” grew in Christianity, particularly in the 4th and 5th centuries, the “soul” began to be elevated in people’s thinking as a wonderful thing that would survive the death of the body, and that theology is still dominant today, making translations such as “of the soul,” “soul-oriented,” or “soul-governed,” unclear to many readers. We need to get back to the proper meaning of biblical words to correctly understand the Bible.

It seems clear from the context that when Paul describes people using the word psuchikos, he is saying that they are not born again of God’s spirit, they are only “soul people.” That seems especially clear in light of 3:1, where Christians who have not yet matured in Christ are not referred to as psuchikos (natural; soul-governed), but as sarkikos (#4559 σαρκικός), “flesh-governed;” “flesh-oriented” (from the word sarx; #4561 σάρξ; “flesh”).

It is difficult to translate psuchikos, especially since it has different shades of meaning in different contexts. Here in 1 Corinthians 2:14, it refers to people who are not born again, so “natural” is a good translation. The translation “natural” does a good job of making the point that the person does not have the spirit of God. In 1 Corinthians 15:44 and 46 psuchikos refers to the life force that animates the body, and so “soul body” is about as well as can be done. In James 3:15 and Jude 1:19 psuchikos is used of earthly and demonic wisdom apart from the spirit of God, so we used the translation, “merely of the soul.”

Chapter 3

3:1. “of the flesh.” The Greek word is sarkikos (#4559 σαρκικός; pronounced sar-key-kos'), and is from the word sark (σάρξ), flesh. It means “of, belonging to, somehow relating to, the ‘flesh.’ The word sarkikos can be more literal and pertain to the human or animal body which is flesh, or it can be more metaphorical. When used metaphorically, sarkikos refers to being “fleshly” or “carnal,” i.e., “having the nature of flesh” and being under the control or influence of the natural passions and desires of the body. It can thus refer to being controlled or governed by mere human nature instead of the spirit of God.

Here in 1 Corinthians 3:1, “of the flesh” refers to Christians who have not yet decided to live by the spirit and are being influenced by their flesh nature. Thus, sarkikos (“of the flesh”) is directly contrasted with psuchikos (“of the soul” cp. 1 Cor. 2:14), which refers to the person who is not born again (See commentary on 1 Corinthians 2:14). The psuchikos person is unsaved (1 Cor. 2:14). The sarkikos person is saved but has not made the decision to obey God and so is still influenced by the flesh (1 Cor. 3:1).

3:5. “servants through whom you believed.” There was a problem in Corinth with the believers being divided over following certain leaders in the one Body (1:11-12). This verse, 3:5, explains the shift from including Peter in the list of 1:12 and 3:22, to only mentioning Paul and Apollos here in 3:3-11. It seems Peter did not actually go to Corinth to plant or water, only Paul and Apollos did. This is why they were the “servants through whom you [Corinthians] believed.” Paul planted by starting the church and Apollos watered by ministering to them, and “he who plants and he who waters are one… God’s fellow workers. You [Corinthians] are God’s field, God’s building” (3:6, 9). Peter is left out of these verses because the point of 3:3-11 is how the Corinthians should think of the ministers that particularly served them in the body of Christ. Hence he says, “Now these things, brothers, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes” (1 Cor. 4:6). Peter did not go Corinth, so it makes sense that he would not be a part of this section. However, after dealing with this subtopic Paul gets back to the broader point of wrong-thinking about ministers generally (not just those who directly plant and water your church), concluding with, “So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas” (3:21-22).

3:13. “Day.” This refers to the Day of Judgment. Every builder has a “day of judgment.” For those who are hired to build a house, for example, the day of Judgment is when the owner shows up to look at the finished product. At that time, the quality of the work will be evident, and the builder will be rewarded by being paid, or he will suffer loss by having to redo his work, or by not getting paid the money he was expecting. God gives us our lifetime to build for Him. On the Day of Judgment, our work will be evident to all. If we have not built well upon the foundation of Christ, our work will be burned and we will enter the kingdom saved, but with no rewards (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10: “good or worthless.”)

3:16. “sanctuary.” The Greek word is naos (#3485 ναός), which means the inner sanctuary, and then, occasionally, by association, the temple building that houses the inner sanctuary. Then, by metonymy, the Greek word naos is used of the Body of Christ (Bullinger, Vine). In contrast, the Greek word hieron (#2411 ἱερόν) means the temple building along with its porches, outer courts, and all associated out buildings. Interestingly, the hieron is never used figuratively in the Bible, it is always literal. In this verse, the “sanctuary” of the Lord is the Body of Christ. For more information, see the note on Ephesians 2:21.

3:17. “mars...mar.” The Greek word translated “mar” is phtheirō (#5351 φθείρω). It has a number of meanings, including “ruin, corrupt, mar, bring into a worse state, spoil, destroy.” Examples of how phtheirō was used include: financial ruin; seducing and thus “ruining” a virgin; ruin or corrupt someone by false teaching or immoral behavior; ruin a contest by breaking the rules; and of ruining something by destroying it. Phtheirō is used in verses such as “Bad company corrupts good behavior” (1 Cor. 15:33) and “Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires” (Eph. 4:22).

In this context the Bible is speaking of Christians, who are guaranteed everlasting life, and because Christians are guaranteed everlasting life, “destroy” cannot be the correct meaning of phtheirō here, especially because 3:15 has just told us that even if a person loses every reward he could have earned, he will still be saved and have everlasting life. We also know that phtheirō cannot mean “destroy” because in the context (1 Cor. 3:16), the “sanctuary” refers to the whole Church, not an individual (the word “you” in verse 16 is plural). No one can “destroy” the Church! In the context of 1 Corinthians 3, the word phtheirō is best understood as “to bring into a worse state” or “to mar.” The point of the verse is that if a Christian “brings the Church into a worse state,” that Christian will be “brought into a worse state” by the Lord at the Judgment. In other words, no one mars the Church without personal consequences. This verse is one of the many in the NT that contrasts salvation with rewards. [For the permanence of salvation and the guarantee of everlasting life, see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation.” For the difference between salvation and rewards, and rewards in the Kingdom, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or worthless”].

“sanctuary.” See commentary on 3:16 above.

3:18. “deceive.” The word is exapatao (#1818 ἐξαπατάω), “thoroughly deceive” (See entry on 1 Tim. 2:14). We have translated the word simply “deceive” in order to avoid possible confusion. For one could read the verse to mean, “Let no one thoroughly deceive himself,” as though a little self-delusion was acceptable, but no one should be thoroughly self-deluded.


Chapter 4

4:1. “house-managers.” The Greek is oikonomos (#3623 οἰκονόμος), and means, “The manager of a household or of household affairs; especially a steward, manager, superintendent (whether free-born, or, as was usually the case, a freed-man or slave) to whom the head of the house or proprietor has entrusted the management of his affairs”
In our case, we are *oikonomoi*, stewards or “house managers,” entrusted by Jesus Christ with the affairs of the *oikonomia*, the “Administration” of the Sacred Secret.

**“sacred secret.”** We translate the Greek word *musterion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what *musterion* actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

**4:3. “man’s day.”** Versus The Lord’s Day, when the judgment will be right, just, and final.

**4:4. “I am not aware of anything against myself.”** “Not a statement of fact, but a hypothesis to show the unreliability of mere complacent self-satisfaction. Note the use of *sunooida* (second perfect active indicative with dative (disadvantage) of the reflexive pronoun) for guilty knowledge against oneself (cf. Acts 5:2; 12:12; 14:6)... Failure to be conscious of one's own sins does not mean that one is innocent.” (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*).

**4:6. “puffed up”** is the literal meaning of *phusioo* (#5448 φυσιόω), which is “a later substitute for *φυσάω*; it is largely limited to Christian literature...lit. ‘blow up, inflate’ from *φῦσα* [phusa] (orig. ‘pair of bellows’, then var. ‘wind, blast’, etc.). Thus, figuratively, to cause to have an exaggerated self-conception, puff up, make proud. The Passive in an active sense, become puffed up or conceited, put on airs.” [BDAG]. Be arrogant. Six out of its seven usages in the NT are in 1 Corinthians. After saying that some are puffed up (4:18; 5:2), Paul notes that love is “not puffed up” (13:4).

**4:15. “though you have ten thousand guides.”** This verse would have had more impact in ancient Corinth than it does today. The children of the wealthy were escorted to school by a “pedagogue,” a person who oversaw their safety, which is why some translations have “guardian” here, while we have “guide” (because eventually the pedagogue did more than just escort and protect, they did some guiding of the child). However, a child from a wealthy family would have many pedagogues, but still, only one father in the family. Paul is making that point, that any Christian will have many guides in their life, but he was their spiritual father, he founded the church at Corinth.

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**Chapter 5**

**5:2. “Let him who has done this deed be removed.”** The verb for “removed” is in the imperative mood, and so the verse can be translated like it is in the REV, or it can be translated: “The one who has done this thing must be removed.” In this context, and in light of verse 5, it seemed that Paul would have used a softer tone and directed the Corinthians what to do, rather than commanding them what to do.

**5:5. “to deliver such a one to the Adversary for the ruin of the flesh.”** To deliver to the Adversary means to put out of the Church (see commentary, 1 Tim. 1:20). “Flesh” is the Figure of speech metonymy for “the desires of the flesh.” The person is excommunicated from the Church and put out into the world, where he is unloved, and (hopefully) his fleshly desires will come to an end (be destroyed) as he comes to realize the value of Christian fellowship. Thus his “spirit” (his attitude toward God and thus his rewards), “may” (the subjunctive expresses the possibility) be saved at the Return. The word “saved” is in the subjunctive mood, expressing the possibility that putting someone
out of the church “may” bring him to repentance, but there are people who leave the Church and never repent, but become very worldly. God, however, opts for the greater possibility and expresses His desire for the person. Instead of kicking him out and saying he “may” stay worldly, He says that he “may” yet regain his attitude and rewards.

“the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

“ruin.” The Greek word translated “ruin” is *olethros* (#3639 ὀλέθρος), which occurs four times in the New Testament (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:3; 2 Thess. 1:9; and 1 Tim. 6:9). The word means *desolation or destruction*, though literal annihilation is not always intended. The English word *ruin* is a good translation, especially because it reserves the translation *destruction* for the stronger word *apoleia* (#684 ἀπώλεια), which denotes a more irrevocable and harsh destruction than *olethros*.

5:9. “associate” in the more formal sense of the word, to be in association, close company, with, or to mix together.

“sexually immoral men.” The noun is masculine, and men are indicated by the context.

### Chapter 6

6:2. “judge and administer.” The Greek word is *krinó* (#2919 κρίνω), and it means “to make a selection; to pass judgment on; to judge; to condemn.” Here it is used in the active voice, meaning that it is not a one-time judgment, but rather an ongoing process of judgment, or what we would call ruling or administering, because administering is made up of a series of individual judgments. The Bible tells us that when Jesus comes down from heaven, he will set up his kingdom on earth (see commentary on Matt. 5:5; “the meek will inherit the earth”). Christians who have been faithful will help rule that future earth (Matt. 19:28; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26; see commentary on Heb. 2:5). The Amplified Bible says that believers will one day “judge and govern” the world, and that is the sense of the word. The same word, *krinó* in the active voice, is used in 6:3 of angels, letting us know that we will judge and administer angels. The word “judge” when used of the world and angels not only refers to the administering the world to come, but also refers to the Day of Judgment, at which point the righteousness of the saints will “judge” or condemn those who have ignored or stood against God and the things of God.

6:4. “have no standing.” From *exoutheneo* (#1848 ἐξουθενέω). See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:20. This word is usually translated elsewhere as “treat with contempt.”


6:9. “unrighteous.” This verse, and verse 10, probably refers to people who are not saved (and are acting out their unrighteousness by flagrant sin). This is why verse 11 says that “some” of “you” were like the unrighteous people in this list. We know from reading both First and Second Corinthians that the church in Corinth still had lots of sinners. But the Corinthians were washed, sanctified, and justified, in other words, saved. The
unrighteous people referred to here, who act out their unrighteousness with evil works, are not saved. Someone might ask, “If this section is to the unrighteous (unsaved) why does it bother to list the sins, since no unsaved person will “inherit the kingdom” (be saved) anyway.” Actually, in some cases an “unrighteous” person, someone who is not born again, will be granted everlasting life at the Second Resurrection. At that resurrection, people will be judged by their works, but they will not be saved if their works are flagrantly unrighteous.

It is possible, but less likely, that the verses in this section are referring to Christians who are participating in flagrant sin. In this case, the word “inherit” refers to rewards, not salvation. The Christian’s salvation is secure, and that is stated clearly and in many different ways [See Appendix C, “The Permanence of Christian Salvation” in The Christian’s Hope; and Appendix A, “The Administration of the Sacred Secret” in The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be like Christ]. In spite of the fact that our salvation is secure, our rewards are not. It is possible for a Christian to enter Paradise “naked” (1 Cor. 3:12-15) and ashamed (1 John 2:28; Mark 8:38). The Christian who practices flagrant sin has everlasting life, but will have no “inheritance” on the New Earth in the Millennial Kingdom. We must remember that the word “inherit” can refer either to everlasting life (cp. 1 Cor. 15:50) or to the inheritance as a reward in Paradise (Col. 3:24). The context will reveal which of the two meanings applies. There will be Christians who will enter into Paradise but not “inherit” it—they will have no reward. This will be terrible for those who experience it—and is a major reason why “the hope” is called the anchor of our souls (Heb. 6:19). This list of ungodly behaviors is not exhaustive but representative (cp. Lenski). Nevertheless, it is complete enough that Christians are to clearly understand that a Christian cannot live in opposition to God’s will and expect His blessings.

“sexually immoral.” The Greek is pornos (4205 πόρνος), which is a masculine noun and technically refers to a man who is sexually immoral or a male prostitute. However, the masculine form was used in a broad sense that included sexually immoral women. A female prostitute or a sexually immoral woman was a pornē (4204 πόρνη), but whereas the masculine form was used to include women, the feminine form was not generally used to include men. In early Greek, pornos and pornē referred much more specifically to prostitution and prostitution. Greek (and Roman) morals were much looser than Christian morals, and so, for example, in both Greece and Rome slaves were the sexual property of whoever owned them, and a slave owner having sex with a slave was not only overlooked, it was pretty much expected. By the time of Christ, and especially in the Christian world, the words, and the neuter noun porneia, were not just used of prostitution but of sexual immorality in general.

“idolaters.” The Greek is eidololatrēs (1496 εἰδωλολατρής) and it means “image worshipper” or “idolater.” The primary meaning is a Christian who worships images. However, over time it was broadened to include other things that were considered idols. The first of the Ten Commandments is to not have any other gods beside the one true God. Anyone who gets “spiritual power,” “spiritual advice,” or “just worships” another god or thing is an idolater. Christians need to be very careful who they pray to for help and what they look to for spiritual help such as “lucky charms.” God is offended by them. Also, something that is usually overlooked in modern idolatry is that ancient idolatry often had some kind of sexual immorality as part of the worship.
“adulterers.” The Greek word is moichos (#3432 μοιχός), and it refers to someone who is married but having sexual intercourse with someone other than his or her spouse. In the Old Testament, and in both the secular Greek and Roman world, the definition of adultery was different. In the Old Testament, “adultery” properly referred to a married or betrothed woman having sexual intercourse with someone other than her husband. The Greek, Roman, and Hebrew concept of adultery was substantially the same, the infidelity of the husband did not constitute adultery. The New Testament specifically commands that each man and woman is to have his or her “own” spouse, and thus the New Testament definition of adultery is narrower than the Old Testament definition, including any married person having intercourse with someone other than his or her spouse. The world and its evil forces want to discount the evil in adultery, so it is called “an affair,” cheating” or “indiscretion,” as if it were no big deal. But it is a big deal, and God has always firmly commanded that people do not commit adultery. Verses forbidding it are in the Old Testament (Exod. 20:14, etc.), the Gospels (Mark 10:19, etc.), and in the Church Epistles (Rom. 13:9, etc.).

“passive homosexual partners.” The Greek is malakos (#3120 μαλακός), and it literally means “soft” or “soft to the touch.” Although it had other uses such as “soft clothing,” it was the standard word in the Greek language for the “passive” one in the homosexual relation. In the Greco-Roman world, the “passive” partner was often a youth, and so, for example, the New American Bible says “boy prostitutes,” but malakos is general enough to refer to the passive person in the relationship. The masculine form of the Greek is used, but as it is used in this context it would also refer to the passive partner in a lesbian relationship.

“homosexuals.” The Greek is arsenokoitēs (#733 ἀρσενοκοίτης), which is from arsen, “male,” and koite, “bed,” and describes a man who “beds” another man, i.e., a homosexual. Although arsenokoitēs is sometimes used in a wide sense referring to all homosexuality, it also had a narrower sense, referring to the one who took the dominant or “male” role in the homosexual relation. Because 1 Corinthians 6:9 also specifically refers to the malakos, the use of arsenokoitēs in this verse refers to the dominant homosexual.

6:11. “in the name of Jesus Christ.” This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority. [For more on the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6].


6:19. “of the holy spirit.” Genitive of content. Our bodies are sanctuaries that contain the holy spirit.

“the holy spirit.” The Greek puts “in you” between “the” and “holy spirit” making the article hard to recognize for beginning students, nevertheless, pneuma hagion (holy spirit) refers to the gift. This is clear because it is “in you,” and God is not “in us,” and we have this holy spirit “from God.” God gives His gift of holy spirit, which is sealed “in” believers (Eph. 1:13). [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

“from God” is the genitive of origin, sometimes translated “of God.”
Chapter 7

7:1. “touch” is euphemistic in the Greek language for touch in a sexual way, especially sexual intercourse (the Hebrew language has the same idiom, cp. Ruth 2:9). This verse is referring to the sexual intercourse in marriage, since sexual intercourse outside of marriage is sin (and it would be superfluous for God to say that sinful sex is not “good”). The NIV picks up the sense of the verse when it reads, “…it is good for a man not to marry.” The question remains, then, as to why God did not simply state that people should not marry, why did He use the idiom? It is because the word “touch,” although used euphemistically, still has literal overtones. Just as most men are stimulated by sight (hence the huge market for women’s lingerie), women can be stimulated by being touched, being held. It is not good for men to touch women and get them emotionally distracted if the man has no intention of marriage.

“woman.” The word woman is in the genitive case, because it is a Greek idiom that words following touch are in the genitive (Lenski; Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament.)

7:2. “so much sexual immorality.” The Greek simply reads “immoralities” in the plural, but this is a plural of emphasis (Bullinger calls this “Heterosis of number,” (Bullinger, Figures). There was so much sexual immorality in Corinth (and in the world in general, which is still true today) that in order keep from being sexually distracted, each person should have his or her “own” spouse. Relief from sexual pressure is not the only reason for marriage, but it is an important one, others include companionship and children. This verse sets the standard for the New Testament: that God has moved away from the polygamy that was allowed in the Old Testament.

“let each woman have her own husband.” We translate this verse as “let each woman have” due to the fact that the verb “have” echō (#2192 ἔχω; “to have”) is in the present tense, active voice, imperative mood. The imperative mood is the mood of command, and here is an exhortation. The verse is not saying “Every man must have his own wife and every woman must have her own husband” in the sense that every person must be married. The context of this chapter makes it clear that is not the meaning. The point of the imperative exhortation is that there is so much sexual immorality in the culture that, if a person needs sexual release, the man must have his OWN wife, and the woman her OWN husband.

If this verse had just said, “Let every man have his own wife,” it would not have particularly caught anyone’s attention in the culture of the day. Although some of the Jewish men and other men of Middle Eastern descent in Paul’s audience had more than one wife, most did not, and having more than one wife was not a part of the Greco-Roman culture. However, the unspoken cultural norm for Paul’s audience was that men were free to have sex with many women besides their wives, while for a wife to have sexual intercourse with another man was “adultery.” For example, any household slave was the sexual property of the man of the house, and it was accepted that men had sex with their slaves. Also, for a man to have sexual intercourse with a prostitute was also accepted behavior. Furthermore, if a man was traveling and stopped at an inn, the proprietor would provide a slave woman (or a man for those with homosexual desires) for
a fee. In fact, it was part of many Roman dinner parties that the host would provide prostitutes after the meal (Instone Brewer; *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church*, p.177).

This verse changed what was accepted and godly behavior: Paul writes that God’s command is that the woman had her OWN husband. Thus, the godly man was not free to have sexual intercourse with others besides his wife. The effects of this verse were very far reaching. First, it elevated the woman’s position in the family and culture. It is a common Christian myth that Paul was somehow against women. Of course, given the way his writings have been mistranslated and misinterpreted, it is certainly could seem Paul was against women. However, when we properly translate this verse and others like it, we can see that the New Testament was a Magna Carta for women, giving them rights and privileges they had never had before. That a woman would have the sexual attention of her own husband and not share him with slaves and strangers was a huge advance for women [For other verses in the NT that elevate women’s position in the culture, see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:34, 35; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12; 3:2; 5:14; and 1 Pet. 3:7].

Another thing this verse did was it protected woman from the selfishness of men. Any man who professes to be a Christian must keep his hands off other women, even if in the culture in which he lived, he had a legal right to use them sexually, such as with the case of his slaves. A slave in the house of a committed Christian would be secure in the knowledge that the master of the house would make sure she would not be used by the men of the house or be passed around at one of his dinner parties.

Another effect this verse had was it separated Christian men from their non-Christian friends. The average man in the Greco-Roman culture would have thought it strange indeed not to fulfill one’s desires by having legal sex with one’s slaves and prostitutes, and thus this command in 1 Corinthians 7:2 caused a division, and some suspicion, between the Christian men and the non-Christian Romans around them. Thus obeying this command of God was hard on many men, who had to choose between their culture and their God. Thankfully, eventually when the Roman world became Christian after the time of Constantine, this verse would define not only Christian behavior, but what acceptable behavior was for “good people.”

There was one thing this verse did that we today would not expect: it placed women in a dilemma when it came to sex with their husbands. At the time of Paul, the average lifespan of a woman was in the low 30’s, around age 32. This was in large part to the fact that between 5 and 10 percent of the women died in childbirth (some died as a result of an attempted abortion, trying to avoid the risk of childbirth). This fact was not lost on many women of the time, and thus many of them preferred their husbands to have sex with their slaves or a prostitute rather than risk their lives in childbirth.

Thus this verse, which is the very foundation of the Christian family, that “family” would be built upon a man and a woman in an exclusive relationship, also caused great difficulties for both the men and the women. The Christian life is simple, but rarely easy.

7:3. “obligation.” If you marry, you are obligated to provide sexual intercourse to your spouse. The Greek word we translated “obligation” is *opheile* (ὀφειλέ) and means, “that which one ought to do, duty” and also “that which one owes in a financial sense, obligation; as debt” (BDAG).
7:4. “The wife does not have authority over her own body…likewise also the husband…” Both the husband and the wife have authority of their bodies before they get married. However, when one enters into a marriage covenant, he or she agrees to no longer have authority over his or her own body, but to give that authority over to the husband or wife.

7:5. “mutual consent.” The Greek word sumphonos, (#4859 σύµφωνος, which moved from Greek to Latin to our English word “symphony”) from the time of Homer, Plato, Aristotle, down, means harmonious, accordant, agreeing; by mutual consent, by agreement (Thayer). If the husband and wife are going to abstain from sexual intercourse, it must be only for a season, and they must be in harmony about the decision.

“that you may have leisure for prayer.” This is literally the way the Greek reads (and also Lenski’s translation). It could also be translated “that you may give yourself to prayer” because the reason for the leisure was so that time could be given to prayer.

“That you may devote yourself to” as in some versions, seems a little strong for the Greek. One needs to ask why God would word the verse this way. Why “leisure” for prayer? The answer is in the greater context of the chapter. The person who marries will have trouble in the flesh (v. 28) and has to be concerned for his or her spouse and marriage (vss. 32-35). In that context, if the couple can be apart for a while, they have “leisure” to pray and focus on the things of God.

“the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

“because of your lack of self-control.” This does not flatter our human nature, but it is an honest assessment of the situation. Most people do not have much self-control when it comes to sexual continence.

7:6. “I say this…” The word “this” is touto, which starts the verse in the Greek, and regularly refers to what has just been stated. Paul had stated that the husband and wife did not have authority over their bodies, their spouses did. However, then he said that they could “deprive” each other for prayer if it was by consent. However, this was not a command. The couple did not have to spend time apart. He does not command time apart, even for prayer. He allows it as a consent if the couple feels it is best.

“by God’s command.” The Greek phrase kata epitagê (κατά ἐπιταγή) is a technical phrase that means “by the command of; by order of.” In this case, the command would have been by God (or the Lord Jesus Christ, doing God’s will), so “God’s” is added in italics for clarity. See commentary on 1 Timothy 1:1.

7:7. “even as I myself.” The Apostle Paul, though once married, was now single. What happened to his wife is a matter of speculation. The average life span of a woman in the Roman Empire at that time was 32, many women died in childbirth or from myriads of other causes. It is also possible, but less likely, that his wife was from a powerful Jewish family and left him when he became a Christian.

“gift.” Here “gift” refers to the ability to live without sexual pressure being a hindrance to godliness. Some people feel the need for sex and companionship more acutely than others. If a person feels no need to get married, then this chapter is giving guidance that if he stays unmarried he will be able to serve the Lord without distraction.
7:8. "unmarried." The term "unmarried" can be a general term, and here probably refers to the unmarried men. The Greek culture had a specific word for widows, but not a word for the male side, "widowers." If "unmarried" was used to include unmarried women, then the more specific term "widows" would be added because the pressure to remarry would be especially strong for widows, who had a very hard time on their own in most ancient societies, and the Greco-Roman society being no exception.

7:9. "are not exercising." The present indicative tense of the verb means that the action is happening at the time. The other use of this word (1 Cor. 9:25) is also in the present indicative tense and refers to athletes who are exercising self-control in their athletic training. The people this verse refers to are not exercising self-control sexually—they are stepping over the morality line. This is not referring to people who strongly desire to have sexual intimacy and are having a hard time waiting, it is referring to people who are not waiting, they are acting upon their sexual desires. These people should get married so they stop sinning. It seems foolish to us today to say that just because you cannot seem to control your sexual urges toward someone you should then marry that person, but that is the biblical mandate.

"burn with desire." The Greek word means "burn" and can refer to burning with sexual desire (Thayer), but since burning with passion is derived from the context and not the word itself, we felt it better to put "with desire" in italics. Not putting it in, as in the NASB, has caused some to teach that if you sin sexually you will "go to hell" and burn. This is written to the Christian Church, whose salvation is assured, so that is not the meaning.

7:10. "command." From the Greek paraggello (#3853 παραγγέλλω). Technically, to bring an order from one to another, thus some translate as announce, but the origin was an order, so command is best here and many other places.

"not I, but the Lord." There are many Scriptures that testify that the Bible is God-breathed, literally, the words of God. Some testimony is in the form of direct statement (2 Tim. 3:16: "All Scripture is God-breathed"), while other testimony is derived from the way the Bible speaks of itself, for example, that if anyone adds to the words of the Bible he will be cursed (Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18), and still other testimony comes from the statements of the men of God, including Jesus, who relied on Scripture as being the Word of God and not the words of man (Job 23:12; Jer. 15:16; John :39; 17:17). There is no evidence that the "Word of God" is a mixture of the Word of God and the ideas of man. How could anyone separate which was which and rely on that kind of document?

Paul made it clear that the epistles he wrote were by revelation (Gal. 1:12), and that each of them was from God and Jesus (cp. 1 Cor. 1:3). However, when Paul wrote, he wrote in first person (actually, Paul dictated most of the epistles to a professional scribe who wrote down what Paul said, then Paul would sign the end of the epistle; cp. commentary on Gal. 6:11). This would not have confused his readers, who were used to prophets and angels speaking for God. There is no evidence that Paul’s readers thought that Paul was putting his own thoughts down as he wrote, even though he consistently used the word “I.” All through Corinthians (indeed, all through all his epistles), Paul uses “I” and is personally representing the Lord. He uses “I” dozens of times in 1 Corinthians alone (cp. 1:10; 5:9; 10:19; 14:5). Furthermore, the other New Testament writers did the same as Paul (cp. Acts 1:1; James 2:1; 1 Pet. 2:11; 1 John 2:7; Jude 1:3).
In light of the information above, readers can be confused when they read in 1 Corinthians 7:10, “I command, not I, but the Lord,” because it makes it seem like Paul is inserting his own opinion in these verses. He is not. Instead, what he doing is similar to what he does in all his epistles when he quotes Scripture as a basis for further authority. For example, in 1 Corinthians 1:19 he quotes Isaiah 29:14 to help people understand the point Scripture is making and to add weight to what he is saying. He could write his epistles without quoting the Old Testament as an authority, but the quotation helps. However, the Four Gospels were not written when 1 Corinthians was written, so Paul could not say, “As Jesus said and it is written [in Matt. 19:6] ‘Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.’” So instead, Paul makes a reference to the well-known teaching of the Lord Jesus about marriage: that the wife should not be separated from her husband. Paul reminds people that this is something that the Lord himself taught while on earth by saying, “not I, but the Lord.” Then, in verse 12 when Paul stops referring to the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, he says, “But I (not the Lord), say to the rest...” At that point Paul resumes writing in first person by revelation, as he had been doing.

“depart” From chorizō (#5563 χωρίζω pronounced core-ee'-zō). From Herodotus down chorizō means: to separate, divide, part, put asunder (Thayer). It has been used for, and can mean, divorce. However, in the Gospels the word “divorce” (sometimes translated “put away”) is properly apoluō (#630 ἀπολύω). It seems that if only divorce was being referred to, that is the word that would be used here. By using the word chorizō, the Lord places emphasis on the fact that the wife is not to separate from her husband, which would include divorce. However, as many marriage counselors will testify, many women who are married are “separated” from their husbands in all but local proximity. As Christians, our marriages are to reflect Christ and the Church, and there is to be no separation between the people.

7:12. “But to the rest I say (I, not the Lord).” See commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:10

7:14. “brother.” The context makes it clear that this “brother” is the Christian brother of the woman, i.e., her husband.

7:21. “Do not be concerned about it.” A Greek idiomatic phrase (Lenski). A Christian slave would worry that his circumstances would keep him or her from serving much, or as he or she would want to. The Lord says he understands the circumstances and “not to worry.” This is a word of comfort to all of us. Moms may feel that all the responsibilities of family may keep them from the Lord; Dads may feel that work limits their ability to serve. The Lord knows that we must take care of obligations on earth.

“rather do that.” Some commentators and translators (Cp. NRSV) believe that having said that each one should remain in the calling in which they were called in verse 20, a slave should remain a slave even if offered freedom. Yet the chapter has several examples of people changing from unmarried to married, bound to loosed, etc. Should not a slave be able to change also? Certainly. The point of verse 20 is that we should not labor at change for change’s sake, because the Lord can work with us in the situation we are in. However, if the opportunity to better oneself arises, then avail yourself of that (Cp. Lenski.).

7:26. “deem.” The word “deem” means to have an opinion. It is similar to “consider,” but with more emphasis on judgment than reflection.
Chapter 8

8:2. “he does not yet know as he ought to know.” Lenski has a wonderful explanation of this verse. If a man has come to know about idols and meat offered to idols, yet if he stopped with just that knowledge, and never put the total picture together as it relates to living in the love of God towards the brothers, then he really does not know as he ought.

8:4. “we all understand.” there is agreement between Paul and the Church at Corinth on the subject of idols. “No idol in the world really exists.” The Corinthians were surrounded by idols, images of Zeus (Jupiter), Artemas (Diana), Hermes (Mercury), Aphrodite (Venus), etc. The primary definition of “idol” (#1497 εἴδωλον eidolon) in Greek writing from Homer forward is an image, a likeness. It refers to the image of a heathen god: Acts 7:41; 1 Cor. 12:2; Rev. 9:20 (Thayer). Thus, this verse is saying that in reality there are no such gods as “Jupiter,” etc. Paul will later tell the Church that the realities are demons (10:20). The two phrases marked off in quotes follow the context and the style of the RSV, the NRSV, and the ESV. These were things that everyone knew, and apparently someone had said.

8:5. “so-called gods.” As with Lenski, NRSV, NIV, ESV. Paul grants the “what if” to satisfy in doubters, but then stakes his claim that to us there is only one (true) God and one (true) lord. In the Greco-Roman religion, there were gods in heaven, such as the Olympian gods, and gods on earth, such as the forest dwelling gods, etc. Also, the word “lord” refers to human dignities as well. For example, Nero was called lord both in the Roman writings and in the Bible (Acts 25:26). See Deissmann, Light From the Ancient East, p.353-355.

8:6. “one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we are for him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we are through him.” This verse clearly distinguishes between Jesus and God. There is one God and Father, and there is one man, Jesus, who is our “Lord.” This verse shows how God and Jesus work in unity to get the Church what it needs. God gave Jesus all authority and made him head over the Church, so now we get what we need “through” Jesus.

Some Trinitarians say that this verse supports the doctrine of the Trinity because it says that all things came through Jesus Christ. But what the verse actually says is that all things came “from” God, “through” Jesus. That stands in contradiction to Trinitarian doctrine because it places Jesus in a subordinate role to God. According to this verse, Jesus is not “co-equal” with the Father; the Father is “God” and the ultimate source of all things, and Jesus is not called “God.”

The context is the key to understanding what the phrase “all things came through him” means. There is no mention in either the immediate or the remote context about the creation of the world such that the “all things” refers to the original creation of Genesis. This verse is speaking of the Church. God provided all things for the Church via Jesus Christ.

The whole book of 1 Corinthians is taken up with Church issues, and Paul starts 8:6 with “for us,” i.e., for Christians. 1 Corinthians 8:4 and 5 had said that even though there were “so called” gods, for us “there is no God but one.” The Roman world was polytheistic, and people were used to having different “gods” and different “lords”
provide different things in different ways. As the various gods provided things, often those provisions would be mediated and distributed to the people through “lords,” lesser gods or people, such as the priests. That was a major reason the Romans had so many temples and shrines to the different gods and worshipped them all—to curry as much of their favor as possible. But Paul challenged that commonly-accepted practice, and boldly stated that there was only one God “from whom are all things,” and only one Lord “through whom are all things.”

The very next two verses, verses 7 and 8, have a practical application of the truth that there is only one God who provides everything for us through Jesus Christ. Since “no idol in the world really exists,” (v. 4), then they do not really provide the food that is sacrificed to them and cannot affect it for better or worse. Thus, for the Church, there are no laws against eating food sacrificed to idols. Verse 8 says, “But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.” However, this revelation was new for the Church. The Old Testament believers did not have this freedom. They had dozens of food laws, and many people who had converted to Christianity still could not eat food with a clear conscience if it had been offered to an idol—even though the idol was nothing and the source of the blessing was God working through Jesus Christ. Hopefully though, by explaining the situation, more Christians would become free in their conscience and not be bound by old regulations.

By wording the verse the way he does and saying there is one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus, Paul pens this verse in a way that clearly stands against the Trinity. If the Trinity really existed, then this verse would have been the perfect place to say so, and have something such as, “for us there is only one God made up of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost,” or something similar. There is no good reason that the verse would be written in a way that is so clearly non-Trinitarian, calling the Father, “God,” and Jesus, “Lord,” if the Trinity existed. Furthermore, the logical reason that this verse is worded the way it is and the reason that the Bible does not make a clear statement about the Trinity, here or anywhere else, is that there is no Trinity. There is, as this verse says, “one God” and “one Lord, Jesus Christ.” [For more discussion on this verse, see J. S. Hyndman, Lectures on The Principles of Unitarianism, pp. 58-63; Patrick Navas, Divine Truth or Human Tradition, pp. 42-45.]

8:8. “bring us close to God.” From the Greek word paristemi (#3936 παρίστηµι) See BDAG. Definition “e,” and cp. NIV, NRSV.

“left behind.” The Greek word means to fall behind, be inferior, to be left behind in a race (Thayer).

“overflow of credit.” The word is perisseuó (#4052 περισσεύω). Intransitive and properly, to exceed a fixed number or measure; to be over and above a certain number or measure,...to exist or be at hand in abundance...to abound, overflow (Thayer), to be an excess of credit (Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament). This verse would have been hard hitting to the Corinthians, where wealth, luxury, and sports combined, and some men fell behind, while others had an excess or overflow. In the case of food, not eating does not cause us to be left behind with God, nor does eating give us an overflowing abundance of credit.
Chapter 9

9:26. “aimlessly.” The Greek is ἀδήλως (#84 ἀδήλως, pronounced “ä-day-lōs”), meaning, aimless, or without aim, i.e. not as one who has a fixed goal (BDAG). It refers to being without a special goal or purpose, to doing something without specific intention, to be “aimless.” It can be understood simply as “without having some goal” or “without some reason” or “without trying to accomplish something.”
9:27. “but I treat my body harshly and make it my slave.” The Greek word ὑποπιάζω (#5299 ὑποπιάζω, pronounced “ah-poo-pi-ā'zō”), like almost every word, has several meanings. BDAG Lexicon lists three primary meanings: 1) To blacken an eye; give a black eye, strike in the face. 2) To bring someone to submission by constant annoyance, wear down. A more appropriate rendering for a figurative sense would be “browbeat.” “Blacken my face” means to slander, besmirch. 3) To put under strict discipline, punish, treat roughly, torment (1 Cor. 9:27 of the apostle’s self-imposed discipline. But the expression is obviously taken from the language of prize-fighting in verse 26).

Of these three, number 3 is the most preferable given the context of 1 Corinthians 9:27 and what we have to do to control our bodies.

“disqualified.” An adjective in Greek, thus we added the object in italics: “for the prize.”

Chapter 10

10:4 “the spiritual rock that followed them.” The rock that came after the Israelites, as history turned out, long after them, was Christ.

The Greek text does not have the article “the,” but it is not necessary to use the definite article when the noun comes after a preposition (in this case, ek; see commentary on Matthew 1:18).

The Greek word translated “follow” is ἀκολουθεῖον (#190 ἀκολουθεῖον pronounced ah-koe-loo-thay'-ēō) and its basic meaning is “to come after,” which can be either in time or spatial sequence. Thus it refers to following after something sequentially. It also can mean to accompany someone who was taking the lead, thus “go along with.” It was used metaphorically for following someone doctrinally as a disciple, thus “be a disciple.” This use came from the fact that the disciple did actually “follow” the teacher where he went both physically and mentally. It was also used of following in the sense of obeying or complying, as in “follow my directions.”

The common definition of ἀκολουθεῖον, combined with the scope of Scripture, shows that in this case “follow” means to come after: Jesus came centuries after the Israelites. The Israelites did “drink,” i.e., get nourishment, from knowing about the Christ who was to come after them, just as did Abraham, who rejoiced at seeing the day of Christ (John 8:56).

There are some very Trinitarian versions, such as the NIV, that translate the word “follow” as “accompany,” as if Jesus were accompanying the Israelites on their journey. But ἀκολουθεῖον appears in the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament 90 times, and even in the NIV it is translated as some form of “follow” (like “follows,” “following,” etc.) 83 of
those times. The NIV translates *akolouthēō* as “accompanied” only twice, here and in Mark 6:1, and we submit that the NIV does so here because of the translators’ Trinitarian bias and not because the context calls for it.

While it is true that lexically *akolouthēō* can be translated as “accompany,” it should not be translated that way here for several reasons. First, we must remember that when *akolouthēō* is used as “accompany,” it is still used in the sense of following, or going with, a leader. It is not used in the sense of “accompanying” a group while at the same time being the leader of the group. But if the Messiah was with Israel, he clearly would have been leading the group in some way, not just following them around.

Also, the scope of Scripture shows that “follow” in the sense of “come after” is the correct interpretation. Since this verse mentions the Israelites in the desert, the desert wanderings become the “remoter context” against which one must check any interpretation. As we have already noted, there is no reference that can be brought forward to show that Christ was either with the Israelites or was somehow following them around. Are there verses that show that the Israelites were looking forward to the Messiah? Yes, many. For one thing, it was in the wilderness where that great prophecy of the coming Messiah was given: “A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel,” and “their kingdom will be exalted” (Num. 24:7 and 17). This prophecy of the Messiah spoke of him as a future reality, not a present one. Furthermore, the Passover Lamb foreshadowed the Messiah. The manna anticipated Christ being “the true bread from heaven.” The Tabernacle, with all its offerings, foreshadowed Christ in many ways, including being the place where people would meet God. The High Priest was a type of the Great High Priest, Jesus Christ.

Not only the verses associated with the wilderness wanderings, but the whole Old Testament, spoke of the Messiah as a future hope. For example, Micah 5:2 foretells his birth in Bethlehem, and Isaiah 53 shows his future life and death. Also, verses such as Jeremiah 33:14 and 15 show that the Christ was the “promised Messiah.” But there is no need to promise the Messiah if he was already with the people. No clear verses say the Messiah was with Israel, and the Jews never understood that to be the case.

The lesson from this verse is that the people looked forward to the coming of the Messiah and “drank,” i.e., got strength and nourishment, from knowing that he was coming, just as we today get strength and nourishment from knowing that he is coming again.

10:7. Quoted from Exodus 32.6.

10:9. “We must not tempt the Lord.” This verse, and its context, make it clear that it is not at all wise to test the Lord. People regularly ignore God’s commands, as they are free to do, for this is “man’s day” (1 Cor. 4:3). But there is a day coming when God will hold people to account, and we will all want to be found righteous on that day. Although the verb “tempt” is present subjunctive, it has the intensifier “εκ” as a prefix, and thus the translation “must” is considered appropriate (cp. ESV; NRSV; RSV; The Source NT; God’s New Covenant).

Many translations read “Christ” instead of “Lord” and use this verse as a support of the Trinity. Some Greek manuscripts read “Lord,” some read “God,” and some read “Christ,” and furthermore, the Church Fathers are divided as well, because different Fathers quoted the verse differently, clearly because they were reading manuscripts that differed from one another. The subject of textual criticism is very involved, and it is
common that scholars differ in their opinions as to which texts are original and which texts have been altered. In this case, there are early texts that read both ways, so the job of determining the original reading from textual evidence becomes more difficult. Although there are a wide variety of manuscripts, even old ones, that read “Christ,” as Bart Ehrman points out, “These arguments, however, are not persuasive. In fact, we know that most Christians had no difficulty at all in understanding how Christ could have been active in the affairs of the ancient Israelites. Most of them believed he was actively involved and read his involvement into Old Testament narratives on every possible occasion” (The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture; pp. 89, 90). Ehrman goes on to point out why the text would have been changed to read “Christ” and shows that the Alexandrian text is usually considered more accurate, and the Alexandrian texts (Sinaiticus, B.C. 33) read “Lord.” We agree with Ehrman’s conclusions and the authors of the English versions that read “Lord,” and believe “Lord” was the original reading.

As it is translated in versions that take the word “Lord” as original, there is no Trinitarian inference or support (cp. ASV, Amplified Bible, GWN, NASB, NIV, NJB, Rotherham, RSV, etc.). There is only a Trinitarian inference if the manuscripts that read “Christ” are considered original.

Every translator will testify to the importance of context in determining the correct translation of Scripture. We feel the context makes it clear that “Lord” is the correct reading. Although there are many times that the Israelites were said to tempt “God” or “Yahweh” (often translated “the LORD”) in the Old Testament, there is not even a single reference to tempting Christ. Furthermore, there is not even a reference to tempting “adonay,” the generic word for “lord.” The Israelites tempted their God, Yahweh, never “Christ.”

By reading the 1 Corinthians 10:9 carefully, we obtain a vital clue to its meaning and the proper translation. The verse says that when the Israelites tempted “the Lord,” they were “destroyed by serpents.” This phrase allows us to find the exact record in the Old Testament that is being referred to. In Numbers 21:5, the Israelites “spoke against God” and then “Yahweh sent venomous snakes among them” (21:6). In the record of this event in the Old Testament, “God” and Yahweh are both mentioned, but “Christ” is never mentioned, neither is the generic Hebrew word for “lord.” Furthermore, there is no scripture anywhere in the Old Testament that says “Christ” poured out his “wrath,” and certainly not by sending serpents. Thus, if some Greek texts read “the Lord” and others read “Christ,” the context points to “Lord” as the correct interpretation.

There are some commentators, however, who assert that the context mentions Christ because 10:1 says that the Israelites drank of the rock, and the rock was Christ. We would first point out, as we have in the commentary, that actually 10:1 militates against the reading “Christ” in 10:9, because 10:1 says that the Christ was coming in the future, in which case he could not have been tempted by the Israelites (see commentary on 10:1). In fact, we know that Christ followed the Israelites by 1400 years. When Balaam the prophet said the Messiah was coming in the future (Num. 24:17), no one protested and said he was with them at that very time. In fact, all the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah coming in the future were never contested, or clarified as if they meant only that he would come “in the flesh” in the future but was with them at that time as a spirit.
[For more discussion on this verse, see Bart Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, pp. 89, 90; Don Snedeker, *Our Heavenly Father has No Equals*; pp. 441, 442].

10:13. **“common to man.”** This translation explains the Greek adjective *anthropinos* (ἅνθρωπινός), meaning “pertaining to being human.” Paul is saying no temptation has taken hold of you that isn’t *human*—that is, “such as comes to a human being, and such as a human being may endure” (Lenski). We translate this “common to man” to avoid the confusion that this refers to temptations that originated by fellow humans. This is not the meaning, for Satan is directly or indirectly behind every temptation.

**“but.”** The particle *de* (#1161 δέ) is usually used when there is a weak contrast, or a pause, but it is often better represented by “and” than “but.” Here, but is more appropriate, to make clear the contrast between our temptation and God who does not tempt us (James 1:13). God is very much opposed to the temptation’s success. He will never allow the force of the temptation to exceed our ability to choose against it, and furthermore, not only will he assure this but “also” (καί) provide a way out. Therefore, man is without excuse. If he sins, he cannot blame God (James 1:13), nor can he claim the lure of the situation overpowered his will, nor that there was no other choice. If we sin, it is *always* our fault in that the choice was ours.


10:30. **“defamed.”** The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (blasphēmeō) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3]. Paul was being defamed, personally attacked, for behavior that was not sinful. This is done far too often in Christianity. We defame people and hurt their personal reputation over things that are our personal opinion (like what should be worn when, what hair styles are “right,” what cars people should drive, etc.). This is not the Christian way to behave. We have no right to defame others who are just living their own lives.

Chapter 11

11:4. **“dishonors.”** This is the Greek word *kataischuno* (καταισχύνω); see commentary on Romans 9:33, “put to shame.”

11:5. **“with her head uncovered dishonors her head.”** This verse shows how important to God it is that there be order in the church. Many verses in the NT let us know that God is a God of order and decency (cp. 1 Cor. 14:33). It was a custom among the Jews that women cover their heads in public. Although it is often taught that the Romans had that custom also, archaeologists and historians have provided enough evidence to show us that although women often covered their heads, it was not a hard and fast cultural norm. Nevertheless, among the Romans, untidy, or natural, free-flowing hair was often associated with unrestrained behavior or even prostitution. Thus, in light of the culture of the time, we can see why God did not want the church meeting to be the place where different cultures clashed and things were uncomfortable.

Proper attire was not the only thing in the first century that the cultures clashed over. The Jews had very strict laws about eating, while the Romans did not. That caused tension in the Church, which Paul addressed in Romans 14:13-21. In that section the
Word of God says, “It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall” (Rom. 14:21 NIV). The “do anything else” includes the way we dress—if it makes people uncomfortable, the loving thing is to not dress that way.

Although the simple clash of the Roman culture with the Jewish culture is enough to explain why Paul had to address the issue of women’s head coverings, there may also be another reason. It was becoming clear that men and women were one in Christ, both empowered by holy spirit, and both with important ministries in the Church. Thus it is possible, and suggested by some commentators, that the women were taking off their head coverings as a symbol of their equal position in Christ with the men in the Church. That is certainly a possibility, and if it is the case, then this verse shows us that equality in Christ does not remove the responsibility each Christian has not to turn the church into a place of uncomfortable debate. It also shows that there are certain gender differences between men and women that are reflected in attire even though the men and women are one in Christ and both able to minister in the congregation (see commentary on 1 Tim. 2:11-15). Thus, there are a few places in the NT that specifically address the way women dress, while not mentioning how men dress (cp. 1 Tim. 2:9).

It is important for us to understand that this verse is addressing the cultural norms of the time, and instructs women to cover their head (not their face) in public meetings. Today our cultural norms are not the same as in biblical times, and so women regularly go to church without a head covering. On the other hand, we see how Christians with the correct attitude understand the culture of a certain region or even individual church. If the people in a certain church put on their “Sunday best” for church, with ladies in dresses in men in a coat and tie, a loving Christian who visits that church will dress in the same way and not press his or her freedom in Christ.

“dishonors.” This is the Greek word kataischuno (καταισχύνω); see commentary on Romans 9:33, “put to shame.”

11:9. “man was not created for the woman, but the woman for the man.” The actual meaning of this verse has been hotly debated. Figure of Speech: Irony. By this irony God hopes to “wake up” the Corinthians to the fact that He placed all of them in the Body as it has pleased Him.

11:10. “symbol.” Something that represents something else, especially if the thing represented is immaterial or spiritual. A “sign” usually points to something else, not as much “represents” something else (as a road sign points to the condition of the road ahead, not “represents” the conditions, or the “signs” that Jesus did pointed to his Messiahship, not represented his Messiahship.)

11:17. “resulting in worse.” The NIV translation of this verse, while not literally following the Greek text, is a very clear dynamic equivalent translation, and catches the meaning of the verse: “your meetings do more harm than good.” This should be a very powerful lesson for all Christians, because our tendency is to say that if someone goes to church, that is a good thing. Not necessarily. Our gatherings should be a place where we are encouraged, challenged, taught what the Bible really says, and mentored in the Faith. The goal of the meeting is to produce strong Christians who are doing the will of God in their lives. If church has become a social gathering place, or a place where our sin is accepted and we are not challenged to change, or a place of education without instruction
in obedience, or a place where traditional teachings not based on the Bible are regularly taught as truth, then our meetings are doing more harm than good.

11:18. “as a congregation.” The Greek word “congregation” is ekklēsia (#1577 ἐκκλησία; see commentary on Matthew 16:18). The Greek text reads, en ekklēsia “in assembly,” which we represent in the REV as “as a congregation,” in other words, when your congregations get together. This is not just a chance meeting of friends, but a purposeful meeting of the “church.” The churches were small and usually met in homes (cp. Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philemon 1:2), although no doubt sometimes they found venues, even outdoors, when the entire congregation of believers in an area could be together. Sadly, even when the Christians in Corinth met as small groups, there were divisions among them.

11:21. “supper.” The Greek deipnon (#1173 δείπνων) means 1) the main meal of the day, 2) an elaborate dinner or feast for guests, or 3) a meal with cultic significance, such as the Passover or Lord’s supper. We have stayed with “supper” because “the Lord’s supper” is a part of Christian vocabulary, and in many places in the English speaking world, “supper” is the main meal of the day.

11:25. “new” The Greek kainos means new in quality. It is not just “new” in time, which would be neos, the New Covenant is new in quality. It was ratified at the last supper, and will be effective when Christ returns to earth and sets up his kingdom. Just because Christ ratified the New Covenant in his death does not mean it is in force. God gave Abraham the land by covenant, and yet he never saw it in his life, and in fact the Israelites never had the full extent of the land God promised in covenant, but they will get it in the Millennial Kingdom. Thus, there can be a large gap between when a covenant is made and when it is fulfilled. That is the case today. All one has to do is study in the OT what God says will happen when the New Covenant is in force to realize it is not in force yet. We today are living in the Administration of the Sacred Secret.

11:27. “in an unworthy manner.” The context tells us what that is in this case: the people of Corinth were not helping each other out. The rich came and were stuffing themselves and getting drunk, while those who had “nothing” (v. 22) went hungry. Thus, because the “body,” (the Church) was not recognized as one body with many members, each as important as the other, some people were weak and sick, and others had died.

11:29. “body.” Many versions have “body of the Lord,” or “the Lord’s body,” but in this verse the text just reads “body.” The reference is almost certainly an amphibologia (Bullinger: Figures. Double entendre). It refers to the body of Jesus which was broken as a sacrifice for others, and thus stands as an example of how we ought to live sacrificially for others; and it also refers to the fact that anyone who ate his fill and got drunk while another Christian nearby was starving did not properly discern the body, i.e., the Body of Christ, in which all people are members of one body, each of equal importance and each needed.

11:31. “accurately judged” is diakrino (#1252 διακρίνω), a word with many meanings. It is more than just “judge,” which is krino (#2919 κρίνω). We have to make an accurate judgment of ourselves. Where are we strong, where are we weak, how can we contribute, where are we in need of help or possibly in error? If the Corinthians were open to that kind of constructive criticism, and then did the hard work of self-correction, they would not be behaving in such an un-Christlike manner as to not share their food with each other.
“we would not be judged.” (krino) i.e., by the Lord, and even by circumstances now. 11:34. “And the rest.” There is more than just what is mentioned in Corinthians that needs attention, but Paul will deal with that personally when he arrives, which indicates that it is not essential that it be handled immediately.

Chapter 12

12:1. “spiritual matters.” The Greek text has the definite article “the” before “spiritual,” which may mean, as it seems apparent from the context, that the Corinthians had written Paul about spiritual matters even as they had about sexual matters (1 Cor. 7:1). Thus Paul would write about “the” spiritual matters, using the figure ellipsis to emphasize “spiritual.”

The word “spiritual” is pneumatikos (#4152 πνευματικός), which is an adjective, so most translations supply “gifts” as the noun that “spiritual” modifies. However, the context is much broader than gifts, so “gifts” is too narrow a word to supply as the noun in this particular context. “Things” usually refers more to concrete entities or objects, whereas “matters” refers more to ideas and concepts, so “matters” seems to be the best noun to supply in this context. In 1 Corinthians 14:1, “things” is more appropriate than “matters,” because we diligently pursue spiritual things.

“Spiritual matters” or “spiritual things” fits the subject of Chapters 12-14, which are about spiritual matters, including “gifts” (12:4), “service” (12:5), “working” (energizings) (12:6) and “manifestations” (12:7-10). It is common for translators to try to get the sense of the context and supply a noun to complete the sense of pneumatikos. For example, in Romans 15:27, it says the Gentiles share in the pneumatikos of the Jews. The NIV and ESV supply “blessings,” while the KJV and ASV say “things.” 1 Corinthians 2:15 uses pneumatikos, and the NIV supplies “man,” reading “spiritual man,” while the ESV supplies “person,” and reads “spiritual person,” and the KJV reads “he that is spiritual.” In 1 Corinthians 9:11, pneumatikos is used in the context of spiritual things that are sown into a person’s life, so the NIV supplies “seed,” reading “spiritual seed,” while the KJV supplies “things,” reading “spiritual things,” and the NRSV says, spiritual “good.”

The wide variety of spiritual matters being discussed in 1 Corinthians 12-14 dictates that “matters” or “things” be supplied to complete the sense of pneumatikos in 1 Corinthians 12:1, 14:1, etc. Those chapters are speaking about spiritual matters of many kinds, not just spiritual “gifts.” Adding the word “gifts” obscures what God had so clearly stated in the original text and causes people to be confused about the manifestations of holy spirit. [For more on “gifts,” see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:1].

12:2. “mute” is a noun, not an adjective, and contrasts the mute idols with the living God. The Greek is worded in such a way as to emphasize the word “mute.” It is not just “mute idols,” but “the idols, the mute [ones].” It is factual, or course, that the pagan idols are mute, but it is also a slap at them, almost sarcasm. This verse echoes the Old Testament, which points out several times that idols cannot speak (Ps. 115:5; 135:16).

“led…led astray.” The difference between “led,” agō (#71 ἀγω) and “led astray” apagō (#520 ἀπάγω) is one of intensity. Apagō has the sense of forcefully carried off. So
although the people did follow willingly, the forceful presentation and charisma of the pagan leaders was a powerful force in leading people astray.

The point that the verse is making is a powerful one. People trust their spiritual leaders to lead them to truth and right. However, Paul makes the point that when the Gentiles were led to idols, they were being led astray. This happens today with many teachers, who lead their flocks astray and into hurtful and harmful doctrines and practices.

12:3. “make known to you” (as per Fee, New International Commentary on the New Testament; etc.) sets the contrast with “I do not want you to be ignorant” in v. 1. The versions are divided as to the “en,” and whether it is an instrumental dative, “by” or should be translated as “in.”

“speaking in union with the spirit of God.” Speaking “in union with” the spirit comes from the preposition en, which describes a relationship (see commentary on Romans 6:3. Lenski also has, “in union with.”). Also, it can be instrumental and be translated “by,” however, that is not the primary meaning here as can be seen by the “in” in the last phrase of the verse. It is about being in a state of agreement or concord with the holy spirit. In the wider context of this section of Scripture about the manifestations of holy spirit (chapters 12-14) it can be seen that speaking “in” the spirit of God can include speaking in tongues, and it might well be thought by pagans that people speaking in tongues were cursing God, which Paul says does not happen.

“in the holy spirit.” In this context, the Greek word en (“in”) is more than just an instrumental dative for “by.” To be “in” the spirit is to be in a state of agreement or concord with the spirit such that one’s actions can agree with, and sometimes even flow from, the holy spirit. When a person says, “Jesus is Lord,” and really means it, that person’s words agree with God’s declaration about His Son. Anyone can mouth the words “Jesus is Lord,” but saying them without meaning them would not be “in,” (“in a state of agreement with”) the holy spirit and the words of God. An unsaved person can see the truth about Jesus and confess him as Lord and be “in” (in agreement with) the holy spirit and get saved.

The “the” is not needed in the Greek text before the words “holy spirit” because the preposition en can make the pneuma (spirit) definite without the article. In this case, the Greek text does not have a definite article before “holy spirit.” The preposition en is before the phrase which means it can be understood as if the “the” was actually present. In Greek, if a preposition governs a noun, it is the context that determines whether the noun is definite or not, and therefore whether there should be a “the” or not in the English translation. Daniel Wallace writes in Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics (p. 247): “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.” A. T. Robertson writes: “...the article is not the only means of showing that a word is definite. ...The context and history of the phrase in question must decide. ...[As for prepositional phrases], these were also considered definite enough without the article.” Robertson then cites some examples that use ek, as does this verse in Matthew (Grammar of the Greek New Testament, pp. 790-792). [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

12:4. “being distributed.” The Greek word is diairesis (#1243 διαίρεσις), it is plural, and it is generally used in reference to “distribution,” meaning that there are different distributions of the gifts, i.e., that different people are being given different gifts (See
Lenski, C. K. Barrett, and Rotherham). That the gifts differ is too obvious to mention, and misses the point. The gifts differ, but the point is that the gifts are distributed to different people, so the whole Body of Christ working together is necessary if we are to have all the gifts of Christ working fully.

“spirit.” The word pneuma, spirit, must be studied carefully because the word “spirit” can refer to the gift of holy spirit, or to Jesus, or to God, depending on the context (both Jesus and God are called the “Spirit”). There are a few reasons that “spirit” could refer to the gift of holy spirit: the fact that “spirit” in verse 3 refers to the gift of holy spirit; the fact that verses 4, 5, and 6 would then have the gift of holy spirit, the Lord (Jesus), and God; and the fact that although there are many “gifts,” there is only one gift of holy spirit. However, there are also some reasons that “Spirit” can refer to Jesus or God. Verse 4 and 11 are almost parallel, with the “Spirit” distributing to people. If “Spirit” in verse 4 refers to God, the word “Lord” in verse 5 refers to Jesus Christ, and “God” in verse 6 refers to God, then we have a chiasmic structure that is common in other parts of Scripture: “A—B—A,” in this case, “God—Lord—God.” The weight of evidence, however, seems to favor that “spirit” in verse four refers to the gift of holy spirit.

12:6. “energizings...energizes.” If anyone is going to do signs, miracles, or wonders, he must understand that he must, by trusting God, bring the power of God to bear on any given situation, but it is always God who provides the power, the energy, for the event to happen. See commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:20, “ambassadors.”

12:7. “manifestation.” The word “manifestation” is the Greek word phanerōsis, (#5321 φανέρωσις), and it means, “to cause something to be fully known by revealing clearly and in some detail – ‘to make known, to make plain, to reveal, to bring to the light, to disclose, revelation’” (Louw Nida, Greek-English Lexicon). The English word “manifestation” comes from two Latin words, manus, meaning “hand,” and festare, meaning “to touch.” A “manifestation” is something concrete and tangible that can be “touched with the hand,” so to speak. The gift of holy spirit is not tangible, because it is spirit. That is why Scripture does not promise that one will feel anything when he gets born again. God may accompany someone’s New Birth with a miracle in the senses world so that he knows it without a doubt, but that is rare and certainly not promised.

To understand this verse, indeed, 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14, it is vital to understand the difference between the “gift” and the “manifestation” of holy spirit. The “gift” is the holy spirit itself, and each Christian receives the “gift of holy spirit,” at the moment he is saved, born again (Acts 2:38; Eph. 1:13). The gift of holy spirit that is sealed in each Christian cannot be detected by the five senses. No one can see, hear, smell, taste, or touch it. However, the gift of holy spirit inside each Christian can be manifested, brought forth into evidence, in the nine ways set forth in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10.

A “manifestation” is detectable by the five senses. Electric energy in a light bulb is manifested (made obvious) in the form of light and heat. A manifestation of the chicken pox virus, which cannot be seen, is a rash with small pimple-like sores.

The multipurpose “Swiss Army” knife (today there are many “multi-purpose” knives that are similar) is a good example of the difference between a gift and a manifestation. The traditional Swiss Army knife has a red handle, and many come with two blades (big and little), two screwdrivers (flathead and Phillips), a can opener, an awl,
scissors, a file, and a pair of tweezers (nine manifestations!). If you receive one Swiss army knife as a gift, you can use (bring into manifestation) any or all of its implements, and cut, snip, tweeze, etc. The one gift of the Swiss knife has many manifestations. Similarly, the one gift God gives each believer is holy spirit, which can be manifested in nine ways.

“of the spirit.” There has been much scholarly discussion about the exact nature of the genitive, “of” in the phrase, “the manifestation of the spirit.” The confusion is in large part due to the fact that most theologians think the “Spirit” is God. The spirit in this verse is the gift of God, holy spirit, and the genitive is the genitive of origin or production. The gift of holy spirit is the source of the manifestations, and the phrase means, the manifestations that originate with, or are produced by, the spirit of God. A somewhat parallel phrase occurs in 2 Corinthians 4:2, which has “the manifestation of the truth” (KJV, which has the articles accurately placed). One cannot see the “truth” in the apostle’s minds, but it is there, and it is the origin of their behavior, which can be seen by everyone. The gift of holy spirit and “truth” are invisible in a person, but they produce manifestations that can be clearly seen in the senses world.

“common good.” The Bible specifically says that the manifestation of holy spirit is for the “common good.” Benefits are missed, or consequences occur, when Christians do not walk with the power of the manifestations of holy spirit. Imagine the Bible with no manifestations of the power of God—no record of Moses smiting the rock, or Joshua stopping the Jordan River, or Samson pushing down the pagan temple, or God telling Samuel to anoint Saul as king, or Elijah calling down fire from heaven, or God telling Jonah to go to Nineveh.

The Bible would be much less exciting, and would bring much less hope and blessing, if the power of God were absent from its pages. If Ananias had not walked in the power of the manifestations, he would not have had the blessing of healing Paul (Acts 9:10-18). If Peter did not walk in the power of the manifestations, he would not have had the blessing of being the first to lead Gentiles into the new birth (Acts 10:9-46). If Paul had not walked in the power of the manifestations, Eutychus would have remained dead (Acts 20:9-12). If a Christian does not speak in tongues, he misses out on its being a sign from God that he is saved (1 Cor. 14:22). Similarly, if the manifestations are absent or misused, there are consequences. If everyone in the congregation speaks in tongues at the same time, for example, an unbeliever may get the wrong impression (1 Cor. 14: 23).

12:8. “For to one.” This verse (and verses nine and ten), seem to indicate that each Christian gets only one manifestation, something that has confused many Christians. When we understand what the manifestations of holy spirit are, it becomes obvious that each Christian has the ability to manifest each of them. For example, 1 Corinthians 14:5 says it is the will of God that every Christian speak in tongues, and 1 Corinthians 14:23 gives an example of everyone in the Church in Corinth speaking in tongues. But if every Christian spoke in tongues, and each could only have one “gift,” then no Christian could have any other “gift.” That cannot be the case. For one thing, every Christian is encouraged to speak in tongues, and also to prophesy and interpret (1 Cor. 14:5). That means each Christian is encouraged to operate three manifestations, not just one! But there is more. The manifestation, “a message of knowledge” is God or the Lord Jesus giving knowledge to believers by revelation. Every believer can get guidance from God or the Lord via the gift of holy spirit inside them. But if each believer can only have one
“gift,” then they would not be able to speak in tongues and get revelation too. These examples should be very clear, and the evidence that each believer can operate all of the manifestations becomes even clearer as we study the subject. For example, every believer needs to have spiritually energized faith to accomplish God’s will in their lives. But since “faith” is in this list that many people say a person only gets “one” of, that would mean if a believer had this “faith,” that would be the one and only thing on the list he would get. Could the Bible really teach that if a person speaks in tongues, or prophesies, or gets revelation knowledge from the Lord, he cannot have faith? Of course not! That makes no sense.

This verse is not saying that each person only gets “one” manifestation. It is teaching that God energizes different people at different times. At any given time or meeting, God energized different people in different ways. To make sure that things in the Church are done “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40 KJV), at any given time the Lord energizes different manifestations in different believers. Thus at a Christian meeting, one person will speak in tongues and interpret, another will prophesy, another will minister healing, etc. [For the difference between “to another” and “to a different one” see commentary on 12:9].

“is given through the spirit.” The manifestations of the spirit come via the gift of holy spirit. We must be clear that God can give knowledge or wisdom to people in many ways. For example, He spoke to Moses via a burning bush. He spoke to Gideon via an angel. He can send a prophet. Messages given in ways such as that are revelation, but they are not “manifestations of holy spirit.”

To be a manifestation of holy spirit, the revelation has to come from God or the Lord Jesus Christ to the Christian via the gift of holy spirit within him. In most cases in the Old Testament and the Gospels, when God wanted a person to prophesy or, like Joseph, to be a wise ruler, He put holy spirit on him so He could more fully communicate with him. Joseph had the spirit of God upon him so he could hear from God (Gen. 41:38). Moses and Joshua had the spirit of God (Num. 11:17; 27:18); the seventy elders of Israel had spirit upon them (Num. 11:25). God put his spirit on Bezalel so he could get the wisdom of God on how to build the Tabernacle (Exod. 31:1-5). Judges of Israel such as Othniel (Judg. 3:10), Gideon (Judg. 6:34), Jephthah (Judg. 11:29), and Samson (Judg. 14:19), had the spirit of God to help them rule and fight. King Saul had the spirit, and prophesied (1 Sam. 10:6). When the spirit of God came on Amasai, he heard from God and prophesied (1 Chron. 12:18). So did Azariah (2 Chron. 15:1 and 2), Jahaziel (2 Chron. 20:14), Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:20), and others. Furthermore, it was holy spirit that gave David the power to hear from God and get the plans for the Temple (1 Chron. 28:12). John the Baptist had the spirit of God upon him from birth (Luke 1:15). Thus, when we speak of “a message of wisdom” and “a message of knowledge” being manifestations of holy spirit, we are speaking of God or the Lord Jesus giving direct revelation to the person via the holy spirit born within that individual.

It is very important to realize that when the Bible says “manifestation of the spirit,” it means exactly that—these are evidences of holy spirit, not natural abilities that God has given to the person. They are the presence of holy spirit being made visible. We make this point because some people treat these manifestations as if they were talents that some people have, with no specific connection to the gift of holy spirit they received when they were born again. It is true that God does give different people different talents.
Some people sing well; some people are very athletic; some are very intelligent; some people are great artists, etc. These are all God-given talents, but they are not manifestations of holy spirit. On the other hand, the manifestations of the spirit such as speaking in tongues, interpretation, prophecy, trust (“faith”), gifts of healings, and miracles, require both the power of holy spirit and the cooperation and action of the believer involved. The manifestations of holy spirit do not operate apart from the free will of the believer. Take speaking in tongues, for example. The Lord will provide the words to say, but the believer must do the speaking. The manifestations are good examples of us being “fellow-workers” with God (1 Cor. 3:9).

“message.” The Greek word is *logos* (#3056 λόγος). We translate these manifestations as a “message” because the Greek word *logos* means an intelligible communication. The first definition of *logos* in Thayer’s Greek Lexicon is “a word, yet not in the grammatical sense (equivalent to *vocabulum*, the mere name of an object), but language, *vox*, i.e., a word which, uttered by the living voice, embodies a conception or idea” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon). The NIV uses “message,” and other versions, such as the RSV, NRSV, and NJB, use “utterance,” which would be fine as long as it is understood that it is the Lord who “utters” the message to the person via the gift of holy spirit, and not the person who “utters” the message of wisdom to someone else. The translation “message” communicates accurately exactly what the Lord gives by revelation: a message. The message may come in many ways: an audible voice, a picture or vision, a physical sensation, an emotion, or a firm realization (an inner knowing). The King James Version says “word of wisdom” and “word of knowledge” and so those terms are widely used, and “word” is used for “message” in Christian jargon. Nevertheless, it could be misleading to a new Bible student who might think of revelation as “words,” especially because in our experience the majority of the revelation any person receives is not a “word” and not even by “words,” but much more often by an impression or picture.

In this verse, the Greek word *logos* is used of individual revelation to people. This is important because both logos and *rhema* (#4487 ρῆμα) are used of individual messages of revelation given to Christians. We say that to correct the error of some Bible teachers who say that *rhema* refers to individual revelation while *logos* refers to the Word of God. This verse, 1 Corinthians 12:8, is a good example of *logos* being used of revelation to an individual, and examples of *rhema* as individual revelation include: Matthew 4:4; Luke 2:29; 3:2. In contrast, examples of *rhema* being used of the whole word of God include 1 Peter 1:25 (cp. Heb. 6:5).

“A message of wisdom.” Definition: A message of wisdom is God or the Lord Jesus Christ, by revelation, providing a person with wisdom. It is God or the Lord giving a person direction, or guiding them in how to apply the knowledge he has about something. For an explanation of how a message of wisdom works, see the commentary on “a message of knowledge.” Both “a message of knowledge” and “a message of wisdom” are revelation [For more on what “revelation” is and how it works, see commentary on Galatians 1:12].

For years scholars have discussed the manifestations of holy spirit, and there are many differing opinions. For example, reading different commentaries shows that some scholars think “a message of wisdom” is being able to understand the wisdom of God, or perhaps being able to express the wisdom of God. The Living Bible, for example, calls “a
message of wisdom,” “the ability to give wise advice.” Many people, saved and unsaved, give wise advice. That is not a manifestation of holy spirit. The manifestation of a message of wisdom occurs when God gives a Christian a message about what to do in a given situation via the gift of holy spirit.

The reason for the discussion and the uncertainty is that the manifestations are not defined in 1 Corinthians. There is a good reason for their not being defined. It is common in all writing that authors leave out details and descriptions that everyone knows. Writers today commonly mention cars, planes, the Internet, and thousands of other things that they do not explain because the readers know what those things are. There are many examples of this in the Bible also.

A good example occurs in the Gospel of Luke. Luke did, for the time in which he lived, a good job of dating the birth of Christ by telling us it was about the time of the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria (Luke 2:2). No doubt everyone in Luke’s day who read that said, “Ah, now I know when the birth of Christ occurred.” Today, however, not much information about Quirinius has survived the centuries, and so there is controversy about the date of the birth of Christ. Another example involves biblical animals. No doubt when Job was written, everyone knew what the “behemoth” was (Job 40:15). Today we do not know enough information for scholars to agree on what the animal is. Another example involves nations. Genesis and other books of the Bible mention the “Hittites” (Gen. 10:15), but that nation was lost in history so completely that until the nineteenth century when archaeologists uncovered entire Hittite cities, some scholars even doubted their existence. (see Joseph Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, p. 108.) Nevertheless, the Bible never describes the Hittites because the biblical readers knew exactly who they were and where they lived.

The people of Corinth and other Christians in the first century were familiar with the manifestations of holy spirit, so there was no need for Paul to explain what they were or how they worked. God’s people had been manifesting holy spirit for generations (except for speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues, but the Corinthian Church was familiar with those by the time Paul penned Corinthians). God had put holy spirit upon people in the Old Testament such as Moses, Joshua, Deborah, David, Elijah, and many others, and those people could then hear knowledge or wisdom from God (thus, the message of knowledge and wisdom). They had the trust (“faith”) to do what God asked of them even when it seemed impossible, they did miracles, and when Jesus came on the scene, he taught his disciples to heal and cast out demons. The believers of Corinth were familiar with all these manifestations, and of course Paul, who founded the Church in Corinth on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18), had also instructed them.

Some scholars have tried to look in Greek culture to find the meaning of the manifestations based on the definitions of the Greek words themselves (for example, “wisdom” was very important in the Greek culture). That misses the point, and for the most part has been unhelpful in discovering the nature of the manifestations, and is one reason why there is so much debate about the manifestations by scholars. The manifestations were not Greek experiences or concepts, but the timeless manifestations, outward evidences, of the inward presence of holy spirit. These manifestations were not to be found in Greek culture, vocabulary, or history, but in the experiences of the men and women of God throughout the centuries.
English culture today is somewhat similar to the Greek culture in that there has been very little accurate exposure to the power of holy spirit and very little accurate teaching on it. Therefore, we need a clear explanation of the manifestations so we can understand them. As the Greeks of old, we need to get our understanding from the Bible itself and then add to our understanding by utilizing and experiencing the manifestations.

“A message of knowledge.” A message of knowledge is God or the Lord Jesus Christ, by revelation, providing knowledge to a person; i.e., giving that person information, insight, and understanding about something.

The message of wisdom and the message of knowledge are “revelation” manifestations, and we will cover them in this one entry because they often work seamlessly together, with a single revelation from God consisting of both a message of knowledge and a message of wisdom. We call these the “revelation” manifestations because they deal with God or the Lord Jesus “revealing” something [For more on what “revelation” is and how it works, see commentary on Galatians 1:12].

We can understand the difference between “a message of knowledge” and “a message of wisdom” by understanding the difference between “knowledge” and “wisdom.” Knowledge is information about a situation, while wisdom is what to do about the situation. The first definition of “wisdom” in Webster’s 1828 Dictionary captures its essence: “the right use or exercise of knowledge.” Since the time of Adam and Eve, it has been important for mankind to hear from God. When God speaks to individuals, if what He says is knowledge, i.e., information and insight, the revelation is “a message of knowledge.” If what He says is wisdom, i.e., direction or what to do about a given situation, the revelation is “a message of wisdom.”

A good example of a message of knowledge would be Joseph interpreting Pharaoh’s dream (Gen. 41:25-27). God gave Joseph knowledge about the meaning of the dream, which was that there would be seven years of plenty, then seven years of famine. That revelation is a message of knowledge because it only gives information, the facts of the case.

When God gives someone a message of knowledge, He may or may not need to give a message of wisdom so the person will know what to do. For example, if a person has lost his car keys, all God has to do is let the person know where they are, He does not have to give a message of wisdom and say, “Go get them.” The person will do that without having to have a message of wisdom. Often, however, God will give a message of wisdom when He gives a message of knowledge. What if God had told Joseph about the years of plenty and the years of famine, but then never said what to do about it? The best Joseph could have done in that case would have been to pick a reasonable solution. However, God did give Joseph a message of wisdom when He told Joseph to tell Pharaoh to store up twenty percent of the harvest during the plenteous years for the upcoming famine years (Gen. 41:33-36). When God gives a person direction, and tells him what to do, then it is “a message of wisdom.”

The Bible is full of examples of “a message of knowledge” and “a message of wisdom,” and God gives us numerous examples so we will understand how He communicates and directs us. The Bible usually does not make it clear whether these examples are via the gift of holy spirit or simply the audible voice of God, but they are all revelation nevertheless. In Numbers 11:16-20 Moses gets both knowledge and wisdom from God. In Joshua 1:2-9 God gives Joshua both knowledge and wisdom. In Judges 7:4
God gave Gideon both knowledge and wisdom. In 1 Samuel 8:7-9 God gave Samuel wisdom, telling him what to do, and knowledge, telling him why to do it. In 1 Kings 14:5, God gave Ahijah knowledge of what was going to happen, and wisdom, telling him what to say. In 1 Kings 17:2-4, God gave Elijah wisdom by telling him what to do, and knowledge, telling him what would happen. These are only a few examples of “a message of knowledge” and “a message of wisdom,” but we can learn a lot from them. For one thing, we see that these manifestations could work independently, but they often work seamlessly together in one “message” from God. Another thing we can see is why God did not need to define the manifestations to the people of Corinth. God’s revelations of knowledge and wisdom are clearly laid out in the Bible and are essential to living a powerful and successful spiritual life.

A message of knowledge and a message of wisdom are God “speaking” to us to guide and help us. It is inconceivable that He would not do that for each and every Christian. Surely He would not give guidance to one Christian and not to another. Every Christian can, and needs to, manifest holy spirit in messages of knowledge and wisdom in order to live a rich and successful Christian life. No doubt most Christians have heard from God via the manifestations without even realizing it. Although there are times when God gives a message of knowledge or wisdom in such a clear and powerful way that it cannot be missed, usually God speaks in a “gentle whisper” or “a still small voice.” (1 Kings 19:12; NIV, KJV).

We need to be aware that there is a difference between “a message of knowledge” and “the manifestation of a message of knowledge” and also between “a message of wisdom” and “the manifestation of a message of wisdom.” A message of knowledge or wisdom can come from God in many ways: God’s audible voice (Deut. 4:12); an angel (Judges 13:3-5); a miracle such as a donkey speaking (Num. 22:28, 30) or handwriting on a wall (Dan. 5:5). That type of revelation is a message of knowledge or a message of wisdom, but it is not the “manifestation” of a message of knowledge or wisdom because it did not come via the gift of holy spirit.

The “manifestation of a message of knowledge (or wisdom)” is a manifestation of the gift of holy spirit, which means the information comes from God or the Lord to the person via the gift of holy spirit inside the person. One thing that is important to realize and keep in mind is that a message of knowledge and a message of wisdom are manifestations of holy spirit, but they come via the human mind. The fact that the revelation from God comes to our minds via the spirit opens the door to a few different problems: first, that we may not be sure whether we are receiving revelation or “just thinking something,” second, we may think we are hearing from God when we are not, and third, we may think that a “thought” was just us thinking when it really was revelation from the Lord. It is noteworthy that the Greek word pneuma (as well as the Hebrew word ruach) is used of both our thoughts and emotions, and the “spirit” God gives us, and it can sometimes be very hard to distinguish revelation from our thoughts.

12:9. “to a different one.” God has placed the nine manifestations of holy spirit into three groups, or categories. Most English versions are not sensitive to this, and read “to one” or “to another” eight times. However, there are actually two different Greek words, allos (#243 ἀλλος) and heteros (#2087 ἥτερος), that need to be properly understood and translated, rather than both of them simply being translated “to another.” In Greek, allos was generally used to express a numerical difference and denotes “another of the same
sort,” while heteros usually means a qualitative difference and denotes “another of a
different sort.” When a list is put together, and the items are said to be allos, they are of
the same kind or nature. When they are said to be heteros, they are different in nature.
Thus what we see in this section is God separating the manifestations into three groups,
dividing the groups by the word heteros, which we showed in brackets when we quoted
the verses. In our translation, we used “another” when the Greek word was allos, and
“different one” when it was heteros.

Studying the groups reveals that two manifestations are revelation (hearing from
God), five of them relate to the power of God, and two are oriented toward worship.

- **Revelation:** A message of knowledge; a message of wisdom
- **Power:** Trust (“faith”), gifts of healing; miracles; prophecy; discerning of
spirits
- **Worship:** Speaking in tongues; interpretation of tongues

Although it is helpful to study these manifestations separately so we can best
understand them, we need to be aware that we are doing that only for the sake of clarity.
God never intended them to be completely separate and distinct in the lives of the
believers who experience them. He is our Father and He wants a relationship with us, and
He wants us to be effective fellow-workers with Him (1 Cor. 3:9). In order to do that,
must be able to worship God (the worship group), hear from Him (the revelation group)
and work for Him (the power group). In the day-to-day life of a believer who is striving
to love God, live a holy life, and do God’s will, the manifestations will often work
seamlessly and result in great blessing for the believer and the people affected. For
example, a Christian woman, let’s call her “Susan,” may be by herself enjoying
worshipping God by singing in tongues to some Christian music she is playing. Then the
phone rings and it is her friend who needs prayer because many things are going wrong in
her life and today she is sick. Susan immediately feels the leading of the Lord to pray for
specifics about her friend’s life (the revelation manifestations at work) and then
commands healing to take place in the name of Jesus Christ (faith and healing). By the
time she gets off the phone, her friend is feeling better emotionally and physically. In this
scenario, Susan did not think to herself, “Now I need a message of knowledge. Now I
need a message of wisdom. Now I need the manifestation of trust.” No, she had a relationship with God and love for her
friend, and the manifestations worked together seamlessly to produce the “common
good” mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:7.

**“Trust.”** The manifestation of trust is a person having the confidence or trust that
what God or the Lord Jesus Christ has revealed to him by revelation (a message of
knowledge or a message of wisdom), will come to pass or come to pass at his command.

The manifestation of trust is the first manifestation that God places in the second
group of manifestations, which we call the “power” manifestations. We believe that trust
is the foundation of the power manifestations. “Trust” is the translation of the Greek
word pistis, (#4102 πίστις) which means “trust,” “confidence” or “assurance.” (cp.
Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, Don’t Blame God! Chapter 10, “Keep the Faith”). We like to
use the word “trust.”

It is important to distinguish the biblical definition of “faith” from today’s
definition that has permeated the Christian Church and society. When most people think
of “faith,” they think of it in terms of the modern definition: “firm belief in something for
which there is no proof” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary; 11th edition). When religious people have no proof for what they believe, we often hear them say, “You just have to take it by faith.” It is vital to understand that “belief in something for which there is no proof” is not the biblical definition of “faith.”

The biblical definition of “faith” is “trust,” and we trust things only after they have been proven to us. Jesus never asked anyone to believe he was the Messiah without proof. He healed the sick, raised the dead, and did miracles, and he asked people to believe the miracles that he did (John 10:38). Similarly, God does not ask us to believe Him without proof. He has left many evidences that He exists and that His Word is true. Thus when God asks us to have “faith” (trust), He is not asking us to believe something without proof. God proves Himself to us, and because of that we trust Him, that is, we trust what He says to us.

1 Corinthians 12:9 uses the word trust (“faith”), but it is in the context of the manifestations of the spirit (12:7). Thus, “trust” in 12:9 is the “manifestation of trust,” not just our regular “trust” (“faith”). All of us have trust in a large number of things. In fact, ordinary life would be impossible without trust. A person would not sit down if he did not trust the chair would hold him. God asks us to trust that Jesus has been raised from the dead because the Bible, history, and life give plenty of evidence for it.

In contrast to ordinary trust, the manifestation of trust is necessary to accomplish the special tasks that God, by revelation, asks us to do. For example, Jesus said that a person with trust could tell a mountain to be cast into the ocean and it would be done (Mark 11:23). Well, all of us have seen mountains, and we know that we do not have the human power to move them, so how can we just “trust” that we can cast a mountain into the sea just by commanding it to happen? We need to access the power of God to move the mountain. To be able to “trust” that God’s power is available to us to perform a miracle we need God to tell us we can do it.

The way the manifestation of trust works is that God first tells us to do something by revelation. Then, having the revelation from God that we can do the miracle, we trust the revelation and command the miracle to happen. The trust we must have in what God told us by revelation is “the manifestation of trust,” and when we truly trust what God has revealed to us, miracles happen.

Moses brought water out of a rock by the manifestation of trust (Exod. 17:5 and 6), Gideon defeated the Midianites by the manifestation of trust (Judg. 6:16), Elijah multiplied the oil and bread by the manifestation of trust (1 Kings 17:14-16), and the other great miracles of the Bible were done by the manifestation of trust. When it comes to miracles and gifts of healings, we need the manifestation of trust because we cannot heal the sick or do miracles by our human power. God must give us a message of knowledge and a message of wisdom, letting us know that it is His will for us to heal someone or do a miracle, and then we must trust God that since He gave us the revelation to do the miracle, we can in fact do it.

Every Christian needs to utilize the manifestation of trust. Christ said that when people received holy spirit they would receive power (Acts 1:8), but no one can operate the power of God without the trust to do so. Since every Christian needs to use the manifestation of trust to bring to pass the revelation that God gives him, every Christian has the ability to manifest trust. Thus, we see that the manifestation of trust, like a
message of knowledge and a message of wisdom, is for every Christian, not just certain ones.

The understanding of the manifestation of trust is obscured by the fact that often the Bible just says “trust” when the context dictates it is the manifestation of trust that is being referred to. God expects us to know what the Bible says about the manifestation of trust and how it works. While there are many records where the revelation from God clearly precedes the person operating the manifestation of trust and accomplishing the miracle, many records do not explicitly state that God gave revelation first. Although this could seem confusing, it is simple to understand. God expects us to understand how the manifestation of trust works by studying the whole Bible. If we cannot do something by our natural human ability, then we need God’s power, and that means we must have a word (revelation) from Him that we can have trust in. Once God gives us the revelation we can then trust what He says and command the miracle, which God’s power then brings to pass.

In the case of Moses turning the Nile River to blood, the Bible tells us God gave the revelation to Moses of what to do, then Moses trusted God and did it (Exod. 7:14-20). When Moses split the Red Sea, God gave him the revelation of what to do, and Moses trusted and did it (Exod. 12:16, 21). When Joshua conquered Jericho, God told Joshua exactly what to do (Josh. 6:2-6) and Joshua trusted what God said (operated the manifestation of trust), and brought the miracle to pass. When David battled the Philistines, he did not just go to battle in his own strength. He first got a revelation from God that he would win the battle, then had trust in the revelation he received and went to war and won (2 Sam. 5:19-21). There are many records that show God giving revelation to a person who then trusted the revelation and brought the miracle to pass.

There are, however, many times in the Bible where the text does not explicitly say God gave revelation first. Does that mean that God did not give revelation in those cases? No. In order for there to be “trust,” there has to be something to trust in. No one can just “trust” to divide an ocean or move a mountain. No human has that power. So unless God tells us by revelation that He will do the miracle, we have nothing to trust in. We do not just have “trust;” we trust in something.

The fact that God does not always tell us in His word about the need for revelation before the manifestation of trust explains why, for example, so many people read Jesus’ teaching about casting a mountain into the sea (Matt. 11:22, 23) and are confused. The context of Jesus’ teaching about the mountain was him cursing a fig tree. But he did not do that without revelation from His Father. He told his disciples that he could not do anything of himself, but did what the Father showed him (John 5:19; cp. John 5:30; 8:28). Thus in the context of acting by revelation and operating the manifestation of trust, he spoke of casting a mountain into the sea.

Hebrews 11 is the great chapter on trust. But if we closely examine the records, we can see that the trust in the chapter is mostly the manifestation of trust. Enoch was a prophet who heard from God (Heb. 11:5; Jude 1:14). Noah received revelation to build the ark (Heb. 11:7; Gen. 6:13-22); God gave Abraham revelation to move to Canaan, and Abraham obeyed, operating the manifestation of trust (Heb. 11:8; Gen. 12:1). Sarah gave birth to Isaac by the manifestation of trust, trusting in God’s specific promise to her (Gen. 18:10-15; Heb. 11:11). Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice because of a specific revelation from God (Heb. 11:17; Gen. 22:1). Moses kept the Passover by trust, because
he trusted what God said to do and how to do it (Heb. 11:8; Exod. 12:1-14). Moses also split the Red Sea by the manifestation of trust in response to the revelation God gave him (Heb. 11:29; Exod. 12:16, 21). Joshua’s trust in the revelation God gave him caused the walls of Jericho to fall (Heb. 11:30; Josh. 6:2-6). These are just some of the examples of the manifestation of trust in the Bible, and they show us that we do not just “have trust,” we trust what God has told us.

When we understand the manifestation of trust we can see how inseparably it works with the other manifestations of the spirit. The manifestation of word of knowledge or word of wisdom is God telling us what we can do. The manifestation of trust is our trusting that what God just told us is true and is the reason we then act on what He said to bring the miracle or healing to pass, and the manifestation of miracles or healings is the power of God being applied and accomplishing the miracle or healing. To be truly effective for God, the Christian needs the confidence to operate all nine manifestations of the gift of holy spirit. [For more on revelation and how revelation works, see commentary on Galatians 1:12].

“gifts of healings” is a person exercising his God-given spiritual ability to heal by the power of God, according to what God or the Lord Jesus has revealed to him by revelation (a message of knowledge or a message of wisdom).

We cover the manifestations of gifts of healings and working of miracles together because they are similar in many ways. The “gifts [plural] of healings [plural]” is so called because God does multiple healings, and each of them is a gift, done out of His grace or mercy. Gifts of healings and working of miracles are manifestations of holy spirit because it takes a believer to do them by the power of God that he has been given. It is very important to realize that it is people, empowered by holy spirit within, who do healings and miracles. On rare occasions God heals or does a miracle without human agency, but that is not “the manifestation” of gifts of healings or miracles because the gift of holy spirit inside a Christian was not employed.

To do a healing or miracle, several manifestations come into action. First, the person needs a message of knowledge and/or a message of wisdom to know what the situation is and what to do about it. Second, he needs the manifestation of trust to bring to pass the healing or miracle. Third, he must represent Christ on earth and, via the power of God, bring to pass the miracle as God supplies the energy for it. Notice how Peter raised Tabitha: he said, “Tabitha, get up” (Acts 9:40). Then she got up from the dead. Peter spoke the miracle into being. First, Peter prayed. Then, when he had revelation from the Lord to go ahead, he raised her from the dead by the power of God. Once Peter received the revelation to raise Tabitha, he performed the miracle. We believe that there would be more miracles and healings in Christendom today if Christians would step out and really trust what the Lord tells them to do. Too often we are waiting for God to do Himself what He has given us the spiritual power to do.

It is not our intention to demean the power of prayer in any way. Christians are commanded to pray, and should do so as much as possible. However, when God or the Lord Jesus gives us the revelation to do a healing or miracle, that is not the time to pray, it is the time to step out and act, trusting that the Lord will energize the miracle as we command it to come to pass. If the miracle or healing takes time, the one receiving the revelation must stay keep on trusting and praying to see it accomplished.
Jesus’ apostles and disciples had holy spirit upon them (John 14:17), which is why he could send them out to heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons (Matt. 10:8; Luke 10:9). Furthermore, Jesus said that when people have holy spirit, they have power (Acts 1:8). It is clear that since every Christian has the gift of holy spirit, then every Christian has the power to do healings and miracles (Mark 16:17 and 18, John 14:12), just as the disciples of Christ and the prophets of old did. We need to increase our trust and step forth boldly to do what the Lord directs us to do. We realize that although the presence of holy spirit gives each Christian the spiritual power to do healings and miracles, not everyone is called to walk in that kind of ministry. There is a difference between inherent spiritual ability and how that ability will actually be evidenced in the life of an individual Christian. Nevertheless, we assert that many more Christians would be doing healings and miracles if they knew they had the ability, and were confident to act on the spiritual power they have.

The manifestations of gifts of healings and working of miracles are often interwoven. There are certainly miracles that are not healings, such as when Moses parted the sea so the Israelites could escape Egypt. Also, there are healings that are not miracles, when, although the natural power of the body to heal itself is augmented by the healing power of God, the healing is not instantaneous. However, there are many miracles of healing in the Bible, such as the instantaneous healing of Bartimaeus, who was blind (Mark 10:46-52). Also, casting out a demon can be a miracle (Mark 9:39).

12:10. “energizings of miracles.” The manifestation of working of miracles is a person exercising his God-given spiritual ability to do miracles by the power of God, according to what God or the Lord Jesus has revealed to him by revelation (a message of knowledge or a message of wisdom). For an explanation of the manifestation, see “gifts of healings” in verse 9 above. The phrase “energizings of miracles” is working more than one miracle and represents that the verb is plural in the Greek.

“prophecy.” The manifestation of prophecy is speaking, writing, or otherwise communicating a message from God to a person or persons. God or the Lord Jesus gives the Christian a message of knowledge or a message of wisdom via the holy spirit born inside him, and when he gives that message to someone else it is prophecy. The revelation that is spoken as prophecy can come in the moment, coming almost word by word as the speaker says them, something we refer to as “inspirational prophecy.” However, it can also come as a complete revelation given to the speaker before it is spoken as prophecy, or prophecy can come as a combination, with some revelation coming beforehand and some coming as the prophecy is spoken. In the Old Testament, when a person had holy spirit, he or she almost always prophesied. That is why Joel said that when holy spirit was poured out on all believers, they would prophesy (Joel 2:28), and why Peter, in his teaching on the Day of Pentecost, referenced Joel (cp. Acts 2:17, 18).

God says His servants will prophesy, so there should be little argument about it. The manifestation of prophecy is to strengthen, encourage and comfort people (1 Cor. 14:3). It can reveal the secrets of people’s hearts so that they can be closer to God (1 Cor. 14:24 and 25). A study of prophecy in Scripture shows that prophecy is part of the power of God, which is why God places prophecy in the “power” group of the manifestations. Some Bible teachers have placed prophecy in the “worship” group of manifestations, but prophecy is not primarily worship, it is speaking a message from God to people. It is used
in a worship service, yes, but that does not make it worship. At any given Christian service all the manifestations may come into play, depending on the needs of the people.

Many Christians do not prophesy, but not because they do not have the spiritual ability. Scripture makes it clear that every Christian has the power to prophesy because of the presence of holy spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:17; 1 Cor. 14:1, 5, and 24). If a Christian does not prophesy, either he has not been sufficiently instructed, or he does not have the trust to step out on what he has been given, or he does not want to prophesy.

There is a reason why each Christian should covet to prophesy. Bringing God’s messages to His people is not only a tremendous privilege, it is essential for the wellbeing of the Church. A study of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, reveals how valuable the prophets were in the spiritual wholeness of the people of Israel. Prophecy is not only about speaking about the future. Not only can every Christian prophesy, as the Scripture says, but we should want to. That every believer can prophesy gives us more conclusive evidence that each believer can manifest all nine manifestations. [For more on prophecy, including what it is, how it comes to the Christian via holy spirit, that each Christian should want to prophesy, and the difference between the manifestation of prophecy and the ministry of a prophet, see John Schoenheit, Prophecy].

“discerning of spirits.” This is God or the Lord Jesus Christ revealing to a person information about the presence or absence of spirits (including both the holy spirit and demons), sometimes including the identity of demons present and whether or not he may cast them out, and providing the power to do it.

The Greek word translated “discerning” is diakrisis (διάκρισις), and it has several meanings. It can mean a “distinguishing” or “differentiation.” Also, it can mean to quarrel (William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon). One of the definitions in Liddell and Scott’s Greek lexicon is “decision by battle, quarrel, dispute.” Thus diakrisis can be much more than just “discerning,” it has the overtones of quarreling or fighting. Since “discerning of spirits” is a total package of recognizing “spirits” and dealing with them, God places it in the “power” group of manifestations. In this verse, discerning is plural. Nevertheless, we used “discerning” because it has the overtones of plurality. If a person is “discerning,” it is because he has exhibited discernment in a multitude of situations.

The manifestation of discerning of spirits is necessary if men and women of God are going to deal effectively with the spiritual realities of this fallen world. There are many “spirits” in this world, including angels and the gift of holy spirit. Nevertheless, because of the spiritual battle that rages around all of us, the most important aspect of discerning of spirits is dealing with the demonic forces of this world. Ephesians 6:12 makes it clear that Christians do not primarily wrestle against fleshly forces, but spiritual forces.

Our Adversary, the Devil, walks about as a roaring lion, seeking people to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). God has not left us helpless in that situation, but has empowered us to deal with him. The manifestation of discerning of spirits is more than just recognizing them; it also involves entering into battle against them and casting them out. Recognizing demons, protecting the believers, and casting them out are all part of “discerning of spirits.” [For more insights into the spiritual battle, see the commentary on Mark 1:25 and Jesus “subduing” evil spirits].


The manifestation of discerning of spirits is interwoven with the other manifestations. For example, a believer manifesting discerning of spirits may be simultaneously aware of the presence of the demon, know what to do about the situation, and begin to command it to come out of the person. Receiving the information about the demon and knowing what to do is similar to and interwoven with a message of knowledge and a message of wisdom, while the casting out the demon can be in the category of a miracle (Mark 9:38 and 39), even as a healing can be a miracle (Acts 4:16).

Every Christian will encounter demons, whether he recognizes them or not. What a great blessing and comfort to know that God has equipped each of us to deal with any demon that comes against us. Ephesians 6:12, which says we wrestle with demonic powers, is written to every Christian. Therefore, every Christian can manifest discerning of spirits.

The word “spirits” in the phrase “discerning of spirits” does not refer to “attitudes.” Although that is one of the meanings of pneuma, it is not the meaning in this context. There are many very gifted people that are very sensitive and can “read” people and situations very well, but many of them are unsaved. That discernment is a natural ability, just as is native intelligence and other natural abilities.

In some Greek texts there is the word “and” before both “to another prophecy” and “to another discerning.” We have left out the word “and” because textual research shows that it seems much more likely the words were added in some texts than subtracted in others.

“various kinds of tongues.” The manifestation of the spirit that involves speaking languages the speaker does not understand is commonly known as “speaking in tongues.” Speaking in tongues is a Christian speaking a language of men or angels that he does not understand, a language that is given to him by the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:33). It is one of the great blessings that God has given to the Christian Church, and He desires that every Christian speak in tongues: “Now I want all of you to speak in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:5). For a much fuller explanation of speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:5.

“the interpretation of tongues.” The interpretation of tongues is interpreting, or giving the sum and substance, in one’s own language, that which he has just spoken in tongues. The word “interpretation” is hermēneia (#2058 ērμη네ία), which means interpretation or exposition. It does not necessarily mean a word for word translation, but rather an interpretation, giving the gist or sum and substance. Thus the interpretation of tongues is giving the gist of what was just spoken in tongues. The Bible makes it clear that speaking in tongues is always “to” God (1 Cor. 14:2), so the interpretation will be to God also, and will be praise and prayer to Him. That is the big difference between prophecy and the interpretation of tongues. Prophecy is a message to the people (1 Cor. 14:3), while interpretation of tongues is to God (or the Lord Jesus Christ), but is heard by the congregation, who are then edified by it.

The interpretation of tongues, like speaking in tongues itself, is given by the Lord. No one understands what he is saying in a tongue, so no one could give an interpretation of what he is saying. The interpretation comes from the Lord Jesus Christ, just as the tongue does. The manifestation of interpretation of tongues works just like speaking in tongues and prophecy do—the words come from the Lord Jesus Christ to the individual.
via the gift of holy spirit inside him. When a person speaks in tongues in a meeting, he should interpret so that the people in the meeting can be edified (1 Cor. 14:5).

The interpretation of tongues is to be done by the one who spoke in tongues, just as 1 Corinthians 14:5 says (see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:27).

12:11. “purposes.” The word “purposes” at the end of the verse is the contextual key that “Spirit” does not refer to the gift of holy spirit, for the gift of holy spirit does not “purpose” anything, but only speaks what it hears (John 16:13).

12:13 “in one spirit.” The Greek word we translate as “in” is “en” (#1722 ἐν), and it can be translated in its plain sense as “in” or as an instrumental dative, “by.” If it is “in” one spirit, it indicates that all Christians are baptized in the gift of holy spirit, which is the case. However, some people would argue that the word pneuma (“spirit”) refers to Jesus Christ and should be capitalized (Jesus is called “the Spirit” a number of times in the NT; see commentary 2 Cor. 3:17). However, we were not all “made to drink” of Jesus Christ, as the last phrase in the verse indicates. Thus when we read the entire verse, the only way “spirit” can be used consistently is if it refers to the gift of holy spirit. Every Christian is baptized in the gift of holy spirit, and that happens when the person is born again. We were all immersed in spirit, and made to drink of it (John 7:37-39). For the fact that a person receives the gift of holy spirit the moment he is saved or “born again,” see commentary on Ephesians 1:13.

“drink of one spirit.” The word “drink” is not literal, but is an idiom referring to experiencing something, or to partake of something. Christians all have the experience of receiving the gift of holy spirit. Jesus used the figure of drinking in John 4:14 and 7:37-39. A related idiom is the word “cup.” Thus, Jesus asked James and John if they could “drink the cup” that he himself would drink (Mark 10:38), and Jesus asked God to “take this cup from me” (Luke 22:42).

12:28. “tongues.” For a much fuller explanation of speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:5.

12:30. “Do all speak in tongues?” Speaking in tongues is a manifestation of the gift of holy spirit, and therefore every Christian has the God-given ability to speak in tongues. Nevertheless, many do not, for different reasons. The key to understanding this verse is realizing that the things listed (tongues, interpretation, and healing) are manifestations of holy spirit that some people are especially gifted at or are energized to do in the Church. It is a matter of fact that everyone does not speak in tongues or interpret, or heal, even though technically they have the spiritual power and ability to do so. For more on speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5.

Chapter 13

13:1. “speak with the tongues.” For information on speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5.

“sounding brass.” The Greek is chalkos ἑχόν (χαλκὸς ἑχόν), which is literally something like “bronze ringing,” “bronze sounding out,” or “echoing bronze.” Its reference to bronze was an appropriate metaphor to use in the Epistle to the Corinthians because Corinth was famous for its bronze. Nevertheless, it is an unclear phrase to us now, because it does not clearly refer to any instrument we know of. Because of that, a
number of different interpretations have been set forth to explain it. One is that trumpets and horns were made of bronze or brass in the Roman world, so it could refer to a “sounding brass” [horn]. The horn would make a loud noise, but often just for show.

Perhaps the more accurate explanation of chalkos ēchōn is that it refers to the resonating jars that were set in niches at the theaters. These large bronze jars would vibrate with the sound of the actor’s voices and help to amplify them. Corinth had resonating jars, but in the second century BC they were sold to raise money for public use. We do not know if they were replaced, but in any case Paul and his audience would have known about them. The jars amplified the voices of actors who were just “playing a part,” so the resonating jars would be an appropriate metaphor for speaking in tongues—or doing anything else for that matter—without love.

Vitruvius Pollio was a military engineer under Augustus and knew Julius Caesar. He wrote On Architecture sometime before 27 B.C. It records some of his own experience and discoveries, as well as some earlier discoveries in architecture and engineering. He wrote:

... bronze vases are to be made in mathematical ratios corresponding to the size of the theatre. They are to be so made that, when they are touched, they can make a sound from one to another of a fourth, a fifth and so on to the second octave. Then compartments are made among the seats of the theatre, and the vases are to be so placed that they do not touch the wall, and have an empty space around them and above. They are to be placed upside down. On the side looking towards the stage, they are to have wedges put under them not less than half a foot high. Against these cavities openings are to be left in the faces of the lower steps two feet long and a half a foot high....

7. Someone will say, perhaps, that many theatres are built ever year in Rome without taking any account of these matters. He will be mistaken in this. All public wooden theatres have several wooden floors and naturally resound. We can observe this also from those who sing to the zither, who when they wish to sing with a louder tone, turn to the wooden scenery, and, with this help, gain resonance for their voice. But when theatres are built of solids, that is of the rubble walling, stone or marble which cannot resound, the use of bronze vases is to be followed.

8. But if you ask in what theatre this is done, we cannot show any at Rome, but we must turn to the regions of Italy, and to many Greek cities. We find a precedent in Lucius Mummius who destroyed the theatre at Corinth, and transported these bronze vessels to Rome, and dedicated them, from the spoils, to the temple of Luna. Further, many clever architects, who in towns of moderate size have built theatres, have chosen, for cheapness’ sake, earthenware vessels with similar sounds, and arranging them in this way have produced very useful effects. (Quoted in Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, St. Paul’s Corinth, p. 75).

People who act without love are like human-size hollow jars that make a noise but do not actually accomplish anything important to God. Love is truly “Christianity 101,” and it is imperative that we think, speak, and act, in love.
“clanging cymbal.” The word “clanging” is onomatopoetic. “Alalazon” was used of a wail or a battle cry. Although there were pagan cults that used cymbals, the use in this verse is not necessarily an allusion to that kind of use. Cymbals were used also as musical instruments. The obvious point that Paul is making is that speaking in tongues without love is just like a clanging symbol—there is a lot of noise but no actual lasting godly effect.

13:2. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

13:8. “where there is a message of knowledge.” The reference in the context, which mentions the manifestations of prophecy and speaking in tongues, is to “a message of knowledge.” Paul would assume that since the OT prophecies said that “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9), and he will go on to say that we will know even as we are known, that “knowledge” will not pass away, but the manifestation of “a message of knowledge” (1 Cor. 12:8) will pass away. We felt this so compelling, and have seen such confusion regarding it, that we added the italics to clear up the point.

13:10. “the Completeness.” The exact Greek phrase is to teleion (τὸ τέλειον #5406), literally in this context, “the complete,” (or perhaps, “the perfect,” or even, “the end”). “Complete” is a substantive, an adjective being used as a noun [For more on substantives, see commentary on Matthew 5:37], so “the completeness,” or even “that which is complete,” is a good translation. The context lets us know what “the complete” is, the completion of all things. The real “Completion,” or “time of perfection” (NLT), is when the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven, the curse on the earth is finally removed, and God lives with mankind and sees people face to face (Revelation 21:1-4; 22:3).

When we study the vocabulary of this verse, it seems clear that it was written very purposely in a way that lends itself to a partial fulfillment and an ultimate fulfillment. “the Completeness,” or “the time of perfection,” certainly in part refers to Rapture for Christians when they get a new body like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21). Then there is a more complete “time of perfection” at the Second Coming. At that time the Old Testament believers are raised from the dead, the earth and animal nature are restored, and Christ rules from Jerusalem. After the Millennial Kingdom, the final and ultimate “time of perfection” comes when the New Jerusalem comes to earth and there is a new heaven and new earth.

Many conservative theologians see the time of completeness as the Second Coming of Christ, the Parousia, which involves the return of Christ and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom on earth. It is true when that time comes there will be a perfection that does not exist now—the air and water on earth will be restored, animal nature will change, and there will be no war or hunger [for more on the Messianic Kingdom on earth, see commentary on Matthew 5:5]. Also, the believers who are raised from the dead at the First Resurrection will have new bodies like Christ’s body, and since Christ is ruling in Jerusalem, we will see him face to face.

Given the perfection in the Millennial Kingdom, are there reasons why it would not be the time of perfection spoken of here in 1 Corinthians 13:10? There are several reasons. Although many things will change in the Millennial Kingdom, many will not.
There will still be death (Isaiah 65:20-22), the earth will still be subject to when it was cursed (Gen. 3:14-18; Rev. 22:3), and Christ will rule with a rod of iron (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 19:15). Also, although 1 Corinthians 13:8 says that prophecy will cease when the time of perfection comes, it is clear that prophecy will not cease in the Millennial Kingdom. Many prophets wrote that the spirit would be poured out from heaven during that time (Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28, 29), and Joel wrote that “your sons and daughters will prophesy” (Joel 2:28). So if prophecy stops when the time of perfection comes, but people are still prophesying during the Millennial Kingdom, then the time of perfection has not yet come.

Although it is generally assumed that the phrase “face to face” is speaking of Christ, that is only an assumption. Actually, the phrase is referring to seeing God face to face. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve walked and talked with God Himself, and he took on a human form to fellowship with them. Since the Fall, although God has taken on human form and appeared to a few people such as Abraham, Moses, and the Apostle John, most people never see God. However, that will change in the Everlasting Kingdom when the New Jerusalem comes to earth. At that time “the dwelling of God will be with men, and he will live with them” (Rev. 22:3). God is “with” us now, so when Revelation 21:3 says that God will be with us and live with us, it is referring to a restoration of the relationship that Adam and Eve had with God, and that quality of relationship will not be restored until the Everlasting Kingdom is established after the Millennial Kingdom comes to an end [For more on God appearing in human form, see commentary on Acts 7:55].

Many theologians have argued that “the completeness” is the Parousia, at the end of this age. We believe, as we have said above, that “the completeness” refers to the Everlasting Kingdom, not the Parousia and the Millennial Kingdom. Nevertheless, in light of the fact that these theologians were arguing that the “Completeness” was a time of perfection and not the completion of the canon or any other such thing, it is appropriate to quote from a few of them. Robert Thayer (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon), in his entry on telios, says that 1 Corinthians 13:10 refers to “the perfect state of all things, to be ushered in by the return of Christ from heaven.” R. C. H. Lenski (The Interpretation of 1 and 2 Corinthians) states: “The aorist subjunctive ἔλθῃ [“comes”], marks the great future moment when the goal shall be reached, namely the Parousia of Christ. Then this entire state of imperfection which is now evident upon the earth will be abolished, for it will have served its purpose. An entirely new way of apprehending, of seeing, and of knowing shall take its place.”

Gordon Fee (The New International Commentary on the New Testament), writes: “…the term ‘the perfect’ has to do with the Eschaton itself [the end of this Age], not some form of ‘perfection’ in the present age. …At the coming of Christ, the final purpose of God’s saving work in Christ will have been reached; at that point those gifts now necessary for the building up of the church in the present age will disappear, because ‘the complete’ will have come.” Ray Collins, a Roman Catholic theologian, translates to teleion as “the end.” He writes: “In English, to teleion can be rendered as ‘the end’ or ‘the perfect.’ Given the eschatological [future] thrust of the periscope, it seems useful to render the Greek by ‘the end.’ It is clearly a reference to the eschaton.”

Some theologians have argued that “the complete” has already happened, and that it was fulfilled when the Word of God was fully written. That, of course, would mean that speaking in tongues and prophecy had passed away, which is usually the main reason for
drawing that conclusion in the first place. Theologians who do not see, or do not believe in, speaking in tongues, but clearly see it in Acts, had to have a reason to say that it no longer exists, and 1 Corinthians 13:10 was the closest thing they could find to a verse that said that. But to conclude that speaking in tongues has passed away because this passage says “the complete” has come, and then to make “the complete” the complete canon of Scripture, is to misunderstand the whole section of Scripture.

Even a straightforward reading of the passage in the King James Version says that “now” we know in part, but when “that which is perfect is come, that which is in part will be done away.” Can anyone really say that our knowledge, which is now “in part,” has been done away? We still know “in part!” Furthermore, we still see as if in a mirror, darkly (i.e., an indistinct image). Can anyone say we see clearly yet? Also, the Bible says “then” we will know “face to face.” We will only know both God and Christ face to face in the Everlasting Kingdom.

Paul wrote the book of 1 Corinthians, in about 53 AD, long before the canon of Scripture was finished when John wrote Revelation, which was likely close to 90 AD. Think about what it would mean if Paul wrote in Corinthians that speaking in tongues would pass away when the canon of Scripture was complete. It would mean that, in essence, God told Paul, “In about forty years, speaking in tongues, prophecy, and knowledge will pass away.” What would have been the point of God telling people what would go away in forty years? Would it have made people more zealous to speak in tongues and prophesy while they still could, before those things stopped? No, it would not have.

In his commentary on First Corinthians, Richard Hays writes that some groups of Christians interpret 13:10 to mean that the charismatic gifts in the church cease to operate after the New Testament canon is completed, and he says, “This interpretation is simply nonsense. There is nothing in the passage about ‘the New Testament’ or about a future revocation of revelatory gifts in the Church. …Only ‘then,’ in the consummation of God’s kingdom, will we know fully—as God knows us already in the present.”

Besides the Scriptural argument that 1 Corinthians 13:10 does not say that speaking in tongues has passed away—and no other verse does either—there are other important things to consider on the subject. For one thing, speaking in tongues is a manifestation of the gift of holy spirit (1 Cor. 12:7-10). It is not a separate “gift” (the Greek text never calls speaking in tongues a “gift,” see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:1). Speaking in tongues is one of the nine ways the spirit of God in us is revealed. If speaking in tongues is gone, we would normally think the other manifestations of the spirit would be gone too, which would mean things like the manifestation of trust (“faith”), word of knowledge, and miracles had passed away too. If the spirit of God born in Christians does not change, how can one manifestation of it disappear, but the others remain the same? That does not make sense.

Also, we should ask ourselves, “Why would God take speaking in tongues from the Church?” The benefits and blessings of speaking in tongues are as necessary today as they were 2000 years ago. The Bible gives us many benefits of speaking in tongues: it is prayer in the spirit; it is giving thanks to God; it is proof of one’s salvation; it builds a person’s trust; and more [For the benefits of speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:5]. Surely these things are as necessary in the Church today as they were in the
first century, so why would God take tongues from the Church? We think it is clear He did not.

There are Christians who do not believe in, or do not want to believe in, speaking in tongues. Sometimes that is because that particular Christian has never seen speaking in tongues, and sometimes it because the person has seen people speak in tongues, but do it improperly. Speaking in tongues is under the control of the one speaking, which is why God tells us where and how to do it (this is in contrast to the teaching that God is in control of speaking in tongues—but He is not). Many people, often in Pentecostal churches, ignore the way the Bible says to use speaking in tongues and so misuse it. For example, the Bible says that not everyone in the church should speak in tongues at the same time; and it also says that if someone does speak in tongues publicly, it must be interpreted. The misuse of tongues has alienated some people to such an extent they think that what they saw cannot be from God.

Thankfully, there is a time of perfection coming when we will be face to face with God and Christ and there will not be any confusion on these subjects.

13:12. “in a mirror.” This was an apt illustration in Corinthians, because the city of Corinth was known for its mirrors (cp. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians).

Chapter 14

14:1. “Diligently pursue.” The Greek word is *diōkō* (#1377 διώκω), “to follow with haste, and presumably with intensity of effort” (Louw & Nida Greek Lexicon); to move rapidly and decisively toward an objective (BDAG). In light of the definition and context, we felt “diligently pursue” was better than just “pursue.”

“*Spiritual things.*” The word “spiritual” is *pneumatikos* (#4152 πνευματικός), which is an adjective, so most translations supply “gifts” as the noun that “spiritual” modifies. However, the spiritual things that Christians are to pursue are clearly including the manifestations of the spirit, such as tongues, interpretation, and prophecy, which are “manifestations,” not gifts (although they are regularly miscalled “gifts”).

Most Christians commonly use the word “gifts” to describe what the Bible calls “manifestations” of the spirit, and this causes problems in Christianity. What is the difference between a gift and a manifestation? A gift is individually given, and no one has a gift unless it was given to him. A manifestation is an evidence, a showing forth, of something that a person already has. There are spiritual gifts, which include holy spirit, God-given ministries such as that of an apostle or a prophet, and the gift of everlasting life (Rom. 6:23). But the nine manifestations are not gifts, and calling them “gifts” can have a negative effect on the quality of believers’ lives.

If a person believes that he will be given at most only one of the manifestations (which is the most common teaching about the “gifts of the spirit”), then to him there is no difference between a gift and a manifestation. The major problem that occurs when the manifestations of holy spirit are thought to be “gifts” is that it causes many Christians to be spiritually passive. Instead of realizing that they can use each of the nine manifestations, some believers wait on God, hoping that one day He will give them the “gift” of tongues, or the “gift” of something else. Such people are waiting for something
they already have! They may even plead with and beg God, and end up disappointed with Him for not answering their prayers. Christians need to know that they have received the power of holy spirit, and that God is waiting for them to act.

The theology of Bible translators is in large part responsible for people thinking that the manifestations of the spirit are gifts. Notice how often the word “gift,” “gifts,” or “gifted” appears in most translations of 1 Corinthians 12-14. Yet not one of these uses of “gift” is in the Greek text.

- 1 Corinthians 12:1a—Now about spiritual gifts, brothers….”
- 1 Corinthians 13:2a—If I have the gift of prophecy….”
- 1 Corinthians 14:1—Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.
- 1 Corinthians 14:12—So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.
- 1 Corinthians 14:37a—If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted….”

It is easy to see why the average Christian thinks of prophecy and the other manifestations as “gifts.” It is difficult to read most versions of the Bible and come away with an accurate understanding of it when the translators have followed their theology instead of the reading of the Greek and thus distorted the clear reading of the text. One good thing about the King James Version, American Standard Version, and New American Standard Version is that the translators italicized many words that are not in the Hebrew or Greek text, but which they added in an attempt to clarify what a verse says. In today’s English writing words are sometimes italicized for emphasis. A Christian reading those versions needs to remember that the italicized words are not being emphasized, they were added to the original text.

“prophesy.” The Greek word is propheteuō (#4395 προφητεύω), the verb “prophecy.” Although it is in a hina clause, in this case and context the hina is not “in order that” but rather just a statement; “that you prophesy” (Lenski), or even just “to prophesy” (The Source New Testament; A. Nyland).

14:2. “for no one understands.” The phrase, “for no one understands,” is an accurate translation of the Greek text. The point the verse is making is that when someone speaks in tongues, he does not understand what he is saying. Many versions add the word “him” at the end of the phrase, saying “for no one understands him.” Adding the word “him” when it is not in the Greek text changes God’s intended meaning, and causes the verse to be in error. There are times, such as in Acts 2 and as has been reported in Christian history, when someone in the audience will understand what another person says in tongues. Thus, if 1 Corinthians 14:2 is made to say that no one listening to someone speaking in tongues will ever understand what the speaker is saying, it creates a contradiction in Scripture, and confuses people who want to be able to read and understand the Bible. 1 Corinthians 14:2 is very clear: when it comes to an individual speaking in tongues, “no one understands,” that is, no one will understand what he himself is saying. This is also what 1 Corinthians 14:14 says: “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.”

“by the spirit.” The Greek text simply has “pneuma” (spirit) in the dative case, pneumati (πνεύματι), which in this case would mean, “by spirit” or more fully, “by way of the spirit.” God, or the Lord Jesus Christ, gives the divine language (speaking in
tongues) to the person syllable by syllable, word by word. The person speaks out what the Lord gives him as it comes to him from the Lord, speaking word by word. The individual speaking does not know the language; it is “tongues” to him.

“sacred secrets.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

14:3. “speaks to people.” Some have used 1 Corinthians 14:3 to teach that there must be at least 3 people present to manifest interpretation of tongues or prophecy. They claim this verse limits us to speak unto “men” (plural), and God does not intend prophecy or interpretation to be done with only one other individual present. But this teaching is misguided. The word “men” can be used in a generic sense, referring to mankind; or it can be used numerically, referring to men (plural) instead of just “a man” (singular). In I Corinthians 14:1-3, it can be easily seen that the word “men” is generic (mankind) and does not refer to the number of people present. “Men” is being contrasted with “God.” Prophecy is “to people” and interpretation is “to God.”

We can prophesy or interpret if there is anyone to listen, even just one person. We can demonstrate this is accurate by examining Scripture. Although there was no interpretation before the day of Pentecost, there was prophecy. According to the idea that “men” in 1 Corinthians 14:2 meant more than one man, it would then follow that no one who gave a genuine prophecy ever gave it to just one man. But when we examine prophecy, we discover that prophecy was often spoken to just one man, such as when Samuel gave Saul a prophecy with no one else around (1 Sam. 9:29-10:8), or when Nathan gave David a prophecy—in that case, others were there, but the prophecy was only to David. So prophecy can definitely be to just one “man.”

The point of 1 Corinthians 14:1-3 is not to limit our manifesting to when we have a group, but rather to point out that when we speak in tongues it is “to God” and not “to mankind,” and when we prophesy it is “to mankind,” not “to God.”

“edification, and encouragement, and comfort.” Each of these is equally important, a point that God makes clear through the Figure of Speech polysyndeton, or “Many Ands.” Proper grammar would have only one “and,” after exhortation.

14:4. “while.” We have translated the de as “while” (Cp. Lenski). The de is a soft contrast, and the fact is that both tongues and prophecy edify. So while the tongues speaker edifies himself, the prophesier edifies the church.

14:5. “want.” The Greek word is thelō (#2309 θέλω), and in this context it means “want or desire.” It does not mean “wish” in the sense of “a desire for something generally unattainable,” as “I wish I had a billion dollars.” It can mean “wish” if “wish” is understood to mean “want” or “desire,” but since we generally use “wish” to mean a desire for something we generally cannot have or that is unlikely, “wish” is not a good translation here. Speaking in tongues is a manifestation of the spirit, and anyone who has the spirit, which means anyone who is saved, has the spiritual ability to speak in tongues. God never forces people to speak in tongues; we must operate the manifestation ourselves and speak. Thus it takes personal desire, and proper instruction, to speak in tongues, which explains why God wants Christians to do it but most do not. “Want” is a very good translation here, as seen in the RSV, ESV, etc., and “would like” is good too, as seen in the NIV and NRSV.
“speak in tongues.” Speaking in tongues is a manifestation of holy spirit that contributes greatly to the quality of our lives as Christians. Before we see what speaking in tongues is, it is helpful to examine five things it is not.

• Speaking in tongues is not:

1) It is not a “gift.” No properly translated verse of Scripture calls speaking in tongues a gift. It is one of the “manifestations” of the gift holy spirit (1 Cor. 12:7-10).

2) It is not gibberish, babble, or a made-up language. Some languages sound strange to our ears, but the Word of God assures us that genuine speaking in tongues is indeed a language of men or angels.

3) It is not speaking a language you already know. When a person speaks in tongues, he does not know the language he is speaking. The Bible says, “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful” (1 Cor. 14:14, cp. 14:2).

4) It is not designed for missionary work. The language people speak when they speak in tongues is not chosen by the person speaking, it is given by the Lord via the gift of holy spirit. The Bible gives many reasons Christians should speak in tongues, and missionary work is not one of them. Furthermore, there is no record in Scripture where anyone used speaking in tongues to do missionary work. That idea came from the early Pentecostal movement when God, apparently to show people that speaking in tongues was not gibberish, gave known languages to people as they spoke in tongues, just as he did on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:11). For example, when Agnes Ozman manifested speaking in tongues, she spoke in Chinese (Roberts Liardon, God’s Generals, p. 119). Upon hearing known foreign languages, people listening assumed speaking in tongues was for mission work.

5) Speaking in tongues is not “dead,” “gone,” or “passed away.” Some Christians believe that it was only for the early Church and is now gone, but that cannot be the case. Tongues is prayer in the spirit, is giving thanks well to God, is proof of one’s salvation, and more. Surely these things are as necessary in the Church today as they were in the first century. 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 says that speaking in tongues will pass away when “that which is perfect is come,” and when we know even as we are known. “That which is perfect” is the Lord Jesus Christ, as verse 12 makes clear when it says we will be “face to face” with him. Furthermore, we will know as we are known only when the Lord comes, and until then we will continue to know “in part” (1 Cor. 13:12).

• Speaking in tongues is: Let us now look at 15 different and important things about speaking in tongues.

1) Speaking in tongues is a Christian speaking a language that he does not understand, a language that has been given to him by the Lord Jesus Christ via the gift of holy spirit.

2) It is something God wants us to do. “Now I want all of you to speak in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:5). The late J. E. Styles, a Charismatic teacher who led many people into speaking in tongues during his ministry, wrote, “From our own experiences, and from the testimony of many others, both ministers and laymen, we are convinced that every Spirit-filled child of God should speak with tongues.
every day in his own private prayer life” (J. E. Styles, The Gift of the Holy Spirit (Fleming H. Revell Company), pp. 37, 38.)

3) It is the absolute proof to a Christian that he is saved, born again, and guaranteed everlasting life in Paradise. Speaking in tongues is supernatural, i.e., it is beyond man’s natural ability. It is a God-given ability made possible by the presence of holy spirit that is born inside each Christian. No non-Christian can speak in tongues. Because speaking in tongues is a manifestation of holy spirit (1 Cor. 12:7-10), the only people who can speak in tongues are those who have holy spirit, and every Christian was sealed with holy spirit when he believed (Eph. 1:13).

4) Speaking in tongues makes a person operate the most basic principle of the Christian walk, which is trusting and obeying the Word of our heavenly Father. God says to speak in tongues, but to do so a Christian must trust that what God says is true, and then he must walk out on that trust and obey what God says.

5) It is a witness of the resurrection of Christ to the believer, and also a sign to unbelievers (1 Cor. 14:22).

6) It is speaking a language of men or of angels (1 Cor. 13:1) which explains why there are so many tongues that are not known human languages.

7) It is speaking to God, not to men (1 Cor. 14:2).

8) It is speaking sacred secrets (the Greek word musterion means “sacred secret,” not “mystery,” and it is translated “sacred secret” in Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible). It is a blessing and a privilege for Christians to be able to speak sacred secrets to God by speaking in tongues.

9) It is speaking the wonders of God (Acts 2:11). On the Day of Pentecost, the tongues the Lord gave the apostles to speak could be understood by the audience, and even the skeptics had to admit that the apostles were speaking the wonders of God.

10) It is praise to God (Acts 10:46; 1 Cor. 14:16 and 17).

11) It is giving thanks to our Heavenly Father (1 Cor. 14:17).

12) It is prayer in the spirit (1 Cor. 14:14 and 15). It is very important to realize that speaking in tongues is prayer in the spirit. Sometimes Christians call fervent or emotional prayer “prayer in the spirit,” but in the Bible that phrase refers only to speaking in tongues.

13) It builds up the one speaking (1 Cor. 14:4; Jude 20). It does not build up the one speaking in tongues because he understands what he is saying, because he does not understand what he is saying when he is speaking in tongues. It builds him up in his trust and in his spiritual sensitivity, because the words have to come from the spirit to his mind.

14) It is under the speaker’s control. If the person does not “speak,” i.e., move his mouth, his tongue, and make the sounds, he will not speak in tongues. A Christian speaking in tongues can start and stop when he wants to. He can speak loudly or softly, he can sing or shout in tongues. Since it is under the speaker’s control, it can be misused and operated incorrectly. This is why the Word has directions in 1 Corinthians 14 of how to speak in tongues correctly. For example, there is no profit in someone standing up in front of a group and speaking in tongues, because those listening will not understand the tongue and the speaker.
will be speaking “into the air” (1 Cor. 14:6-9). Similarly, if the whole church has gathered and everyone is speaking in tongues at the same time, if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in, he will probably say you are all out of your mind (1 Cor. 14:23). One thing we need to be aware of is that on rare occasions a person who is demonized (“possessed”) will be taken over by the demon and forced to speak in a language they do not understand (demons know angel languages). This is not speaking in tongues; the counterfeit can be recognized because it is never under the control of the speaker.

15) Speaking in tongues is primarily designed for one’s personal edification and use, but it is also to be utilized in a gathering of Christians by following it with its companion manifestation, the interpretation of tongues, so that the Church is edified by one’s praise to God. Speaking in tongues followed by the interpretation of tongues enables each believer to obey God’s exhortation to “…strive to excel in building up the church” (1 Cor. 14:12, ESV).

• How does a person speak in tongues?

1) Remember that God would not ask you to do something you cannot do. He clearly says, “I would like every one of you to speak in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:5).

2) Act. Open your mouth and utilize the mechanics of speech, but do not speak English or any other language you know. What you will be speaking is whatever language the Lord chooses to give you. The only way to fail is to not speak. Do not wait for the Lord to give you a sentence. The syllables form as you speak them. The water did not become firm for Peter before he stepped on it, but as he stepped. It is the same with speaking in tongues.

3) Keep speaking even if it seems strange. You are not used to speaking words without understanding them, but that is what you have to do to speak in tongues. Practice makes it easier.

4) You may tend to repeat the same syllables or words over and over. Although that is speaking in tongues, it is not the developed language that you should desire. Remember that you are doing the speaking, so relax and let the Lord help you expand your vocabulary with different sounds.

5) Overcome any fears you have about it. Some people do not speak in tongues due to a fear about it. One common fear people have is that they will not really speak in tongues, but instead will have some kind of counterfeit. God never warns us about counterfeit tongues, so we should not worry about that. When a Christian is speaking words he does not understand, and is in control of his mouth, then he is speaking in tongues (cp. Luke 11:13). Another common fear people have is that they are making up the language they are speaking. Speaking in tongues is part supernatural and part natural; part spirit and part flesh because the language comes via the spirit but we have to use our flesh to speak. In fact, some Christians do not speak in tongues even when they know it is God’s will because they expect God to speak through them, i.e., take over their mouths and make them speak. He will not do it. The Bible says the Christian does the speaking. Thus, it may feel like you are making up the language, but as you speak more and more, and the language starts to really flow out of you, you will realize there is no way you could be making it up. Keep speaking and let the language develop. Another fear some people have is that they will “sound stupid.” Nothing
that comes from the Lord is ever “stupid.” We should be very thankful for whatever language the Lord gives us. Another fear some people have is that they are not “good enough.” Since speaking in tongues is a manifestation of holy spirit, if you are saved then you already have holy spirit and can therefore speak in tongues. Remember also that speaking in tongues is prayer and praise in the spirit. Everyone is “good enough” to pray and praise God, so get speaking in tongues!


**speaking in tongues.** Speaking in tongues is a language of men or angels, and it is not understood by the speaker or anyone speaking the same language or languages he speaks. The manifestation of interpretation of tongues is for the edification of the congregation. For more on speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5.

**revelation.**” For what “revelation” is, see commentary on Galatians 1:12 and 1 Corinthians 12:8.

14:7. “lifeless.” = without *psuche*, soul-less (occurs only here in the NT).

14:9. “a message.” *Logos* can be what is said, a message. [For more information on *logos*, see commentary on John 1:1, “Word”.]

14:10. “voices, voiceless.” Not just “languages.” That is not the word here, although some commentators think that *phonai* means “languages.” However, then the verse makes no sense: there are many kinds of languages, and none languageless (see Lenski). The “voice” can refer to individual human voices (explains better “it may be,” not trying to set any number), and no voice is “voiceless,” i.e., without sound.

14:12. “zealous for spirits, spiritual utterances.” In both Greek and Hebrew, the word translated “spirit” (Hebrew: *ruach*; Greek: *pneuma*) has many meanings. In this verse and a number of others in both the Old and New Testaments, the word “spirits” is put by the figure of speech metonymy for the manifestations produced by the spirit. In other words, “spirits” means “manifestations of the spirit,” which would include speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophecy, etc. Lenski correctly understands that “spirits” refers to the manifestations of the spirit, “This term ‘spirits’ designates the different manifestations of the one Holy Spirit [holy spirit] in the individual Christians.” Understanding that “spirits” can mean the manifestations of holy spirit is essential to understanding a number of verses in the Bible. For example, this same use of “spirits,” is used in 14:32; 1 John 4:1, 2, 3; 2 Thessalonians 2:2, 8; Isaiah 11:4 (translated “breath” in most versions)

The people in Corinth were very zealous for spiritual power. When they came together, everyone had a tongue (i.e., everyone spoke in tongues in the congregation), an interpretation, or a revelation (14:26). Although their zeal needed to be tempered, they were in the spot that most Christians should be: zealous to use the spiritual power God has given us. Too many Christians are content not to utilize the spiritual power they have.

1 John 4:1 says, “do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits” and since the context is false prophets, the word “spirits” in that verse (and verses 2 and 3) also primarily refer to prophecies. The exhortation in 1 John is that Christians should not just believe every prophecy and spiritual utterance, but test them to see if they are from God. This is necessary because many false prophets are gone into the world, and thus the information that every prophecy that acknowledges that Jesus has come in the flesh is from God, while those prophecies that do not are not from God. We do need to
acknowledge that the use of “spirit” for “utterances of the spirit” also leaves the door open for the word “spirit” to be a literal reference to the “spirit” (the gift of holy spirit or the demon) that is producing the prophecy.

2 Thessalonians 2:2 is another place where “spirit” primarily refers to a prophecy, and Paul warns the church at Thessalonica not to be unsettled or alarmed by a prophecy that the Day of the Lord has already come (see commentary on 2 Thessalonians 2:2).

2 Thessalonians 2:8 says the Lord will kill the lawless one by the “spirit” (pneuma) from his mouth.” There again we see the use of “spirit” is a reference to the prophetic word. Although we do not fully understand it, it is clear that Christ is prophesying and destroys the lawless one by the “spirit,” the powerful spiritual utterance that he speaks. In the beginning God created the universe by speaking it into being (Genesis 1) and after his resurrection Jesus received all power and authority from God (Matt. 28:18). Thus it makes perfect sense that Jesus could destroy the wicked by a prophetic word, an utterance with true spiritual power. This is also foretold in Isaiah 11:4, which says, “He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath [ruach; “spirit”] of his lips he will slay the wicked.” The phrase, “rod of his mouth” is the genitive and can be translated, “rod from his mouth,” and similarly “spirit of his lips” can be translated “spirit from his lips,” i.e., the spiritual utterance from his lips.

The prophetic word coming from the mouth of Jesus Christ is portrayed as a sword coming out of Christ’s mouth in Revelation 1:16; 2:16; 19:15, 21. We are told in Ephesians 6:17 that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God.

“strive.” The Greek is zeteō (#2212 ζητεό), which means seek or strive for. Here, “strive” is better than “seek,” because it is not that we have to look for how to build up the Church, we have to strive, or push ourselves, to do it.


14:13. “so that.” The person prays (speaks in tongues) so that he can interpret. The traditional explanation of this verse is that people should pray for the ability to interpret speaking in tongues. “Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret” (NRSV). That cannot be correct, because the interpretation of tongues is a manifestation of the gift of holy spirit, and anyone who has the gift of holy spirit, which means every Christian, has the spiritual ability to interpret speaking in tongues (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:1, “spiritual things”). We do not “pray” for the ability to interpret, we “pray” in tongues so that we will have a message to interpret.

The next verse (14:14), uses the word “pray” for speaking in tongues. It says, “for if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays.” This makes it clear that “pray” in these verses is referring to speaking in tongues. 1 Corinthians 14:13 and 14 read: “Therefore, let the one who speaks in a tongue pray so that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.” If we understand “prayer” is speaking in tongues in this context, the verse is saying: “Therefore, let the one who speaks in a tongue, pray in tongues so that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.” This now makes perfect sense. The context of these verses is edifying the congregation (14:12, 16, 17). If I speak in tongues, I am edified, but the congregation is not. Therefore if I am going to edify the congregation, I must pray in tongues so that I will then have something to interpret. Then the congregation can be edified by my interpretation.
Frederic Godet wrote in *Commentary on St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians*, that verse 13 did not mean, “Let him ask of God the power to interpret.” Godet wrote:

“But the terms aitein or deisthai would perhaps suit better a positive position than proseuchesthai, which rather denotes the state of prayer; and the use Paul makes of this same term proseuchesthai in the following verses, specially to denote ecstatic prayer, hardly admits of our taking it in verse 13 in another sense. The words: let him pray (in tongues) that he may interpret, therefore signify: “In giving himself up to the Spirit who leads him to pray in a tongue, let him do so with the intention and with the settled aim beforehand to reproduce the contents of his prayer afterwards in intelligible language.”

Thomas Edwards came to the same conclusion as Godet, and both of them use the term “ecstatic prayer” for speaking in tongues. Edwards wrote that the *hina* phrase in Greek should be understood to have its normal telic meaning, and added:

“let him that has that gift of tongues pray with tongues, but let him do it with the purpose of interpreting his utterance afterwards;” that is, he should not be content with ecstatic prayer, but should strive after the gift of interpreting his prayer.

*Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek Testament* (Samuel Green, 1886), notes that the general meaning of the subjunctive mood (and the word “interpret” is in the subjunctive mood, derived from the preposition *hina*), is to signify possibility or intention. Thus it says, “In 1 Cor. 14:13 it is not meant that the disciple is to pray for the power to interpret, but that his gift of prayer is to be so exercised as to involve the power of interpretation.”

Because the congregation cannot understand what we are saying when we speak in tongues, in a meeting we should speak in tongues out loud with the specific intent of interpreting the tongue and thus edifying the body of believers. **14:15. “What, then, is to be done?”** The opening phrase is difficult in English. The NIV has the sense, “What shall I do then?” The same phrase is in Acts 21:22. See NASB there.

**14:16. “Otherwise.”** The Greek word is *epei* (#1893 ἐπεί, pronounced, “ep-ā”), which is a marker of time, cause, or reason. Here it is a marker of reason, and a very important one, because it links verses 15 and 16 together and shows that it is not proper for someone to “bless” (bless and praise God) with the spirit (i.e., by speaking in tongues) in the congregation unless that person interprets. If there is no interpretation, the people do “not know what you are saying.” Thus, although it is possible to “pray with the understanding” and “sing with the understanding” without it being an interpretation, in this context that is the most important emphasis.

“is unlearned.” The Greek is literally, “occupies [or “fills”] the place of the unlearned.” It is not as if the unlearned have a special place just for them. “Occupying the place” is an idiomatic way of referring to them being there and taking up space, or “a
place.” “Instead of merely using the term ‘the unlearned,’ ‘the layman,’ Paul very properly describes the man: “he that occupies the place of the unlearned” (Lenski; The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians). This is an example of when an idiom in a language makes translating difficult. Translating the Greek literally introduces questions and confusion in the mind of the English reader that would never occur to a Greek reader, thus we feel justified in simplifying the English. One should not have to learn Greek idioms to understand the English Bible.

14:18. “speak in tongues.” For more on speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5.

14:20. “Brothers, do not be children in your thinking.” This verse starts a new section, and reminds the believers to use their minds and their wisdom. The use of “children” is directly related to the quotation from Isaiah 28 that is in the next verse. The Israelites had repeatedly ignored God’s warnings about their sin, so as the clock moved forward to their destruction by Assyria, God asked them, “Who is it he [God] is trying to teach? To whom is he [God] explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast?” (Isa. 28:9). Then one verse later He says, “Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people” (Isa. 28:11).

Here in Corinthians God is using the quotation from Isaiah and its mention of “children” to good effect. God’s people are not supposed to act like children who cannot think or see consequences. To the world, speaking in tongues should be seen as a great miracle. Here are people, Christians, obviously speaking languages they have never been taught. This should be a “sign” to them (God speaking to them!), that He exists. Sadly, it was for the early Church as it was for Isaiah 700 years before Christ, and as it is for us today, “and not even then will they listen to me, says the Lord.” Most Christians do not see the value in speaking in tongues and even deny its existence. Most unbelievers scoff at it.

14:21. “In the Law.” Quoted from Isaiah 28:11, 12. This is the general use of “Law,” where “Law” refers to the whole Tanakh (technically a form of synecdoche, the part for the whole). In later Jewish writings, the term “law” was even sometimes used of some of the Jewish traditions that had become firmly embedded in society.

“I will speak to this people, and not even then will they listen to me.” This quotation from Isaiah is not a prophecy foretelling that people would speak in tongues. No one would have understood such a prophecy. The point of what God said in Isaiah 28 was that for years God had “spoken” to the people of Israel in many different ways to get them to return to Him, including verbally and through other signs, and they had ignored what God said.

One way God had spoken to Israel was through his prophets. He warned the people of Israel about their sin and told them they needed to return to Him. Amos, much earlier than Isaiah, had said Israel would face dire consequences for its sin: “Thus says the LORD: ‘For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment,” (Amos 2:6 ESV). Hosea had also spoken of Israel’s sin and its consequences. “Then the LORD said to Hosea…’I will soon punish the house of Jehu…and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel’” (Hosea 1:4).

God had also “spoken” to Israel in other ways as well. God made it clear in the Law of Moses that if Israel obeyed Him they would be blessed (cp. Deut. 28:1-14), but if they turned away from Him they would be cursed (cp. Deut. 28:15-68). In fact, Deuteronomy specifically stated that if Israel turned away from Him they would be
defeated by their enemies (Deut. 28:47ff) and carried away from the Promised Land (Deut. 28:64ff). Israel had a covenant promise from God that He would bless and protect them if they would be faithful to Him. Therefore, when they were not faithful and things started to go wrong in Israel, that was God “speaking” to them and warning them that they were not right in His sight.

Amos chapter four lists some of the ways God said he “spoke” to His people, but “you have not returned to me, declares the LORD” (Amos 4:6). God spoke to Israel by famine, by the fact that it rained in one city but not in another, by the scorching east wind, by the mildew that ruined their crops, by crop-devouring insects, by plagues, by wars, and in other ways as well (Amos 4:6-13).

Isaiah 28 is one of the many places where God is reproving Israel for its sin. The leaders were proud and drunkards (28:1), even the priests and prophets (false prophets) were drunkards (28:7). Since the prophets in Israel no longer spoke for God, He said that, “He [God] will speak to this people” Himself, (28:11), but how would He do it? Israel had refused to listen to Him speaking through His true prophets or His warnings of famine, plague, and war, so how would God speak to them? God said He would speak to them by fulfilling His promise of Deuteronomy 28:64; Israel would be carried away from the Promised Land by strangers, Assyrians, who spoke another language, “another tongue” (28:11 KJV).

When they were conquered by the Assyrians and carried away from the Promised Land, Israel should have realized that God was fulfilling His promise in Deuteronomy, and repented with all their heart and soul. Even Solomon, in his prayer at the dedication of the Temple, prayed that if Israel sinned and was carried away from their land, “if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you…and say, ‘We have sinned, we have done wrong and acted wickedly;’ and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul…and pray toward the land you gave their fathers…then from heaven…hear their prayer and their pleas, and uphold their cause. And forgive your people, who have sinned against you” (2 Chron. 6:37-39). Alas, Israel never repented, and so never did return from their captivity. God foresaw that, and thus He said, “but they would not listen” (Isa. 28:12).

When we understand the history of Israel and what Isaiah 28 is saying, we are able to understand why God quoted Isaiah 28:11 and 12 in 1 Corinthians 14:21. The congregation in Corinth started with the Jews (Acts 18:1-18), and it was the Jews, historically God’s chosen people, who harassed Paul in Corinth, even dragging him before the regional government (Acts 18:12). The Jews resisted Paul and the Gospel he preached, and they were not listening to God (nor were most of the Gentiles) just as Israel had behaved in the days of Isaiah. Therefore, just as in the days of Isaiah, God decided to speak to them and give them a sign of His presence and power even though again it looked like, “and not even then will they listen to me.” However, this time the sign He gave the unbelievers was not prophecy, which was a manifestation of the spirit and a sign they had encountered (and ignored!) for hundreds of years, but a new manifestation of the power of God: speaking in tongues. That is why 1 Corinthians 14:22 says that “tongues are for a sign” to those people who do not believe. It is indeed a sign of God’s power whether they ignore it or not, but as Israel ignored God’s signs and suffered because of it, those who ignore God’s signs today will also suffer consequences.
The point of 1 Corinthians 14:21 is that God, as always, is trying to reach out to people, giving them signs of His presence and power. The Assyrians with their powerful armies and strange language were a sign to Israel that they had abandoned God and His covenant blessings. Now, the strange language of tongues is again a sign to unbelievers, and if they ignore that sign, they do so to their peril.

14:23. “everyone speaks in tongues.” Paul had just made the point in verse 22 that speaking in tongues was a sign to unbelievers. It can be easily seen that this could be overplayed by the congregation, who might think that if the unbelievers saw not just one person speak in tongues, but everyone speak in tongues, that would be really convincing. However, the Word tells us what modern experience has confirmed: that when unbelievers come across a whole church speaking in tongues at one time, they are not convinced; rather, they are generally confused or frightened, and think something is wrong with the people. Churches that make a practice of having everyone speak in tongues at one time need to take heed to this verse. [For more on speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Cor. 12:10 and 14:5].

“raving mad.” The translation “raving mad” (some versions read, “mad,” or “out of your mind”) is an attempt to represent the Greek text in this context of public worship, which, unfortunately, cannot be easily translated into English. In the Greek pagan worship, it occasionally happened that the devotees were taken over by demons and acted in a frenzied, frantic, raving manner. The New Testament scholar, C. K. Barrett, writes: “You are mad does not mean, You are suffering from mental disease, but, You are possessed…” (C. K. Barrett, Black’s New Testament Commentary: The First Epistle to the Corinthians). God wants to prevent confusion in Christian fellowships. He never wants people who attend church to think that the congregation has been taken over by demons and gone into a religious frenzy. He makes it clear that what is done in the service “…must be done for the strengthening of the church” (1 Cor. 14:26b).

14:24. “convinced” by all. The Greek word elegcho is hard to translate here. We went with “convinced” because it is being contrasted to the ones who, upon seeing tongues, were not convinced but said the people were “raving mad” (actually, demonized). However, it also carries the meaning of being openly exposed, brought to light. In prophecy, the life of the person is often brought to light in a way that convinces them that God is among you.


14:27. “one at a time.” The Greek phrase ana meros (ἀνὰ μέρος), which literally translates into something like “up a part,” is idiomatic, and means “one at a time” (Porter, Idioms of the Greek New Testament).

“the same one must interpret.” The Greek for this phrase may be read two different ways—“one, as in anyone, must interpret,” or “the one, he alone must interpret.” Those who claim that a different person may interpret someone’s tongue in an assembly favor the first reading. However, we will see that this creates problems with the context of chapter fourteen and is therefore most likely not the sense of the Greek. The underlying Greek text is composed of the word heis, (#1520 ἐἷς) which is the cardinal number one (however, we will see it is not always used in that simple manner) and the verb for “interpret,” diermēneuō (#1329 διερμηνεύω), in the third person, singular, imperative mood. When the verb is put in this form it means, “he/she/someone must interpret.”
We use the word *must* to indicate that this is a command. Although the imperative mood is sometimes used of exhortations and can be represented by “let,” in this case the context and scope of the subject dictates that the imperative mood is better served by the English word “must,” rather than “let.” In English, “let” usually indicates passivity rather than activity of command, the person is allowed to do something if they want to, but are not being told they must do it. Thus, “I will let you eat one of my cookies if you want to,” versus, “You must eat a cookie.” Thus “let” does not capture the sense of the verse in this situation. If someone speaks in tongues in the congregation, no one understands him, so to be walking in love and obeying God, he “must” interpret. Paul is giving a command here.

Putting *heis* and *diermēneuō* together, we get “one must interpret.” If this is taken to mean that one, as in anyone, can interpret the tongue, then this verse seems to go against what Paul has written up to this point on how tongues ought to be interpreted. There are three places prior to this verse where the practice of interpreting tongues is discussed. These are 1 Corinthians 14:5, 13, and 15-16:

1. Verse 5 tells us that a person who speaks in tongues is not edifying the church unless he interprets. This would seem to indicate that the person who speaks in tongues would be edifying the church if that same person (he) followed the tongues with an interpretation. According to normal Greek syntax, the logical antecedent for the verb “interpret” would be *ho lalon* (“The one speaking” in tongues).

2. Verse 13 instructs us that a person who speaks in a tongue should “pray” that he may interpret. This instruction seems clear that the same person who spoke in the tongue should be the one who interprets. In Greek, “the one speaking in tongues” is the subject of the verb “interpret.”

3. Verses 15-16 begin with Paul rhetorically asking the question “What then should a person do?” regarding the proper place and practice of tongues and interpretation in the church assembly. He then answers the question by stating that it is proper to “pray/praise” with the spirit and then “pray/praise” with the understanding; otherwise people will not be edified because they will not understand the tongues (praying/praising with the spirit) by itself. The first word of verse 16 is a key to understanding Paul’s intent in these two verses. It is the word “otherwise.” Paul is saying that unless he follows his speaking in tongues with an interpretation others will not be edified. Verses 15-16 clearly indicate that Paul is teaching that the person who speaks in tongues should follow it with an interpretation. He says *I* will pray with my spirit then *I* will pray with my understanding also. Paul sets the example of the same person giving the interpretation.

It seems then that every verse to this point indicates that the person who gives the tongue ought to be the one to give the interpretation. This is strong evidence that we should not read Paul as going against this in verse 27. Instead, there is a legitimate alternative reading that clears up the apparent inconsistency. A closer look at the Greek word *heis* reveals that this word is not always used in the sense of the number one. Lenski states that, “There is no reason to stress εἷς to mean one person only for the two or the three speakers…” Gingrich’s Lexicon lists three different definitions for *heis* while
Thayer lists five different definitions with numerous subcategories under each category. One of the definitions that Thayer provides in his second definition category is the usage of the word *heis* in the sense of ‘alone’ or ‘only.’ He cites Mark 2:7 as an example of this usage: “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (ESV). The word translated “alone” is the Greek word *heis*. It makes no sense to translate their statement, “Who can forgive sins but God one.” It is made clear by this verse that a legitimate Biblical usage of the Greek word *heis* meaning “alone” does exist. The sense is to indicate the “one and same” nature of the subject, *this one God only* can forgive sins.

If we bring this meaning back into 1 Corinthians 14:27 we get the following phrase, “he alone must interpret” or “this same one must interpret.” This sense put along with the rest of the verse would read as follows: “If anyone speaks in a tongue, *it should be* two or three at the most, and in turn, and the same one must interpret.” This reading lines up with Paul’s earlier instruction in the chapter and actually prohibits the very activity which the contradictory reading promoted (i.e. someone else interpreting). We should note that if Paul had meant to teach that someone else should interpret the messages, he could have said it in many different and clearer ways. He could have used the following words instead of *heis*:

- *tis* - this would have indicated that anyone could have given the interpretation.
- *heteros* - this would have indicated that any other one could have given the interpretation.
- *to autos* - this would have indicated that the same one should give all interpretations.
- *hekastos* - this would have indicated that each one in turn should give his own interpretation after someone speaks in tongues.

However, verse 27 uses none of these words. It does use the word *heis*, which in contrast to these other words, shows that “the one and the same” one who spoke should interpret the message.

**14:28. “But if there is no one to interpret.”** This translation fits the context and follows versions such as the ESV, RSV, and NRSV. This verse is saying that if no one in the room has been instructed in interpretation or if no one desires to speak in tongues and then interpret at that time, then instead of speaking in tongues out loud without interpretation, each person should just keep quiet.

This verse is not saying that the “interpreter” is a different person than the one who speaks in tongues. The phrase, “if there is no one to interpret” is a simple statement of fact—not a reference to another person. There are many people who speak in tongues and who do not interpret, as is clearly evidenced in congregations of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. So, it can happen that “there is no one to interpret” for several reasons. For one, people may not have been instructed in interpretation or may have even been taught that since they speak in tongues they cannot interpret. Or, people may not want to interpret because they are comfortable with just knowing how to speak in tongues. Or even that people may not feel like interpreting in that particular meeting. In each of these cases, there is “no one to interpret” in the room.

Far from showing that the person who interprets is different than the person who speaks in tongues, this verse is more evidence that the person speaking in tongues is the same person who must interpret. In a large congregation, especially with new people and
visitors coming and going, how would anyone who might desire to speak in tongues know if someone else in the room was “an interpreter?” And since the Bible says not to speak in tongues in public worship without there being an interpretation, that would place a terrible burden on the person who becomes inspired to speak in tongues to be sure that someone in the room would interpret. The only real and practical way to be sure that if someone speaks in tongues, there will be an interpretation, is if the one who speaks in tongues is the same one who interprets. Both speaking in tongues and interpretation are manifestations of the gift of holy spirit (1 Cor. 12:10), and are both operated from the freewill and trust (“faith”) of the individual Christian. So when a Christian has been instructed in the use of the manifestations, and wants to use them in a meeting as a blessing to the people there, he or she will speak in tongue and then interpret the message so the congregation can understand it.

14:30. “revealed.” For what “revelation” is, see commentary on Galatians 1:12 and 1 Corinthians 12:8.

14:32. “And spirits spoken by prophets are subject to prophets.” This verse has a primary interpretation, and some sub-themes. First, it is accurate as translated above. The text does not read, “the spirits” or “the prophets.” There are no definite articles. Second, “spirits” is the figure of speech metonymy for “spiritual utterances,” or prophecies, due to the fact that they originate from the spirit. Thus if this verse were to be expanded according to meaning, it would be: “The prophecies of prophets are subject to prophets.” That “spirits” refers to spiritual manifestations, prophecies, can be seen both from this chapter and from a similar use in 1 John. For example, in verse 12, people are said to be “zealous for spirits.” In that verse, as in this one, “spirits” is put by metonymy for that which is produced by the spirit, which is the manifestation, or evidences of the spirit (see commentary on 14:12). Here in 14:32, the “spirits of,” is a genitive of origin, and should be understood as “spirit from,” or expanded as, “And spiritual manifestations, prophecies, from prophets are subject to prophets.”

Another example of this use of “spirits” is in 1 John 4:1: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” The context of 1 John 4:1 makes it clear that we are to test the “spirits,” the manifestations (specifically prophecies), because many false prophets are in the world, and thus there are many false prophecies (“spirits”) in the world. Then the context of 1 John 4 goes on about what the false prophets say (see commentary there). Another use of the word “spirits” in the sense of a prophetic word is 2 Thessalonians 2:2 (see commentary there).

14:34, 35. These verses are in brackets because there is good evidence that they were not part of the original text, but were an early textual note that was copied into the text. It is more accurate to the original text to omit these verses when reading. As much as we dislike omitting a verse or verses that have been accepted as part of the text, it is honest to recognize that occasionally the biblical text was changed, and in this case there is good evidence that these two verses are an early addition to the text. [For more information and full commentary on these verses, see Appendix 12: “The Role of Women In The Church”.

14:38. “If anyone does not acknowledge this, he is not acknowledged.” (Cp. Lenski; NAB) If anyone in the congregation is hardhearted and does not acknowledge that what
Paul was writing was the word and direction of the Lord, then that person should not be acknowledged in the Church as a leader, teacher, or spiritual person.

14:39. “do not forbid anyone to speak in tongues.” In spite of this command, many congregations forbid people from speaking in tongues. The Corinthian church needed instruction on the subject of the manifestations of holy spirit, which Paul provides in chapters 12-14. He clarifies the manifestations themselves in chapter 12, encourages people to manifest. He tells people to eagerly desire spiritual things (14:1), to speak in tongues (14:5; which means that not everyone was), and to seek to edify the church (14:12). Paul set the example for the Corinthians by saying that he spoke in tongues more than all of them combined (14:18), and he explained that tongues were a sign to unbelievers (14:22). In light of the clear command to not forbid speaking in tongues, it is astounding how many Christian denominations do exactly that, clearly contradicting the clear teaching of Scripture. Christians should take to heart the desire of God that is clearly expressed in 14:5: God wants every Christian to speak in tongues.

Due to the construction of the words in the verse, it sometimes gets suggested that this verse is the figure of speech Tapeinosis, or Understatement, and that what Paul is really saying is “Greatly encourage people to speak in tongues.” Although God would like us to greatly encourage speaking in tongues, the evidence is that this is not the figure Tapeinosis. In considering whether or not a verse is a figure, we must keep in mind that the literal reading is always to be preferred if it makes sense in the context. In this case, the fact on his third missionary journey Paul had to write to the people of Corinth about the manifestations shows that the people had become unclear about them. After all, only a couple years earlier Paul would have instructed them about the manifestations when he was there for a year and a half (Acts 18:11). Nevertheless, division started in the Church (1 Cor. 1:10ff), and along with that came confusion about the manifestations. It got to the point that there were people who were not speaking in tongues, and apparently not eager to do so (hence the encouragement to speak in tongues and be eager about the manifestations). It is easy to see in that context that there even would have been some people trying to stop the speaking in tongues, just as there are today in the Church. In that context, a clear warning not to forbid speaking in tongues was necessary. This would put an end to any debate about whether or not the manifestations had a place in the Church. Also, in verse 38, Paul wrote that if a person did not acknowledge this instruction, he was not to be acknowledged as a spiritual person. Thus the people in Corinth were instructed not to endlessly debate the issue with those who were defiant towards the power of God, but simply not acknowledge as leaders or people of authority anyone who stood in opposition to what Paul was teaching.

“For more on speaking in tongues, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:5.

Chapter 15

15:1. “I want to remind you.” This is the correct sense of the Greek, although the death and resurrection of Christ was fundamental, and something they should have known and boldly stood on. In the REV, we, like some other versions such as the NIV, have translated this “I want to remind you.” That is the essence of what Paul was writing to the
Corinthians, but he worded it as “I make known to you,” which is the way some of the more literal English versions, such as the NASB, read. Paul had already told the Corinthians about the resurrection, so by saying “I make known to you” something they already knew, he was mildly reproving them for not standing on what they knew. Grosheide writes: “The solemn beginning of this chapter must be understood against this background. I make known is not, “I remind you,” but “I make known emphatically” (cp. Gal. 1:11) (F. W. Grosheide, The New International Commentary). There are a couple reasons why “remind” is better than “I make known to you” in this verse. First, it clears up what is otherwise a cause of confusion in the English and makes it clear that Paul was telling them something that he had already taught them. Second, in English, reminding someone can be a mild reproof if the person was already supposed to know what you were reminding them of, so in this case the sense of reproof in the verse is not totally lost by the translation: “I want to remind you.”

15:2. “are being saved.” There are verses that say we have been saved (Eph. 2:8), verses that say we are being saved (1 Cor. 15:2), and verses that say we will be saved (Rom. 13:11). Our salvation is more than just our guarantee of everlasting life. We get that guarantee when we believe and are sealed with holy spirit (Eph. 1:13, 14), and because we believed, we will be with Christ forever. However, a guarantee is not the actual thing, and the guarantee of salvation is not salvation in full. The verses that say we “have been saved” are using the idiom of the prophetic perfect (see commentary on “seated,” in Ephesians 2:6). “Salvation” is being rescued from this present evil world, and that is still future, and will occur when Christ comes and we get our new, everlasting bodies. Also, we “are being saved,” in the sense that our being rescued from this world is being worked out every day, and we are building both wholeness now and rewards in the future. It is in this light that if we “believed in vain (to no purpose)” we will have everlasting life (cp. 1 Cor. 3:11-15), but we will be in Paradise without the fruits and rewards of salvation-rewards which every believer would have earned if he had been serious about his salvation and obeying his God. Life is not to be wasted. God created us to do good works (Eph. 2:10), and people who hide their talent in the ground and do not use it for God’s purposes are “wicked, lazy” servants (Matt. 25:26).

15:3. “as of first importance.” The phrase en prōtos is literally “in the first place (or position),” and in this context refers to what Paul thought was the most important. Paul is not remembering the very first thing he taught the Corinthians, but rather what he thought was most important.

15:4. “was raised.” This is a better translation than “rose again.” See commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:15.

15:12. “if Christ is being preached.” A good example of the idiomatic Greek use of “if” meaning “since” (cp. Eph. 3:2). However, it is so well understood in English that Christ had been being preached that leaving the “if” does not cause confusion, and the sentence reads smoother with it left in.

“out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “from among the dead.”

15:12. “how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” This is an interesting question in light of the Jewish, Greek, and Roman culture and beliefs that the congregation in Corinth came out of. It shows how thoroughly Paul communicated the basic beliefs of the Christian Faith, and how essential those beliefs are to Christianity.
When Paul went to Corinth he first went to the synagogue so that he could convert the Jews and Greek “God-fearers” who were there (Acts 18:4; for “God-fearers,” see commentary on Acts 13:16). When he was rejected in the synagogue, he went to the “Gentiles,” the non-Jews (Acts 18:6).

When Paul talked to the Jews in the synagogue, it is likely that at least some of them were of the persuasion of the Sadducees, that there was no resurrection (Matt. 22:23) or had taken on some of the beliefs of the Greeks and Romans around them, that the soul (life-force) of the body lived on after the body died, but the soul never occupied a physical body again. The Greeks and Romans believed that the soul lived on after the death of the body, but without a physical body, and they scoffed at the resurrection of the dead (Acts 17:32).

Given that so many of the congregation had come from a background in which there was no physical resurrection, it seems logical that at least some of the Christians in Corinth would have remained unconvinced, or at least be confused, about the need for a physical resurrection. It seems that Paul would not have needed to ask the question, “How do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” Many people would answer, “We never believed in a physical resurrection.” So what Paul’s question really tells us is that the physical resurrection of the bold is an essential piece of the Christian Faith, that he had taught it thoroughly, and also that it should be fundamental part of the teaching in every Christian church.

Sadly, however, the situation in Corinth is similar to the situation in much of Christianity today. Many Christians are convinced that Christians “go to heaven when they die,” and are confused about the need for a physical resurrection, even though it is clearly part of the Christian Faith (Acts 24:15; Rom. 6:5; 1 Cor. 15:44-54; Phil. 3:11; 1 Thess. 4:16; 2 Tim. 2:18; Heb. 11:35; cp. the prophecies of the dead being raised in the Old Testament and Gospels: Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:11-14; Hos. 13:14; Dan. 12:2, 13; Luke 14:14; John 5:24-29).

15:15. “in contradiction to God.” The Greek here for “contradiction” is from the preposition kata (#2596 κατά). BDAG defines kata as contradiction in this verse: “give testimony in contradiction to God” (def. b, β). Paul’s reasoning starts by assuming that God always knows the true position of things and speaks the truth. Supposing for argument’s sake that God did not in fact raise Christ, then God’s position would be that He did not raise him. And thus Paul would be testifying against God by saying He did something He did not in fact do. Testifying against God in this sense would be to speak in contradiction to God.

15:18. “asleep.” The Greek verb is koimaō (#2837 κοιμάω), to fall asleep, to be asleep. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60. If Jesus has not been raised, then there is no resurrection from the dead, no Rapture to be with Christ, and those who have died are not just dead, they have “perished.”


“asleep.” The Greek verb is koimaō (#2837 κοιμάω), to fall asleep, to be asleep. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.

15:22. “in Adam…in Christ.” The Greek word translated “in” is en (#1722 ἐν), and here refers to a relationship, a connection. [For more on the “in” of connection, see commentary on Colossians 1:17 and Romans 6:3].
“Adam.” The Greek reads, “the Adam,” letting us know that it is the well-known one, the first man created. However, we do not reproduce the word “the” in English.

“all die.” The Greek word translated “die” is ἀποθνῄσκω (#599 ἀποθνῄσκω) in the present tense, active voice. Robertson (Grammar, p. 827) calls this the “frequentative present,” and it is also called the iterative present. It means “they go on dying.” It refers to the ongoing process of Christians dying.

“all will be made alive.” The Greek word translated “will be made alive” is ζωοποιεῖ #2227 ζωοποιεῖ, and it is a future tense. Robertson rightly refers to this as a punctiliar future, because different groups of people will be made alive en masse in the future: first at the Rapture, then at the first resurrection, and lastly at the second resurrection [For more on the resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15].

This verse has confused many, and been a central pillar in the teaching of the doctrine referred to by theologians as “Universalism,” that is, that every person who has ever lived will be saved, no matter what they believed or how they behaved. A central part of that argument is that both uses of “all” should be understood the same way, that is, if “all” (everyone) dies, then “all” (everyone) must be made alive (i.e., everyone must be given everlasting life). Proponents of Universalism correctly argue that it does not fit the context to make the first “all” refer to everyone, but the second “all” refer only to Christians. Although that would certainly be convenient, it does not do justice to the grammar.

The key to understanding what Paul is saying is the context, which is about Christians and the resurrection. Paul is not discussing that fact that everyone dies; he is discussing why there must be a resurrection, because some people were saying there was no resurrection (v. 12). The whole argument in Chapter 15 is about Christians only; it is not about “everyone,” i.e., both Christians and unbelievers. Paul is discussing Christians who die and then must be resurrected to be alive. Paul starts by pointing out that this was the pattern for the founder of the Faith, Jesus Christ, who himself died and then was made alive via resurrection (vs. 3, 4). Then Paul points out that if there is no resurrection, then Christ is not raised (v. 13), so he must be dead, and our trust in Christ is therefore futile (v. 17). Furthermore, the Christians who have already died have “perished,” they are forever dead (v. 18). But Paul then triumphantly says that in fact Jesus has been raised from the dead, and is the first one to be raised from the dead (v. 20).

Of course, it is clear that Christians are dying, just as it will be clear that Christians will be raised from the dead, but Paul clearly states this point in verse 22 so no one will misunderstand. He says, “For just as in our connection with Adam all Christians die, so in our connection with Christ all Christians will be made alive.”

Many of the underlying arguments of the Universalist position are based on the assumption that God is love, so He cannot allow anyone to suffer in Gehenna or perish. However, those arguments misunderstand love. The nature of love is not controlling, but rather allowing someone the freedom of choice even if the choice is a bad one with bad consequences. We should all understand this. We see people every day make choices that are harmful to them, but we also understand that they have the freedom to make those choices even if we wish they would take a better path in life. It is not loving for us to force people to live the way we want them to, even if it would be better for them. Similarly, it is not loving for God to force people to live in a way that is good for them, even if the end of people’s bad choices is death.
The Bible is clear that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18), so if He says the wicked will be destroyed, then they will be [for more on the destruction of the wicked see Appendix 5: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”]. There are many extremely clear teachings in the Bible about the destruction of the wicked, and we cannot simply discount them because we wish people would do well now and in the hereafter (cp. Matt. 10:28; 2 Pet. 2:4-6). God cannot tell us the wicked will be destroyed and then not follow through with it. It is because God is love that He warns us over and over to be wise and do what is right.

The Bible has warning-story after warning-story of people making bad choices and suffering and even dying because of them, but we do not see God removing their freewill and making them make good choices so they will not suffer and die. Instead, we see God pleading with people to make the right choices and do well (cp. Ezek. 33:11). Much of the point of the emphasis on wisdom in the book of Proverbs is so people will make the right choice and not suffer and die.

15:24. “when… after.” This verse contains the Greek word hotan (#3752 ὅταν) twice, which we have rendered “when” and “after.” The proper translation of this word unlocks the temporal sequence of the end that Paul is revealing. Hotan is a temporal term that can signify either simultaneous action with the main clause or prior action to the main clause. The difference depends on the tense and mood of the verb that it modifies: “with the present subjunctive, when the action of the subordinate clause is contemporaneous with that of the main clause… with the aorist subjunctive, when the action of the subordinate clause precedes that of the main clause” (BDAG). Here in verse 24 the main clause is “then comes the end,” the action that is contemporaneous with the end is “when he delivers (present subjunctive) the kingdom to God,” and the action that is prior to the end (making the end “after” this) is “he abolishes (aorist subjunctive) all rule and all authority and power.” Paul is being very precise in revealing the order of events. First Christ abolishes all the powers, and then he delivers the kingdom to God, and this delivery is simultaneous with the end. The end is the telos, or end goal, the desired conclusion of the creation project. Compare BDAG’s definition of telos: the goal toward which a movement is being directed, end, goal, outcome.

“he.” We believe the pronouns in verses 20-28 should be understood as follows:

20But in fact, Christ has been raised out from among the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

21For since by man came death, by man also the resurrection of the dead. For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

22But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then those who are Christ’s, at his coming.

23Then comes the end, when he (Jesus) delivers the kingdom to God, even the Father, after he (Jesus) abolishes all rule and all authority and power. For it is necessary for him (Jesus) to reign until he (Jesus) has put all these enemies under his (Jesus’) feet.

24The last enemy to be abolished—death! For he (God) has put all things in subjection under his (Jesus’) feet. But when it says, All things have been put in subjection, it is clear that the one (God) who subjected all things to him (Jesus) is not included. And when all things have been subjected to him (Jesus), then the Son will subject himself to him (God) who subjected all things to him (Jesus), that God may be all in all.

“brings to an end all rule and all authority and power.” Jesus is the one who abolishes all rule and all authority and power. He has the power and authority to do that, because God gave it to him (Matt. 28:18; John 5:21-29; Acts 2:34-36; Eph. 1:22; Phil.
2:9, 10; Heb. 1:3, 4; Jude 1:15; Rev. 1:18; 22:12). The rule, authority, and power refers to the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12); see also commentary entry on 15:25. Scripture teaches that there are angelic rulers and cosmic powers who hold certain authority in the universe, and that some of these powers are hostile to God (E.g., Dan. 10; Psalm 82; Matt. 24:29; Luke 4:6; Rom. 8:38-39; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 6:12; 1 John 5:19; Rev. 12:3-10). Here, Paul is saying that Christ “abolishes” these positions of authority. This comes from the Greek word katargeō (#2673 καταργέω). BDAG gives the following definitions for katargeō, all of which can adequately describe what Christ does to the angelic rulers, authorities, and powers: 1) to cause something to lose its power or effectiveness; hence invalidate or make powerless; 2) to cause something to come to an end or to be no longer in existence; hence abolish, wipe out, set aside. 3) to cause the release of someone from an obligation (one has nothing more to do with it); hence be discharged, be released.

All this authority has been transferred to Christ (Matt. 28:18) and he will discharge the demons of their rule, wipe out their authority, and render their power ineffectual. But as Hebrews 2:8 makes clear, even though everything has been put under Christ’s subjection, we do not yet see everything subjected to him. The powers are still in the heavenly places now (Eph. 6:12). It is not until the end that Christ takes his mighty power and begins to reign, starting with the war in heaven and the conquering of Satan and his minions (Rev. 11:15-18; 12:10).

15:25. “all his enemies.” The Greek has the definite article, and literally reads, “all the enemies.” This refers to a particular set of enemies, namely the spiritual forces behind “all rule and all authority and power” just mentioned in verse 24, and that is why we, along with most other versions, replace “the” with “his.” The enemies are Christ’s enemies. This echoes Ephesians 6:12 (ESV):

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (emphasis added).

It is necessary for Christ to reign until all these enemies are put under his feet. (See also Hebrews 2:5-9, 1 Peter 3:22, and Revelation 11:15-18; 12:10).

15:26. “that will be brought to an end.” In the Greek this verb, katargeo (#2673 καταργέω), occurs in the present tense. It is an instance of the Prophetic Present, presenting a future reality as certain by speaking of it in the present tense. “This tense startles and arrests. It affirms and does not merely predict. It conveys a sense of certainty” (Lenski). This idiom uses a present tense verb, instead of a future tense verb, to express an action in the future, and by doing so emphasizes that the action is certain to come to pass, and usually quite soon (See commentary on Ephesians 2:6 and Luke 3:9 for more on the prophetic present). In this case, the words “brought to an end” are in the present tense, and Young’s Literal Translation has a very literal translation of the verse: “the last enemy is done away—death.” The problem with translating the Greek literally here, like Young’s does, is that most Christians are not familiar with the prophetic present idiom or the prophetic perfect idiom, and would tend to misunderstand a literal translation—because death has not yet been abolished. Nevertheless, the idiom gives great comfort to the knowledgeable reader who understands that God is communicating clearly that death will indeed be destroyed, and soon. However, most English versions
use the English future tense, translating the verb in a way that does not confuse the reader. Thus, the NASB reads, “The last enemy that will be abolished is death.”

“death.” This is death, the absence of life, not just the death of the body. In the Garden of Eden, God said to Adam that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would “die” (Gen. 2:17). God said “die,” not “live forever in a bad place” (i.e., “hell”). When people die, they are “dead,” and by definition, death is the absence of life. When it comes to things that we cannot know, such as what happens when a person dies, we must trust that God has given us the answers in His Word. It is important to realize that because there are some people who assert that “death” means “separation,” but that is not biblically correct. When a person “dies,” he is not alive and “separated” from God; rather, he is not alive in any form or in any place. The Bible uses the same Hebrew and Greek words for the “death” of humans, as for the death of animals and plants. There is no special word for the “death” of people that means “separation,” and no reason to say that the word “death” means “separation” when referring to a person but actual “death” when referring to an animal. There is a reason God uses the same words for the death of a human and the death of animals—death is the same for all of them, and “death” is the total absence of life. [For more information on the state of the dead, see Appendix 4: “The Dead are Dead.”]

15:27. Quoted from Psalm 8:6.

“it says.” Some versions translate this “he says” (KJV; ASV; NASB), which would make God the first person speaker being quoted. Although it is true that God inspired the Scripture and is its author, in this instance Paul is dealing with the biblical text of Psalm 8:6 where the Psalmist, as the narrator, is speaking of God; it is not God who is speaking in the first person. This is a quote of the narration of Scripture and should be handled as it often is by preachers and teachers who say, “the Bible says…it says,” not “the Bible says…He says.”

15:28. “subject himself.” The form of this verb, \( \text{hupotassō} \) (#5293 ὑποτάσσω), can either be passive (“be subjected” [NIV; ESV; NASB]) or be a middle future, “the son will subject himself” (Lenski; Robertson, Grammar). The latter translation makes sense, that the son subjects himself. In every other use in this context, the active or passive of “subject” refers to the use of force, but that certainly does not apply to the Son, who out of love for His Father and of his own free will subjects himself after all enemies are subjected by force.

15:29. “baptized for the sake of those who are dead.” The exact way to translate this verse has been debated for centuries. In 1770 John Salomon Semler proposed that the standard translation was likely not correct, and broke the first sentence into two, making something such as: “Otherwise, what are they doing who are baptized? It is on behalf of dead ones if the dead are not raised.”

While the exact translation may be debated, the essential meaning of the section is not. Although we have no records of it today outside the Bible, it seems clear that Christians were being baptized as a ritual of standing in place of those who had died without being baptized. The fact that this is not mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament, or by any of the Church Fathers, or in the secular writings of those who speak (usually disparagingly) about Christianity, shows that the practice was probably local and very short lived. It is very common that ancient cultures had practices of which we today
know very little because many local customs were never written down or the records were lost.

The text speaks of being baptized “for the sake of” \([\text{huper}]\) those who had died. The Greek preposition \(\text{huper}\) means “for the sake of” or more colloquially, “in the place of.” Paul’s argument is thus right to the point: if there is no resurrection from the dead, then being baptized for someone who has died is pointless, and anyone who doubts the resurrection, but gets baptized on behalf of a dead person, is contradicting what he says by what he does.

The most likely explanation for the custom is that living Christians were being baptized for people in the congregation who were known to be faithful and believers but had not as yet received the rite of baptism. In the early centuries of the Church, especially once the Romans persecutions had started, it was often the case that a person had to be faithful to the Church for some probationary period before he or she was allowed to be baptized, which granted them the full status of membership in the congregation. It seems probable from this passage of Scripture that at some point in the early Church a new custom started such that if a person in the probationary period died, someone else was then baptized in his or her place, most likely as a demonstration that the person really was a believer and would be in the resurrection, and that was being practiced at Corinth.

15:31. “I swear this, brothers, by your reason to boast, that is, Christ Jesus our Lord.” It would seem by the large number of ways that this verse has been brought into English that it is a very difficult verse.

Some versions start with “I protest.” While that gets the sense of the fact that Paul is upset with the people of Corinth, it misses the sense of the Greek, which is a well-attested formula by which people swear to something. A number of versions (cp. GWN; NAB; NJB; NLT; The Source NT) and commentators (cp. Lenski; A Thiselton, \(\text{The New International Greek Testament Commentary}\)) explain that Paul is using a grammatical formula that the Greeks used in making oaths. A. Nyland (\(\text{The Source New Testament}\)) writes:

Paul used the common Greek expression for swearing by a divinity (\(\text{νὴ, ne, with accusative})\)...This Greek word has no other meaning. In Greek times, people frequently said, ‘I swear by Zeus!’ and here Paul is saying, ‘I swear by your reason to boast!’ and the Greek requires that the reason to boast must have divine implication. Paul used the word καύχησις \(\text{kaukhēsis}\), which is ‘reason to boast,’ which cannot mean ‘pride’ or ‘glory,’ and in no way is he suggesting here that he is proud of the Corinthians—quite the opposite. He is giving the Corinthians a severe roasting for their behavior. Paul is saying that his reason to boast is their reason to boast, and this reason is Jesus.

Despite the number of translations that say Paul is boasting in the Corinthians (cp. CEB; HCSB; GWN; NASB; NET; NIV; NJB), there is every reason to believe the verse should not be translated that way. Starting right from chapter one, Paul has said he is upset with the Corinthians. They were divided (1:10ff; 11:18ff), and Paul was glad he had not baptized them (1:14). He treated them as if they were immature in the Faith (2:1ff; 3:1ff). He reproved them for their arrogance, and had to admonish them to imitate him (4:8ff). He reproved them for the sexual immorality allowed in the church (5:1ff). He reproved them for taking each other to court (6:1ff). He had to defend himself against personal challenges to himself and his ministry (9:1ff). He told them their meetings were doing more harm than good (11:17). He had to give them exact instructions on love
(13:1ff). They were not respecting each other in the meetings, but were stepping on each other (14:26ff).

If all the above were not enough reason to see that Paul is not boasting in the Corinthians, early in chapter 15, some church members were actually saying there was no resurrection from the dead (15:12). Paul really went after that, and argued forcibly that Jesus was raised from the dead. By 15:30 he says his life is in jeopardy every day for Christ, something he confirms in the first phrase of 15:31: “I die every day!”

It would be strange indeed if, at this point in 1 Corinthians, Paul suddenly reversed his tone and told the Corinthians that he boasted about them. On what possible basis? That cannot be what Paul is saying. Instead, in 15:31 Paul is saying that he swears by Jesus Christ, who is their boasting too, that what he has been saying is true. It seems natural, given the doubt that some in the church at Corinth had about Paul, that he would want to bolster his words by swearing that what he was saying was true. When he wrote 2 Corinthians, likely less than six months later, he had to emphasize that he was not lying (2 Cor. 11:31).

In light of the whole scope and tone of 1 Corinthians, it makes perfect sense that Paul would swear by “what they boasted in—Jesus Christ” that what he was saying was true.


15:40 “There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies.” Some versions use the adjectives, “celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial” (which contrasts the earth with the planets) while some use the adjectives “heavenly bodies and earthly bodies,” which places contrast more on heaven and earth. The immediate context does have “sun, moon, and stars,” which favors “celestial” and “terrestrial,” but the chapter is all about the resurrection of the dead, which is about the difference between our earthly body and the heavenly body we will have. Also, there is no reason that angels and other spirit beings are not included in the “heavenly bodies” description, and planets and stars are in fact “heavenly bodies,” so that is the way we have gone in our translation.

15:44. “soul body…spiritual body.” The Greek phrase translated in the REV as “soul body” is sōma psuchikos (#4983 sōma σῶμα; and #5591 psuchikos ψυχικός), and the Greek phrase translated “spiritual body” is sōma pneumatikos (#4983 sōma σῶμα; and #4152 πνευματικός; in the Greek, the noun “body” comes before the adjective, while in English we put the adjective first). The adjective psuchikos comes from the noun psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced, psoo-kay’), which is usually translated as “soul,” and the adjective pneumatikos comes from the noun pneuma (#4151 πνεῦμα), which is usually translated as “spirit.”

The adjective psuchikos means “of, belonging to, somehow relating to, the ‘soul’ (psuchē),” and the adjective pneumatikos means “of, belonging to, somehow relating to, the ‘spirit’ (pneuma).” In this case, from the context and scope of Scripture we can see that the verse is saying that today we have a body that is related to the soul and “soul-powered,” while in the future we will have a body that is related to spirit, and “spirit-powered.” [For more on psuchikos, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 2:14, “natural!”].

The human body is now animated by what the Bible calls “soul,” but when believers are raised from the dead or changed at the Rapture, we will no longer be animated by soul, but will be animated by spirit. So, for example, Ezekiel 37:5-14 says that God puts ruach, “spirit,” into people, making them come alive. “Thus says the Lord
GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves… I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live.” (Ezek. 37:12-14 NRSV abridged). Unfortunately, many English versions translate the Hebrew word *ruach* in Ezekiel 37 as “breath” and not “spirit,” but some versions, such as the Douay-Rheims, NAB, Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible, and YLT, say “spirit” in these verses. A study of the whole Bible on this subject shows that God will put spirit into people’s dead bodies, which will then come to life (see commentary on John 3:3 and John 3:6).

The phrase “soul body” seems awkward, but “soul” is not easily made into an adjective in English. “Spirit” is much easier, and becomes “spiritual,” but it seems the best we can do with “soul” is “soul body.” It is tempting to use the translation, “soul powered body,” but the soul does more than just power the body. Partly because of the difficulty with “soul body,” many versions translate *sōma psuchikos* as “natural body,” but that is not really what the verse is saying. The verse is not saying that our body is “natural,” it is saying that our body is animated by “soul.” This verse is contrasting our current soul-powered body, which will die, with our future *pneumatikos* body, a spirit-powered and spirit-enabled body that will live forever. Marvin Vincent correctly states that the phrase *sōma psuchikos* (“soul body”) “signifies an organism animated by *psuche*, soul” (*Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament*). And just as our “soul body” is animated by soul, so in the future our “spiritual body” will be animated by “spirit,” and it will live forever.

It is important that we do not become confused and think that when 1 Corinthians 15:44 says a “spiritual body,” it means a non-corporeal body, like a ghost. The meaning of a *sōma pneumatikos* (“spiritual body”) is clear from the context. A “soul body” is a body animated by soul, and a “spiritual body” is a body animated by spirit, not a body that has no physical substance and is immaterial.

When we are raised from the dead or changed at the Rapture, we will have a body like Jesus Christ has now (1 Cor. 15:48, 49; Phil. 3:21). When Jesus first appeared to his followers who were inside a room with locked doors, “they were terrified and frightened, and thought they were seeing a spirit [*pneuma*]” (Luke 24:37 REV). Those disciples had never seen a resurrected body, and because Jesus came into the locked room where they were staying, they thought they were seeing some kind of ghost-like being with a non-corporeal body. Jesus quickly corrected their misconception and said, “Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me, and see, for a spirit [*pneuma*] does not have flesh and bones, as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39 REV). Even in his resurrected body Jesus has flesh and bones, and we will too. However, our new flesh and bone body will not be powered by the soul that we have today, it will be powered by, and relate to, spirit.

“**Since there is.**” We translated this as “Since there is,” because that is more the meaning of the Greek text than the conditional statement. The condition expressed by the Greek word *ei* is assumed to be true, so translating *ei* as “if” can be misleading. For more on translating the Greek word *ei*, usually “if,” as “since,” see the commentary on Ephesians 3:2, “Since.”

**15:45. “man…became a living soul.”** This is quoted from Genesis 2:7.

“soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; and attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here *psuchē* is used of the person himself. Thus, many modern versions say “living being,” or
“living person.” Adam’s body was just inanimate (“dead”) material until God breathed life into it. That is the one and only time God created life for people. God took life from Adam (his “rib” or “from his side”) and made Eve, who then had life. Since that time the life (“soul”) of Adam and Eve has been passed down to their progeny. Every person alive today has the life that God breathed into Adam.

When God breathed life into Adam, He did not breathe in something that was like a ghost that inhabited the body and could live apart from the body. He gave “life,” to every cell of Adam’s body. In fact it is the presence of what the Bible calls nephesh in the Hebrew Old Testament, and psuchē in the Greek New Testament, and we call “soul” in English, that differentiates between a something alive and something dead. A living cell has “soul,” while a dead cell does not.

The soul is sustained by the body, which provides a medium in which it can survive, and when the body can no longer function, the “soul,” the life, dies. It does not go anywhere when it dies, it just dies. “Soul” in the cells of our bodies die by the millions every day, and we never ask “Where did the life go?” We believe it just died. Confusion about “soul” only occurs when every cell dies together, in other words, when the person himself dies. At that time we ask, “Where did the soul go?” But the answer is the same no matter how many cells dies at one time—the “soul” just dies and is gone, it does not “go” anywhere. The dead person is then completely dead in every sense of the word, and is awaiting the resurrection and the Day of Judgment. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

“life-giving.” There is a lot of meaning in the phrase that Jesus is a “life-giving” spirit. The primary meaning is that God has given Christ the power to raise the dead (John 5:21; 6:39-54; 11:25). That is why the phrase “life-giving spirit” is used in this verse. The context is speaking of raising the dead (cp. 1 Cor. 15:35, 42). However, it is also true that Jesus gives us power in this life, but that is a secondary meaning in this context (Cp. 2 Cor. 4:7-10; 2 Cor. 12:9; 2 Tim. 1:7).

“spirit.” Jesus is referred to as a “spirit,” but has a flesh and bone body. See commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:44 above. After his resurrection, the New Testament sometimes refers to Jesus as “the Spirit.” Because when Jesus was raised from the dead he had a spiritually powered body, the New Testament sometimes refers to him as “the Spirit” (cp. Acts 2:4; 10:19; Rom. 8:26 and 27, 2 Cor. 3:17 and 18; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; and 22:17; see commentary on Revelation 2:7).

15:46. “soul body.” See commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:44.

15:51. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ιδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”). This is the only time idou appears in 1 Corinthians, so it brings a very important emphasis (cp. more than 60 times in Matthew). God wants us to pay serious attention to the sacred secret that involves our resurrection (or Rapture) and receiving new bodies that will be spiritual bodies like Jesus’ body.

“sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

“sleep.” The Greek verb is koinaō (#2837 κοιμάω), to fall asleep, to be asleep. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.
15:52. “last trumpet.” The key to understanding the “last trumpet” is understanding the athletic and cultural analogy it refers to. It is not the actual last trumpet in time, but the trumpet that closes the event or festival. The Age of Grace (the Church Administration) will close with the Rapture, accompanied with the trumpet of God (1 Thess. 4:16).

Some commentators try to determine the time of the Rapture by the “last trumpet,” and believe in a mid-Tribulation Rapture because they say the “last trumpet” in Revelation is the seventh trumpet of Revelation chapters 8-11 (the seventh and last of the seven is Rev. 11:15). But that is not what the “last trumpet” means. For one thing, the seventh trumpet in Revelation is chronologically not the last trumpet in the Bible (more on this below). Besides that, however, 1 Corinthians was almost certainly written in 55 or 56 AD, but the book of Revelation, which reveals many truths that were not known before, including the 7 trumpet judgments, was not likely written until sometime around 90 AD. When Paul wrote about the “last trumpet” to the Corinthians, they surely understood what he meant, something they could not have done if they needed to have the book of Revelation (or Matthew!) to be able to understand what Paul wrote. The “last trumpet” was known by the Corinthians because they knew the common custom of trumpets ending the events they attended.

There are many athletic analogies in Corinthians. This makes perfect sense when you understand the history and culture of Corinth, especially in light of the Greco-Roman athletic culture. Athletic events were a huge part of the Greco-Roman world. There were 4 “PanHellenic games” that had gone on for centuries. The most well-known were the Olympic Games, which were held in Olympia in Greece in honor of the god Zeus, and the winners received an olive wreath crown (and lots of money). The second most popular games were the Isthmian Games, which were held at Corinth in honor of Poseidon, and the winner received a pine wreath crown (and lots of money). The other two PanHellenic games were the Pythian Games, which honored Apollo and were held every 4 years at Delphi (staggered 2 years so they would not conflict with the Olympic Games), and the Nemean Games, which were held every 2 years at Nemia in honor of Zeus and Hercules. And beside these games, there were many lesser “games.” Corinth had a number of smaller games, much like schools today have “local meets,” “regional meets,” and “national meets.”

Because of the importance of athletics to the Corinthians, there are a number of athletic references in 1 and 2 Corinthians. For example, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 has many athletic terms. 1 Corinthians 9:24 has “run” (trechō, to run in a race); “race” (stadios, race-course); “prize” (brabeion, the prize for the contest). 1 Corinthians 9:25 has “is completing” (agonizomai, to strive in a contest). The word agonizomai is from agonu, the place where the games took place. 1 Corinthians 9:25 also has “exercises self-control” (egkrateuomai, to exercise self-control in training); and “crown” (stephanos, the crown or wreath received for winning the contest). 1 Corinthians 9:26 has trecho like verse 24, and also “box” (pukteuo, to box); “beat the air” (aera deron, to beat the air or shadow box). In 2 Corinthians 10:13, 15 and 16, the word “sphere” is kanon, meaning rule or standard, and was used of the measure of a leap in athletics. 1 Corinthians 7:18 mentions becoming “uncircumcised.” It was embarrassing for a Jew to participate in the Grecian games because the contestants were nude, so an operation was devised whereby the skin of the penis was cut and pulled forward so that when it healed it looked like the contestant was uncircumcised.
Closely aligned to the athletics of Greece were the Roman games, which often involved gladiators and people fighting animals. 1 Corinthians 4:9 mentions the spectacle of the arena, and the procession that it sometimes involved. 1 Corinthians 15 has a couple allusions to the Roman games. In 1 Corinthians 15:32 Paul wrote, “If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’” Paul was not actually in the arena, but the analogy to the Roman games was well understood at Corinth.

It was standard for the Roman Games to begin and end with trumpets. The Corinthians would easily understand that “the last trumpet” was the one that ended the Games. For the Church, the ending, the “last trumpet,” is the trumpet that accompanies the Rapture, which ends the Church Age. It is important for the analogy to realize that no Corinthian would think that the “last trumpet” meant there were no more trumpets and no more Games. It just meant that those particular Games were over. The next Games would begin some weeks or months later. The last trumpet of Corinthians accompanies the Rapture of the Church to heaven and ends the “Church Game” on earth, then “the Game of life” continues on with the Tribulation, which has 7 Trumpets we know of (Rev. 8:7-11:15). Then, after the Battle of Armageddon, Christ will gather the elect with a loud trumpet (Matt. 24:31). We can see from the scope of Scripture that this gathering of the elect includes both the gathering of the people who are still alive on earth and also the First Resurrection, also referred to as the Resurrection of the Righteous. [For more the Resurrection of the Righteous, see commentary on Acts 24:15].

It is noteworthy that the Age of Grace, the Age of the Christian Church, began with a sound and will end with a sound. The day the Christian Church started on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), it started as “a sound came from heaven like a strong rushing wind” (Acts 2:2). The Day of Pentecost was in June, and a typical June day in Israel is cloudless and quite calm. There was no “strong rushing wind,” there was only the sound of one, which is why all the people were amazed. If there had been a strong wind accompanied with the sound of strong wind, no one would have thought anything about it. It was only because there was the sound of the wind without the wind that it caught people’s attention.

The Church Age will end as it began, with a sound, in this case, the sound of a trumpet. The trumpet and Rapture will mark the close of the Church Age and the end of the Body of Christ on earth.


15:55. “Death” is in the vocative case, the case of direct address. This is the figure of speech Personification (Prosopopoeia) where death is set forth as a person and spoken to.

Chapter 16

16:2. “prospered.” See commentary on “go well with you” on 3 John 1:2.
16:5. “for I intend to pass through Macedonia.” The Greek text reads, “For I am passing through Macedonia.” Paul was not passing through Macedonia at the time, but was writing 1 Corinthians from Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:8). This is a case where the Greek present tense is used to indicate an intention. This is also a common idiom in English. We say, “I am going to the store,” using the present tense, when actually we are sitting at
home discussing what we will do during the day. Many versions translate the intention into the text and say, “I intend to go through Macedonia.” While this is clear, it is always good to have some understanding of the idiom of the original.


16:12. “brother Apollos.” Cp. CJB. The Greek literally reads “Apollos the brother,” with the word “brother” in the genitive case. It is a descriptive genitive, describing an attribute of Apollos, that he is a brother in the Lord. To translate this “Apollos our brother,” as many versions do, would shift the emphasis of the phrase from Apollos’ membership in the whole family of God (brother Apollos), to his relationship to Paul and company (our brother).

16:18. “give recognition.” This is the from the Greek word “to know” epignosko (#1921 ἐπιγινώσκω). The Greek adds the preposition epi as an intensifier, Paul’s command to “know” such men is rightly understood by all versions to mean “acknowledge” such men, or “give recognition” to such men. Included in the sense, but hard to translate, is the idea that the people would not only be recognized publicly, but they would be appreciated by the believers. For this translation, compare Williams’ The New Testament: a Private Translation in the Language of the People; CJB; and NJB. The Complete Jewish Bible and New Jerusalem Bible translate the word “appreciate” here, which captures the sense very well.


16:22. “is not a friend with the Lord.” The Greek word we translate “is...a friend with,” is phileō (#5368 φιλέω). It is hard to translate the Greek verb phileō in this context and keep the English as a verb. If we say, “love,” as most versions do, we lose the meaning of phileō here, and confuse it with agapē love. We could say if someone is not “friendly to” or “fond of,” but these seem too weak. Likewise, “attached to” seemed too unclear, because when a person is saved they are attached to the Lord by virtue of being a part of the Body of Christ. It seemed that using the noun, “a friend” and having “with the Lord” as an indirect object of the verb instead of the direct object that it is in the Greek was still the best way to keep the meaning in English. For a more complete understanding of phileō, see the note on John 21:15.
2 Corinthians

Chapter 1

1:10. “hope.” The Greek verb is ἔλπιζω (ἔλπιζ). To “hope” is to have a desire for, or an expectation of, good, especially when there is some confidence of fulfillment. It is used that way both in common English and in the Bible. However, the Bible often uses the word “hope” in another way—to refer to the special expectation of good that God has in store for each Christian in the future that is based on the Word and promises of God and therefore guaranteed to occur. This includes the “Rapture,” receiving a new, glorified body, and living forever on a new and wonderful earth. Today, the ordinary use of “hope” allows for the possibility that what is hoped for will not come to pass. However, when the Bible uses the word “hope” to refer to things that God has promised, the meaning of “hope” shifts from that which has a reasonable chance of coming to pass to that which will absolutely come to pass.

A biblical occurrence of “hope” as “an expectation of good” can be found in Acts 27:20. Paul was on a ship bound for Rome. A storm came up and raged for many days, such that “we gave up all hope of being saved.” Another example is in 3 John 14 where the apostle John wrote to his friend Gaius and said, “I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.” These are examples of the Bible using the word “hope” in the way it is used in everyday language, such as when someone says, “I hope the mail comes on time today.” However, there are also many times the Bible uses the word “hope” to refer to things that will absolutely come to pass, such as everlasting life and the blessings associated with it. Colossians 1:23 mentions “the hope held out in the gospel,” i.e., “the expectation of future good presented in the gospel.”

Unfortunately, in common English the word “hope” is often used as a synonym for “wish.” When a person says, “I hope it rains this week,” it is likely that there is no rain in the weather forecast, and so the statement is made without any certainty or confidence that it will, in fact, rain. It would have been more proper for the person to say, “I wish it would rain this week.”

It would help us understand the Bible if Christians used vocabulary the way God does in His Word, and use the word “hope” when there is an absolute certainty, or at least a good chance, that what is “hoped” for will occur. God, “who does not lie,” made many promises about the future everlasting life of the believer. Although we may not know when He will fulfill those promises, we can be absolutely certain that He will fulfill them. We can, and should, base our thoughts and actions on the “hope” that God promises in His Word.

1:23. “soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is ψυχή (ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is more broadly used of the individual himself while including his thoughts and emotions. Thus, while the verse could read something such as, “I call on God as a witness, on my life” (HCSB; NAB), or as “I appeal to God as my witness” (NET), using the word “soul” shows us that Paul is calling God to witness his testimony based on all who Paul is in himself and in his thoughts and emotions. All of us should strive to live such godly lives.
that our lives can be called upon as a witness for Christ. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

Chapter 2

2:1. “for my own sake.” The Greek construction makes this the reading most preferred. (Cp. Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament; The International Critical Commentary). It is easier to read, but not really to the point to say, “I made up my mind.” The Greek gives a reason, represented in the ASV as “for myself,” and in the NASB as “for my own sake.” Paul is not just saying he determined (literally: “judged”) what to do, but rather, that he determined his course of action based on what was good for him. This is, no doubt, another effort to spare the Corinthians. Meyer calls it “and ingenious, affectionate turn” “the truth of which there is no doubt.” The Corinthians were already feeling badly about their sin, and had repented (2 Cor. 7:8-10) and it would have really hurt them for Paul to say he did not visit because of the sorrow it would cause. He did not lie when he said he judged that it was for his sake he did not come, for it is never easy to reprove and correct people. But it really was for the sake of the Corinthians, as is clear from the context.

2:11. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

2:12. “in the Lord.” The Greek is en kuriō (ἐν κυρίῳ), and can either be “in the Lord” or “by the Lord.” The versions and the commentators are divided. The essence is pretty much the same. If the door was opened “by the Lord,” then the Lord gave Paul an opportunity to spread the Good News. If the door was opened “in connection with” the Lord, there was an opportunity to spread the Good News. The reading “by the Lord” is much easier to understand from the point of view of the English reader, and if the door was originally opened “in connection with” the Lord, no doubt the Lord was working to make that happen, so “by the Lord” would not be far off the mark.

This is a wonderful section because it shows how we humans have to deal with, and control, our emotions. Even though Paul was no doubt very excited about the opportunities he had to spread the Word, he was still very agitated because he could not find Titus. We humans are very complex creatures, and can have a host of different emotions and feelings all at the same time.

The preposition en can make the noun “Lord” definite, so there is no need for the article “the” in the Greek.

2:13. “in my spirit.” This is the use of “spirit” (pneuma) that refers to the mental and emotional life. [For the uses of pneuma, “spirit,” see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

2:14. “Triumph.” 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 refers to a Roman event known as the “Triumph,” which we sometimes refer to as the Triumphal Procession. The Roman Triumphal Procession was a parade honoring the victory of a Roman general and his army. In the days before photographs and mass communication, it was important to find ways to enroll the people of Rome into the events of the Empire. The Triumph brought
some of the pageantry of the conquest into the streets of Rome for everyone to see. First we will describe the Triumph, then show how it relates to the biblical text and Christian life.

When considering exactly what a Triumph was like, we must remember that the written accounts and the visual depictions on bas-reliefs, vases, cups, etc., of Roman Triumphal Processions were generally produced as political propaganda to aggrandize Rome and its power, and not as accurate historical accounts. Also, we have no complete descriptions of a Triumph. We have many descriptions and depictions of parts of them, and they can be used to build a general picture of what a whole Triumph involved. Also, there were something like 500 Triumphs that are recorded in the ancient Roman records, supposedly going all the way back to a victory of Romulus, the founder of Rome. With so many instances, obviously there were differences between them. Besides, as with most parades, there is a tendency toward greater grandeur, pomp, and expense, so some change was unavoidable. Thus, what follows is only a typical description of what a Triumph was like. In spite of their differences, however, the Triumph was a parade with both immediate and historical significance, and every Triumph was designed to connect this victory with victories that had come before, thus pointing out the stability and continuity of Rome. Therefore, there was enough continuity between them that we can speak of things “typical” to a Triumph.

A Triumph was only given when certain conditions were met in the war. Although these too changed a little over time, the basics remained the same. The war had to be fought on foreign soil. The war had to be a significant victory for Rome in which at least 5000 enemy soldiers were killed and territory was added to the state. The conquering general had to be of the rank of “dictator,” “consul,” or “praetor.” The victory had to end the war so decisively that the Roman army could come home. If these conditions were met, the Senate of Rome would vote to decide whether the commander would be given a Triumph.

Leading the Triumph were the Roman senators and magistrates, who met the parade as it entered the streets of Rome. Next trumpeters and musicians came, announcing to all the victory, and the celebration. After them came the captives, led in chains and destined for the slave market or the arena. Apparently in different Triumphs these captives were treated differently. In some they were clothed, while in others they were paraded naked down the streets (this is referred to in Col. 2:15, see commentary there). Also, sometimes they followed the spoils instead of coming before them.

After the captives came the spoils of war. Carts had “trophies,” on them, which is the technical term for a post or a post with cross-pieces on which were hung shields and armor worn by enemy soldiers. These “trophies” showed the people of Rome how well armed the enemy was. The captured treasure was displayed, including gold, silver, and other valuables. In some cases, such as when Jerusalem was captured and the Menorah from the Temple was in the Triumph, placards or signs described what the treasure was. Some of this treasure was later distributed to the returning troops as thanks for their bravery and sacrifice. Along with the treasure there were paintings and “floats” with portrayals of the cities, defenses, and fortresses of the enemy, all designed to help the people of Rome see how valiant the Roman army was.
Following the spoil, dressed in the black of mourning, came the captured foreign king, his family, extended family, and even the nurses and teachers of his children, showing the total conquest of his kingdom and social system.

After the spoils came members of the victorious army without weapons, but carrying laurel branches symbolizing victory. Unlike modern armies, in which the soldier swears allegiance to his country, Roman soldiers swore allegiance to their general. Therefore to prevent any possible coup, it was against Roman law for a general to bring his armed troops inside the city of Rome, and it was why the Emperor had his own armed troops, the Praetorian Guard, inside the city. Of the troops in the Triumph, individuals who had done great feats wore special crowns for the occasion. For example, a soldier who was first over the wall (and lived to tell about it) might have a gold crown cast to look like city walls, with crenellation on top. Later that crest would be carved in stone and be placed over the main door of his house as a permanent civil recognition. The soldiers would often be singing, and sometimes songs would be about some of the faults of the general—the thought being that he was just “one of the men” and care must be taken not to elevate him too highly. Sometimes some, or all, the troops followed the conquering general instead of going before him.

Following the troops was the conquering general. He wore dress traditionally associated with the statue of Jupiter Capitolinus and the ancient Roman monarchy, which was the purple and gold toga, a laurel crown, and red boots. He held laurel branches and perhaps a staff representing civil authority, and rode in a chariot usually drawn by 4 beautiful horses. The chariot had ceremonial status, and would be kept for years, just like in modern times revered memorial pieces are kept for years. For example, the chariot the Augustus Caesar rode in was used by Nero some 50 years later. The general was accompanied by his immediate and extended family. Smaller children might ride in the chariot with him, while older boys might ride on the horses pulling the chariot. The idea was to convey that the victory was a victory for Rome itself, and supported the whole social order of Rome and its families. The general who was honored with a Triumph was then referred to as vir triumphalis (“a man honored with Triumph”) for the rest of his life.

After the commander and the last troops came oxen (usually white), which would be sacrificed in dedication to Jupiter at the Temple of Jupiter, which was the endpoint of the procession (often the oxen were in a different order besides last). The meat from the oxen was then distributed to the people of Rome. Sometimes the meat was distributed directly to the people, while at other times the streets of Rome were filled with tables and there was a more formal public dinner with everyone invited. In each case, the point was to help everyone recognize that the victory was a victory for Rome, the Roman people, and the Roman way of life.

At some point after the feast there would be the culminating event, a public spectacle. This would usually be in the arena. Although exactly what happened varied, events that were standard included gladiator events, animal hunts (where the floor of the coliseum was decorated as much as possible to look like the area just conquered and the animals were native to that place), reenactments of battles that had occurred, and the execution of prisoners taken in the war, often in inventive ways, such as having them eaten by wild animals.

Triumphs always took the same route. In that sense, there was with each Triumph the idea that Rome was building on what had been built before. The Triumph started at
the “Field of Mars” (Campus Martius [pronounced: Mar-shus]) on the west bank of the Tiber River, and traveled a long, circuitous route through the city, passing through every Triumphal archway from previous generals, and past the temples erected in dedication to previous victories. The Triumph passed by the Forum Valarium, the Forum Romanum, and the Circus Maximus. The final destination was always the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill. All along the route, the streets were packed with excited, shouting people. Also, incense filled the air along the whole route of the Triumph because incense was burned on the altars of temples in Rome (Plutarch; Dio Cassius). The smell of this incense is mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16.

It is this “Triumph,” or Triumphal Procession, that 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 is referring to, and thankfully many modern versions read “triumphal procession,” which makes the verse much clearer (ESV, NET, NIV, NRSV). The King James Version gives us the wrong impression when it says, “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ.” This makes it sound like Christians win every battle—we always triumph. In a practical sense, we do not. There are many times in life when we lose a battle, just like the Roman army lost battles in the enemy country. Terrible things happen to us (cp. 2 Cor. 1:8; 4:8-10; 6:4-10; 11:23-28; 1 Thess. 3:4; 2 Tim. 3:12). Also, many Christians are killed or die of unnatural causes (Acts 7:60; 12:2). Although God is always working for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28 NIV), bad things often happen to good Christians. We must not try to “explain” 2 Corinthians 2:14 by somehow “recasting” the evil that happens to us as “good” and as a “triumph.” While it is always true that God will reward Christians for doing the right thing, even if it means being tortured and killed, that is not the triumph God is referring to in this verse.

Properly interpreted, 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 is speaking of the Triumphal Procession that occurs at the end of the war. Battles may be lost, but the war has been won by Jesus Christ. Although the actual fight between good and evil is not over, our eventual victory is so assured that God uses the analogy of the Triumph to demonstrate that it is just a matter of time before the victory is total and final. The analogy of the Triumph shows us that the outcome of the war is not in doubt. Jesus Christ is the conquering general of the highest rank (his name is above every name), who has soundly defeated his enemies and won a victory on foreign soil (earth; now controlled by the Adversary). Because the war is “won,” he leads his “Christian army” in a Triumph. We can march along in life, knowing that we will win by resurrection, even if we are killed in this life.

It is valuable to notice that starting in verse 14, and going through 16, God makes a shift in His use of the Triumph analogy. In the first part of verse 14 we are the conquering troops, being led in the Triumph. However, in the middle of verse 14 we become the smell of the incense that is burning on the altars of Rome. That analogy is powerful because although the same incense burned on the altars, the smell of it meant different things to different people. To the conquering army it was the sweet smell of victory and meant home, safety, and friends. To the captives in chains, it meant death in the arena (or slavery; a living death). In the same way, Christians, by our life and testimony, are the smell of “life” to other Christians, but the smell of “death” to those who do not believe.

It is important to notice that God never tells us to figure out how to “smell better.” We Christians are not to water down our witness so that we do not offend the unsaved by
our smell of death. In fact, the very next verse (2 Cor. 2:17), speaks of those who water down the Word, ostensibly to be accepted by others. Christians smell like death to unbelievers. Hopefully, some of them will recognize that the death they smell is their own, and come to Christ for salvation so they can live forever.

2:15. “on the road to salvation.” The Greek is the present passive participle of σώζω (#4982 σώζω) “to rescue; to save; to make whole.” The verb is present tense in this verse because “saved” is not just referring to our everlasting life, but is referring to the broader spectrum of salvation, which includes being rescued from troubles here on earth and being given everlasting life in new bodies when the Lord returns. Our full salvation even likely includes the rewards in the future Kingdom that we receive for our faithful service. The verb is a passive participle because God is the one who actually saves us as we have faith in Him. For more on “saved,” see the commentary on Romans 8:24 and Romans 10:9, “will be saved.” The phrase “on the road to salvation,” or “on the way to salvation” is due to the present participle, which indicates the action is ongoing, and the “road” is taken from the metaphor about the Triumph—the victors and the captives would walk down the road, some to salvation, some to destruction (cp. Ralph Martin, Word Biblical Commentary: 2 Corinthians).

“on the road to destruction.” The Greek verb is apollumi (#622 ἀπόλλυμι), which means “to cause or experience destruction” (BDAG); so “perish” or “be destroyed” are good translations here. However, whereas σῴζω (“are being saved”) is clearly a passive participle, the verb form of apollumi (“are perishing”) can either be passive voice or middle voice. We assert that from the context and scope of Scripture this should be understood as a middle voice, which means that the people are doing the action in a way that affects them. This verse is saying that while God is the one who acts to bring about our salvation both now and in the future, people bring about their own destruction by rejecting God. The phrase “on the road to destruction,” or “on the way to destruction” is due to the present participle, which indicates the action is ongoing, and the “road” is taken from the metaphor about the Triumph—the victors and the captives would walk down the road, some to salvation, some to destruction.

2:17. “adulterating.” The Greek is kapeleuo (#2585 καπηλεύω) It was used frequently of tavern-keeping [because the owners would water down the wine.] “trade in, peddle, huckster (of retail trade)…Because of the tricks of small tradesmen the word almost comes to mean adulterate (so Vulg., Syr., Goth.).” (BDAG). We felt “adulterate” was the best translation here. The emphasis is not on “peddling,” as if evangelism was wrong. The point is that the street hucksters “watered down” what they sold to make a profit, so the product was adulterated, which is exactly what Paul says to the Corinthians he did not do. We feel that the Vulgate, Syriac, and Gothic translations got that point.

Chapter 3

3:1. “recommend.” The Greek word is sunistemi (#4921 συνίστημι). It has a number of different meanings but in this context it means to recommend (cp. note on Rom. 16:1, Col. 1:17).

3:4. “in God through Christ.” Literally, the Greek reads, “we have such confidence through Christ towards God,” but this is difficult to read in English. We would not say, “I
have confidence towards God,” rather, we would place our confidence in God. An alternate translation might read, “we have such confidence as this directed to God through Christ.”

3:7. “the glory of his face.” 2 Corinthians 3:7 is referring to the Old Testament record in which Moses goes up onto Mount Sinai for the seventh time and speaks with God while he is there, and when he comes down the mountain his face is radiant (Exod. 34:29-35).

All seven times that Moses ascended and descended Mount Sinai are in Exodus. First time: 19:3 up; 19:7 down. Second time: 19:8 up; 19:14 down. Third time: 19:20 up; 19:25 down. Fourth time: 20:21 up; 24:3 down. Between the fourth and fifth time up Moses went part way up with the elders of Israel: 24:9. Fifth time: 24:15 up (he was there 40 days and 40 nights (24:18) and got the Ten Commandments on stone (32:15) during this fifth trip; 32:15 down. Sixth time: 32:31 up; 32:35 he is commanded to go down. Seventh time: 34:4 up; 34:29 down.

This seventh time down the Mount, Moses was carrying the second set of the Ten Commandments. The first set of stone tablets God Himself carved out of stone and wrote on (Exod. 31:18; 32:15, 16). After Moses broke them, God told Moses to chisel out two new tablets (no easy task with bronze tools) and He would write on them (Exod. 34:1, 29).

Exodus 34:29 tells us that Moses’ face was radiant. The Hebrew text says that Moses’ face shined (the Hebrew word is qaran (Strong’s #7160) and means “to shine.”) Moses’ face was reflecting the brilliant light of God, and it was shining so brightly that the Israelites, including Aaron the High Priest, were afraid of him (Exod. 34:30), and he had to cover his face with a veil (Exod. 34:33, 35). What Exodus does not specifically say, but just assumes, and Corinthians tells us explicitly, is that the radiance of Moses’ face eventually went away.

3:11. “passing glory, much more that which remains has permanent glory.” The Greek phrasing here is very interesting. Paul uses two participles (passing away, remaining) and two prepositions (through, in) but no verbs. Literally, it would read, “the one fading away, through glory; the one remaining, in glory.” This effectively paints a picture of the old covenant temporarily passing through glory, fading away, while the new covenant remains in glory. The preposition dia (#1223 δία), meaning “through,” creates a feeling of the law momentarily journeying across the realm of glory, never meaning to permanently reside there—the Law is portrayed not as an end in-of-itself, but as a progression on the journey to bring us to Christ:

**Galatians 3:23-25 (ESV)**

Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian...

The new covenant, on the other hand, is said to be the one remaining en (#1722 ἐν) glory. It is permanent, taking up its residence in glory land and is there to stay.

3:17. “the Lord is the Spirit.” In the New Testament, Jesus is sometimes called “the Spirit” because of the new spirit-powered body he got after the resurrection. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

3:18. “reflecting as in a mirror.” The verb translated as “reflecting” is katoptrizomai (#2734 κατοπτρίζομαι), which can mean “to behold” one’s self in a mirror, as many
versions translate it (e.g. ESV; NASB; KJV; ASV; NAB), or to reflect one’s image, to mirror one’s self, as represented in NRSV; NIV; HCSB; NET; and NJB. The translators are evenly divided on the issue; however, it most likely means “reflecting” here. This can be seen from the context which speaks of Moses, whose face shone with glory and who covered his face with a veil (v. 13). Verse 18 is drawing a parallel between Christians and Moses. When he came down Mount Sinai, Moses was not beholding glory in a mirror but was reflecting the glory of God out to the Israelites. Furthermore, it is not reflecting as in a mirror but reflecting as a mirror; our job as Christians is to reflect the glory of God like a mirror reflects the beams of the sun. Unlike Moses, who covered his face, we openly reflect the glory of the Lord and become transformed into this glory. This experience of transformation goes beyond what happened to Moses, whose mere external appearance was affected only temporarily.

“The Lord who is the Spirit.” Cp. Williams; ESV; NIV; HCSB; NET; NAB; NJB. The Greek has the two genitive nouns, “Lord” and “Spirit,” in apposition, in other words, they are describing the same reality. The Lord and the Spirit are the same. Jesus Christ is sometimes called “the Spirit” in the New Testament. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

Chapter 4

4:2. “the hidden, shameful things.” The Greek reads “the hidden things of shame,” which is the figure of speech antemereia, “exchange of cases.” The adjective “shameful” is put in the nominative as the object of a genitive, to give it more force. However, that construction is somewhat confusing when translated into English.

“adulterating.” The Greek word is dolōō (δολοῦ;), and it meant to ensnare, to change something so that it would be false, thus distort, falsify, adulterate. Doloō was used of the innkeepers who would overly water down the wine so they could make more profit, a practice that was well known in Corinth. Corinth had many inns and restaurants because it was one of the largest trading emporiums in the ancient world, host of the Isthmian Games (one of the PanHellenic Games of the Ancient world, along with the Olympic, Pythian, and Nemean Games; the Isthmian Games were held every two years, the year before and the year after the Olympic Games), and a well-known sexual hot spot (a common Latin word for a prostitute was a “Corinthian Girl”). The whole first part of verse 2 fits the behavior of many innkeepers: they were involved in hidden, shameful activities of all sorts, they lived crafty, deceitful lives, and they adulterated the wine they served to make more money for themselves. In comparison to those kinds of people, Paul writes that he does not live like that, and does not adulterate the Word of God, i.e., water it down to where it is not the Word but is something false. [For more on inns and innkeepers, see commentary on 1 Peter 4:9].

4:4. “god of this age.” This phrase emphasizes the Slanderer’s rulership over this age and the worship associated with it. It is used only one time (2 Cor. 4:4), and frankly, the general Christian teaching that “God is in control,” and “The Devil can only do what God allows him to do,” has obscured the powerful meaning of this phrase.

The Bible does not use the word “god,” lightly or haphazardly. In Greek it is theos, the same word that is used for our God and Father. Since in Greek, the word theos is not capitalized when referring to our God (unlike what we do in English), if we made
our English words like the Greek words, we would say either “god and Father” and “god of this age,” or “God and Father” and “God of this age.” The point is that, by using the word “God” for the Devil, our God is giving us a glimpse into the tremendous power and control he exercises over the world—a control that is obvious when we stop and think about it. Famines, floods, hurricanes, tsunamis, tornadoes, epidemics, hatred and wars, envy and murder—these are all engineered by the “God of this age.” And that is just one part of his power. From behind the scenes he manipulates people to do his will, and is so powerful that it is safe to say that almost no one has a truly care-free life. Evil, hatred, jealousy, envy, and the use and abuse of people are everywhere, all promoted by the “god of this age.”

Another thing the phrase “god of this age” brings into focus is his insatiable desire for worship. The Slanderer has so manipulated the things of this life that he directly and indirectly gets worship from many sources. Some people directly worship him as Satan or as another “ungodly god” that he has invented and elevated to the top of a pantheon of lesser gods, such as Zeus, Odin, or Ra. Sometimes he is worshipped as an idol. Sometimes he is indirectly worshipped by people who are awed by, and then dedicated to, power, fame, wealth, or just the glitz and glitter of the world.

The word “age” (sometimes mistranslated as “world”) is aion. While it is true that aion refers to an age, a period of time, the meaning is actually much deeper. It refers to the spiritual and moral climate of a time, the characteristics that mark the age. In restaurant terms, it means “atmosphere.” The Devil is the god in control of the “atmosphere” of our world, its spiritual and moral climate and its physical activities (see commentary on Eph. 2:2; also W. E. Vine, Lexicon; R. Trench, Synonyms). Because aion does not just refer to time, but to the character or atmosphere of the time period, “world” is not a bad translation of aion in some contexts. Nevertheless, the word aion does communicate that the rulership of the Slanderer is limited to this “age,” and not the next, whereas the “world” will continue. Another reason for translating aion as “age,” and not “world” in this verse is that John 12:31 calls the Slanderer the “ruler of this world,” and in that verse, “world” is the Greek word kosmos, which does mean “world.”

It is unfortunate that most people are not aware of the “spiritual atmosphere” that surrounds them. They think “this is just the way life is.” A major goal of the Devil is to make the “atmosphere” we are immersed in ungodly, so that people are led into ungodliness, and live in it without being aware of it or have any desire to change it. A good example is a person who watches sit-coms on TV daily and thinks that cutting people down with words and being sarcastic towards others is simply the way to communicate. Only when we are aware that the Devil creates the atmosphere that we live in do we become aware of it, not live according to it, and try to change it. [For more on the age we live in, see commentary on Rom. 12:2]. For other names of the Slanderer (Devil) and what they mean, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

“and shining forth.” The Greek text in this verse contains the figure of speech amphibologia, or double meaning (cp. Bullinger, Figures of Speech). The double meaning arises from the phrase mē augasai ton phōtismon, which can be understood to mean, “lest [they] see the light” or “lest the light shine.” Most modern versions go with the first translation, as for example the NIV, “so that they cannot see the light.” The ASV, KJV, and Darby’s translation, on the other hand, understand the phrase in the second sense. In reality, both are true. The devil desires to keep unbelievers from seeing the
light, and to keep them from shining this light forth, once they are illuminated by the face of Christ.


“on the face of Jesus Christ.” When Moses saw the glory of God, that glory was reflected on his face and was so bright it frightened the people of Israel (see commentary, 2 Cor. 3:7). Now we have the opportunity to see and reflect the glory of God, which is not on the face of Moses, but the face of Jesus Christ. We must look at Jesus to reflect the glory of God.

4:7. “this treasure.” The treasure is the “knowledge” of the glory of God (verse 6).

4:10. “carrying around in our body the putting to death of Jesus.” As Lenski points out, “the putting to death of Jesus” makes Jesus the object of the phrase instead of the subject, but both are grammatically acceptable, and both make sense, it just seems to be more in line with the subject matter being discussed to make the putting to death the subject and Jesus the object of the phrase.

In order to understand this verse we must understand that Christ is still suffering. His death atoned for sin once and for all, but he is alive, and he is still suffering. Sometimes this is due to the purposeful actions of his enemies (“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Acts 9:4), and sometimes through ignorance, laziness, weakness, or other sins and faults by unbelievers and believers alike that hurt him, usually through hurting his Body. This suffering of ours that is also the suffering of Jesus is a theme in 2 Corinthians, and first appears in 1:5 where the sufferings of Jesus overflow into our lives, and are our sufferings.

“the life also of Jesus.” Just as we cannot understand the verse if we do not understand how we carry the putting to death of Jesus, we cannot understand it if we do not grasp what the life that he gives is (and makes publicly known through us). The “also” can make the verse somewhat difficult to understand, but it is necessary. If we were to conflate the verse, we could say, “always carrying around in our body the putting to death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, as well the death we are experiencing, can be made visible in our body.” In other words, Christians who are actively standing for the Word of God are always under pressure, and that is visible to others around us, but we also have to show that the life of Jesus is alive in us, giving us hope, a reason to live, and more. Too many times unbelievers see our problems and not our joy, or we try to hide the problems and pretend we are always “blessed.” The truth is that we are always bearing the suffering of Jesus, and should also be drawing life and joy from him, and people around us need to see both sides of our life.

It is not referring to the post-resurrection physical life of Jesus, although we certainly make known that Jesus is alive. The emphasis of this verse is that we reveal to others the “life,” the salvation and everlasting life (along with “real life,” a real sense of meaning and “being alive”) to others. This allows us to understand verse 12, in which death “keeps working” in the apostles, but life “keeps working” (the verb is understood in the sentence) in the Corinthians. As the ones being ministered to by Paul and his companions, the Corinthians kept getting to see and experience the life that flowed from Jesus via the sacrificial lives of the apostles. There would be a turn around, of course. As the Corinthians matured in the faith and ministered to others, they would bear the burden.
and the dying of Jesus, while others would see and experience the “life” of Jesus that they provided.


4:14. “to be with Jesus.” We have added “to be” in italics to best capture the meaning of the word “with,” and to avoid a misunderstanding about the phrase “raise us with Jesus.” The word “with” is sun (#4862 σῶν), and means “in association with,” “in accompaniment with.” We will be raised to be with Jesus, to be in his company. The “with” here does not mean a temporal with, as in, “we were raised with Jesus, when he was raised.” The verb is future tense, we “will be” raised, hence, it is speaking of a future rising. As Kistemaker has written, “not that Jesus was raised again, but that Jesus as the firstfruits of all his people guarantees their resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20, 51, 53). Jesus will secure the glorious state of all believers and be with them in God’s presence (11:2; Eph. 5:27; Col. 1:22; Jude 24).”

Chapter 5

5:1. “here on earth.” The Greek is epigeios (#1919 ἐπίγειος), and means existing upon the earth, earthly, terrestrial. It is an expression of locality, not of character, as if “earthly” were contrasted to “godly,” or some such. Our house, our tent, is here on earth.

“our tent.” The Greek is the genitive of apposition. “The house of our tent,” where the house and the tent are the same thing. Our earthly body is called a “tent” because it is so temporary in nature.

5:2. “continually groan.” The verb “groan” is in the present active. We groan and groan.

5:5. “prepared.” The Greek is to katergazomai (#2716 κατεργάζομαι), and one of the meanings is to cause to be well prepared, prepare someone (BDAG). The Christian is well prepared for receiving a new, everlasting body.

“God.” The position of “God” in the sentence in Greek makes it emphatic. Our future clothing has nothing to do with us. We are prepared by God; we will be clothed by God. The crowning experience of the believer, a new body, is all of God; all we did was to accept the invitation.

5:6. “confident.” The Greek is tharrheô (#2292 θάρρηω), and in this context it refers to “confidence.” It is important to notice that Paul has repeated “confidence” twice in the sentence, which starts in verse six and ends in verse eight. When it comes to what happens when we die, we must have confidence in what God says, because we cannot find out on our own. Paul is especially confident because he rightly points out that God has given us the gift of holy spirit as a guarantee of our wonderful future life. The gift of holy spirit is born inside us (1 Pet. 1:23), and sealed inside (Eph. 1:13), and can be outwardly manifested, proving that we do indeed have it (see commentary on 1 Cor. 12:7ff; 1 Cor. 14:5).

5:7. “trust.” The Greek is pistis (#4102 πίστις), a noun. In both ancient secular Greek and in the Bible, pistis means “trust, confidence, assurance.” We like to use “trust.” When the people of the first century got the letters of Paul, they did not say, “What is pistis?”, as if Paul had invented a new word. Pistis was in common use in the Greek language, and had been for centuries. It is in the writings of the Greeks, including
Aristotle, Plato, Herodotus, etc. The first definition of *pistis* in the *Liddell and Scott Greek Lexicon* is “trust in others.”

When the Greek New Testament was translated into Latin, *fides* was the natural choice as a translation of *pistis*, because *fides* means “trust, confidence, reliance, belief.” So where Greek Bibles have *pistis*, Latin Bibles have *fides*. As the English language developed, our English word “faith” came from the Latin word *fides*. Despite the fact that a lot of Christians are confused about “faith,” there is nothing mysterious about *pistis*, *fides*, or “faith.” We know what trust is. *Merriam-Webster* defines it as “assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something.”

A lot of the reason there is confusion about “faith,” is the definition of faith changed in the Middle Ages. The ancient and biblical definition of *pistis* differs from the modern definition of “faith.” If both *pistis* and *fides* mean “trust,” how did “faith” come to be defined in our modern culture as “firm belief in something for which there is no proof” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th edition)? The actual historical process is long and tedious, but the concept is simple. The Church asked people to trust doctrines that were neither logical nor clearly backed up by Scripture. For example, one such doctrine is “transubstantiation,” the doctrine that the “host” (bread) and wine that are used in Roman Catholic Mass become the body and blood of Christ is not logical, nor is it backed up with solid Scriptural exegesis. Priests know this, and so they ask people to “Take it by faith,” meaning, “Believe this even though there is no proof.” That happened with enough doctrines that over time, “belief in something for which there is no proof” became the accepted definition of “faith.” This is especially harmful because people then import that made-up definition of “faith” back into the Bible, although that is not what “faith” means when used in the Bible.

There is nothing wrong with “take it by faith (trust)” if there is actually something (such as a promise) to trust. When Jesus told the blind man that if he washed in the Pool of Siloam he would be healed, the blind man had “faith” in Jesus, that is, he trusted Jesus and his promise, so he washed and was given sight by a miracle. However, if there is nothing to trust in and nothing “trustworthy” to believe, then asking people to “take it by faith” is wrong, and contributes to the misunderstanding of God and the Bible. Biblical faith is neither magic, unreasonable, nor illogical. It is simply trust.

The way God designed the human mind, we only trust things when there is a reason to trust them. We cannot “just trust” something that does not make sense. For example, if a stranger comes to our house, we cannot, “just trust” him. There may be something about him that gives us some confidence so we decide to take a risk and let him in, but we do not “trust” him yet. True trust develops over time. Jesus never asked anyone to trust he was the Messiah without proof. He healed the sick, raised the dead, did miracles, and he asked people to believe the miracles that he did (John 10:38). Similarly, God does not ask us to believe Him without proof. He has left many evidences that He exists and that His Word is true. Thus when God asks us to have faith, He is not asking us to believe something without proof. God proves Himself to us, and because of that we trust Him, that is, we have faith. If we are going to please God, we have to trust Him, which means trusting what He says (cp. Heb. 11:6). It seems D. Elton Trueblood said it well when he said, “Faith is not belief without proof, but trust without reservation.”

When it comes to spiritual realities, such as what happens when a person dies, the only truly reliable source is God and His Word. The wise Christian learns to live his life
5:8. “For.” When the whole Bible is read as a document, it is clear that when a person dies, he is dead in every sense of the word, with no conscious awareness, and is awaiting the resurrection. This is contrary to the teaching of traditional Christianity, which is that when a person dies, his soul goes to heaven or hell. Through the centuries, Christians have focused on a few verses of Scripture to support their claim that dead Christians are alive in heaven, and 2 Corinthians 5:8 is one of those verses. Many Christians read 2 Corinthians 5:8 and think it is saying that when a Christian dies he goes immediately to heaven to be with the Lord. However, that is not what the verse is saying. The first thing we must do to understand the verse is to read it carefully. The Apostle Paul said, “We would rather be away from the body and home with the Lord.”

At what point is a Christian home with the Lord? A careful reading of the Scripture shows that Christians are at home with the Lord sometime in the future when the Lord comes and gets us. Jesus Christ will come down from heaven, shout, and the trumpet will blow. At that time dead Christians will come out of the ground in new bodies, and join the Lord in the air. Also, the Christians who are still alive on earth will immediately change, get a brand new everlasting body, and meet the Lord in the air (1 Cor. 15:51-53; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17). So what is the Apostle Paul saying in 2 Corinthians 5:8? The Apostle Paul is saying, “Look, I am living a tough life, and I would rather be home with the Lord.” A lot of Christians today feel the same way, and they will be at home with the Lord at the Rapture, when he comes for us.

To fully understand the verse and realize it is not saying we are at home with the Lord the moment of our death, it is important to read it in its context. In 5:1, Paul refers to the human body as a “tent,” because it is temporary. Also in verse one, Paul says that if our earthly home, our tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God that is everlasting. We can tell from the context that the new “building” we have is our new body. Paul is not speaking of being a disembodied spirit. He is speaking of getting a new dwelling—his new body.

When we study the whole Bible on the subject of the dead, we learn that no one gets a new body until the Rapture or the resurrections. God promises that each Christian will have a new body (Phil. 3:21), but we do not get it until the Lord comes for us and we are raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15:42-44). People die as mortals, but are raised as immortals. They die weak, but get up powerful. This is very clear in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 (REV): “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a soul body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a soul body, there is also a spiritual body.” Paul, like the rest of us, wants to have a new spiritual body, so he wrote: “For in this tent [the body] we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling” (2 Cor. 5:2).

One of the great keys to properly understanding this whole section of Scripture is verse 3: “because indeed, after we are clothed, we will not be found naked.” The understanding of what Paul means by “naked” is important to the understanding this whole section of Scripture. It is clear we are not “naked” while we are alive. 2
Corinthians 5:1 said we living people have a “house,” a “tent,” but it is not the one we long for, which is our house from heaven. Then verse two said, while we are “in this [house; our body], we continually groan.” Then verse three points out that when we are clothed with our house from heaven, we will not be found naked. But we are not naked now; we are in an earthly house. So if we are not naked now, and we are not naked when we get a house from heaven, when are we naked? We are “naked” when we die, because that is when we do not have a body. Then verse four makes it clear that we should not want to die. Paul says, “not that we want to be unclothed.” As difficult as this life is, we do not want to be “unclothed,” that is “naked,” or dead. Instead, what we want is the last part of verse four, that “what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.” Our mortality is swallowed up by life when the Lord returns, we get everlasting bodies, and we are finally at home with the Lord.

We might well ask, “How can we know that God will raise us from the dead and give us new, everlasting bodies?” The answer is that God guarantees it. Verse five says: “Now the One who prepared us for this very thing is God, who gave us the spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” God prepared us for everlasting life, and even gave us a guarantee that we would obtain it. Verses six and seven then highlight the confidence we have in God, and that we have to live by trusting Him and not by what we see.

Verse eight starts by reiterating the confidence we have in God, and finishes with a kind of restatement of what was already said in verse two: that we deeply desire to be clothed with our habitation from heaven. As we have seen, this will happen when the Lord comes and gets us.

“we are of good courage.” This is the second time in this long sentence (that started in verse six), that Paul has said he was confident that he would receive a new, everlasting body and mortality would be swallowed up by life. Paul has the right attitude about the Word of God. We need to be confident in what God says in His Word, and not be doubters. In spite of his confidence in the future, Paul would like the Rapture now, a point he makes clear by saying he preferred to be away from his body and home with the Lord (see commentary on confident; 5:6).

“prefer.” The Greek is euđokeō (#2106 εὐδοκέω), and it means to consider something as good and therefore worthy of choice. The meaning includes “want, decide, choose” depending on the context (BDAG; EDNT). Given his choice of the three states of being, alive in this earthly body, dead, or being with the Lord, Paul would prefer to leave his earthly body and be at home with the Lord in his new body, which he will get when the Lord returns.

“instead.” The Greek is mallon (#3123 μᾶλλον), which in this context marks the object of greater preference. Thus “rather” or “instead” (cp. NJB). Paul is “confident” in the promises of God about his future, but he would prefer instead to actually be in his new everlasting body.

“to be away from this home.” The Greek is ekđemēō (#1553 ἐκδημέω), and it refers to movement from one geographical area to another: to leave one’s home or place of residence and go to another. It is a very appropriate word for the movement that Christians will see at the Rapture from their old body (or the grave) to the new place of everlasting residence.
“to be at home.” The Greek is endêmeō (#1736 ἐνδημέω), and it refers to being or staying at home, being among one’s own people, to live in one’s own country. It implies having a fixed place to live, which will certainly be the case when we get our new everlasting bodies. We will “be at home” with the Lord.

5:9. “whether at home or away from home, to be pleasing to him.” At first reading this verse can be confusing. We know we can do things that displease God in this life. But why would the verse say that we make it our aim to be pleasing to Him when we are “away from home,” which the context makes clear is when we are in our new bodies and home with the Lord? The answer is in verse ten, that the reference to being away from “home” (i.e., away from our earthly body) is referring to the time immediately after the Rapture when we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and are judged for what we have done in our body.

This verse is indeed very important instruction for Christians, because we want to live in a way that pleases the Lord now, and we want to live in such a way that the Lord will be pleased with us on the Day of Judgment. The Bible makes it clear that each person will be judged for the things he has done while living life on earth, and some people will be rewarded and some punished (see commentary on verse ten).

5:10. “must.” The Greek word is dei (#1163 δεῖ), and refers to what is necessary. “Must” is a good translation. We cannot avoid or decline the Judgment. God created us for His purpose, and each person has a moral obligation to serve the Creator.

“be exposed.” The Greek word is phaneroō (#5319 φανερῶ), to be made manifest, to be revealed, to be exposed. Furthermore, it is in the passive voice, so it is not something that we do, but something that is done to us. “To be made manifest means not just to appear, but to be laid bare, stripped of every outward façade of respectability, and openly revealed in the full and true reality of one’s character. All our hypocrisies and concealments, all our secret, intimate sins of thought and deed, will be open to the scrutiny of Christ….” (Philip Hughes, *The International Commentary on the New Testament; The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. P. 180).

“judgment seat of Christ.” Jesus Christ will do the actual judging, but God is the authority behind the judgment. For an explanation of why the judgment seat is sometimes referred to as the judgment seat of Christ, and at other times the judgment seat of God, see commentary on Romans 14:10.

The Greek word translated “judgment seat” is bēma (#968 βῆμα). There are some Christian groups that teach that a bēma is a place where only rewards are given out. This is incorrect. The bēma of Christ will be a “judgment seat” in the common sense of the word. Vine’s Greek Lexicon is very helpful in understanding bēma: “Primarily, a step, a pace (akin to bainō, to go), as in Acts 7:5, translated ‘to set (his foot) on.[it]’ was used to denote a raised place or platform, reached by steps...[and] from the platform, orations were made. The word became used for a tribune, two of which were provided in the law courts of Greece, one for the accuser and one for the defendant; [then] it was applied to the tribunal of a Roman magistrate or ruler” (Vine, *The Expanded Vine’s Expository Dictionary*).

The uses of bēma in the New Testament make its meaning clear: it is used as a place for the foot (Acts 7:5), it is used as a place from which to speak to people (Acts 12:21) and it is used as a judgment seat (Matt. 27:19; John 19:13; Acts 18:12,16,17; 25:6,10,17; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10). The fact that Jesus Christ was sentenced to death
from a ἐμά, and that the Jews brought Paul to Gallio’s ἐμά for trial (Acts 18:12, 16, 17) shows that it was not just a place for oration and rewards.

“by means of.” This is very important. The body is shown to be the vehicle for the actions of the person’s will. The Greek word is not en (in) but δια (through, by means of). It is not just what a person does “in” the body, but what is done through the body that will be openly exposed. This would include allowing demon spirits entrance to our bodies and working evil through us. We need to be in control of ourselves, and think and live godly lives.

“good or worthless.” The traditional and orthodox belief that when a saved person dies he goes right to heaven and lives there forever has obscured the clear meaning of this verse and others like it. It has also obscured a major reason God gives in His Word that we should be obedient to Him. To clearly understand what will happen to a person in the future, it is essential we understand the difference between salvation and rewards.

“Salvation” refers to being saved; i.e., having everlasting life. “Rewards” refers to being given rewards for the way we have lived in this life.

When it comes to salvation, either a person is saved or is not saved. On the Day of Judgment a person who is not saved will be thrown into the Lake of Fire and burned up (see commentary on Rev. 20:10). In contrast, a person who is saved will get to live forever in the Kingdom. But not everyone who gets to live forever has the same rewards in the Kingdom. Our rewards differ, depending on how we live this life.

The Bible does not teach that people who are saved will be in heaven forever. What it teaches is that Jesus Christ will come down from heaven to the earth, fight and win the Battle of Armageddon, and set up his kingdom on earth, which will fill the whole earth (see Appendix 3: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”; cp. Dan. 2:35, 44; Rev. 19:11-21). Jesus will set up his palace in the newly rebuilt Jerusalem, and for 1,000 years reign over all the earth with a “rod of iron” (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15; 20:4, 5 KJV). Many scholars refer to this 1,000 year kingdom as the “Millennial Kingdom.” After the 1,000 years are over there will be a great war (Rev. 20:7-10). Then there will be the second resurrection (Rev. 20:11-13), and after that the Eternal City will come from heaven to earth, and the saved will live forever in that city (Rev. 21:1-4).

When Christ sets up his Millennial Kingdom on earth and rules from Jerusalem, it will be a “kingdom” in the true sense of the word, with every kind of job that is done in any kingdom. If we ask the question, “What will people do in heaven forever?” the Bible does not have an answer. The reason for that is simple: people will not be in heaven forever. If, on the other hand, we ask, “What does the Bible say people will do on earth in the kingdom of Christ?” then we get lots of clear answers. For one thing, there will be people assigned to rule and administer with Christ (Isa. 1:26, 32:1; Jer. 3:15, 23:4; Ezek. 44:24; Matt. 19:28; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26). The Apostles understood this, and James and John boldly asked Jesus if one of them could sit on his right side, and one on his left, in his kingdom. They were asking to be Jesus’ second and third in command, a request that made the other apostles angry, no doubt at the possibility of them getting a lesser position in the Kingdom. Jesus told them that the positions of authority in his kingdom would be given by God (Mark 10:35-41).

The Bible specifically mentions many jobs in Christ’s kingdom on earth, some having more honor, some having less. These include:

- builders (Isa. 54:12, 60:10, 61:4; Jer. 30:18; Ezek. 36:10, 33; Amos 9:14).
• farmers (Isa. 30:23 and 24, 32:20, 61:5, 62:9; Ezek. 36:9 and 34, 48:19; Amos 9:13).
• herdsmen (Isa. 30:23 and 24, 60:6 and 7, 61:5; Jer. 31:12).
• vinedressers and vintners (Isa. 25:6, 62:8; Jer. 31:5; Amos 9:13).
• metalworkers (Isa. 2:4, 60:17; Mic. 4:3).
• fishermen (Ezek. 47:10).
• landscapers (Isa. 60:13).
• servants (Isa. 14:2).
• cleanup duties and gravediggers (Isa. 9:5; Ezek. 39:14 and 15) (There will be death in the Millennial Kingdom because “natural people” will live there, people who survived the Tribulation and Armageddon and whom Christ allowed into the Kingdom; Matt. 25:31-46; Isa. 65:20. After the 1,000 year Millennial Kingdom comes the Everlasting Kingdom, which includes the New Jerusalem that comes down from heaven (Rev. 21:2ff). There will be no death in the Everlasting Kingdom).

The Bible does not name every job in the future kingdom of Christ. Enough are named to show us that the kingdom will be similar in diversity and needs to earthly kingdoms and nations of today. When we understand that our future life will be in Christ’s kingdom on earth, we get a much clearer picture of how we can be rewarded or punished in the future. We are finally in a position to understand how a person can “receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or worthless.”

If a person is “saved,” he will get to live forever in the Kingdom. But what job will he do? The “job” we do in the Kingdom is a part of our reward. A person who had faith in Christ and got saved, but did not obey Christ or take his Christianity seriously, is still saved, but may have little or no rewards in the Kingdom. In contrast, a person who got saved and lived in obedience to Christ throughout his life will be greatly rewarded.

That a Christian can end up with few or no rewards in the Kingdom is not commonly taught in Christendom today, so the information may seem unbelievable or be shocking. Nevertheless, it is what the Word of God says over and over in verse after verse. We need to be thankful that God is loving and just, and has spoken of these things so that we can make informed choices about our day-to-day behavior now, before the Day of Judgment, because then it will be too late to change. We should also notice that when God does speak of people losing rewards, He never threatens. He gives factual information so people can make informed choices. He honors our free will and makes factual statements so people can choose. God is just, and it would not be just or right for God to “surprise” people by waiting until the Judgment to inform them that His judgment is based on their actions.

The Bible repeatedly declares that people will eventually get what they deserve.

• Jeremiah 17:10: “I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve” (there are many other verses that say this same thing: Job 34:11, Psalms 62:12, Proverbs 24:12, Jeremiah 32:19, Ezekiel 33:20, Matthew 16:27, and Romans 2:6).
• Matthew 10:41, 42: “Whoever receives a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man will receive a righteous man’s reward. And whoever gives one of
these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, truly I say to you, he will not ever lose his reward.”

- **Matthew 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 he has done.

- **Luke 12:47,48 (abridged):** “That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows.”

- **1 Corinthians 3:10–15 (abridged):** “I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds...the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”

- **2 Corinthians 5:10:** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

- **Colossians 3:23–25 (abridged):** Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.

- **1 Thessalonians 4:6:** and that in this matter [of sinning sexually] no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you.

- **2 Timothy 2:11-13 (abridged):** “For if we died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us. If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he is not able to deny himself.”

- **2 John 1:8:** “Watch yourselves, so that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may receive a full reward.”

It is sometimes taught that verses that mention punishment or wrath are referring to God’s punishment now, not in the future. However, verses like Matthew 16:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10, Colossians 3:23, and 1 John 2:28, make it clear that rewards and punishments are handed out at the Judgment. The Kingdom on earth is still future, and the rewards and punishments associated with the Kingdom are future also. Of course God is “pruning” people today, but that is totally different from the rewards or punishment spoken of in Scripture that people will receive on the Day of Judgment.

It is also sometimes taught that Christians can get rewarded for what they do, but they are saved and will never be punished. However, verses such as 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10, Colossians 3:23, 1 Thessalonians 4:6, 1 John 2:28, and 2 John 1:8, are written to Christians, not to the unsaved. Sometimes verses such as these speak of “losing” rewards (cp. 2 John 1:8), or having one’s works burned up (1 Cor. 3:15), and that in and of itself would be a form of punishment, but 1 Thessalonians 4:6 actually uses the word “punish.”

Christians who have been selfish and disobedient to God will experience shame for their selfishness when they stand at the Judgment Seat and face the Christ they ignored or denied throughout life.
• **Luke 9:26**: If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

• **1 John 2:28**: And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

Scripture is silent on how long the feeling of shame will last, and surely there will be joy and blessings on the future earth. However, there are more verses that mention shame than the two quoted here, so some degree of shame will be very real for people who have lived selfish lives and not sought to obey God. The Bible is telling us this so we will make the effort to live our lives in a way that is a blessing to God and for which He will reward us. These scriptures, and others like them, can be very sobering, even disheartening, to people who are recognizing God’s justice for the first time. This recognition may also bring with it a genuine sense of remorse for ungodly behavior. That is an important part of repentance and becoming obedient to God’s Word.

It will be a great tragedy on Judgment Day for some of the people who are saved to realize that their selfishness and failure to obey God has resulted in their not being rewarded in the Kingdom—especially since they will be with so many people who have dedicated their lives to Christ and will have great rewards in the Kingdom. The Book of Ezekiel contains a quite graphic portrayal of this kind of loss, and speaks of the difference between the Levites and priests who were faithful to God and those who were not.

**Ezekiel 44:10–16 (abridged)**: 10 “The Levites who went far from me...and who wandered from me after their idols must bear the consequences of their sin. 11 They may serve in my sanctuary, having charge of the gates of the temple and serving in it; they may slaughter the burnt offerings and sacrifices for the people and stand before the people and serve them. 12 But because they served them in the presence of their idols and made the house of Israel fall into sin, therefore...they must bear the consequences of their sin. 13 They are not to come near to serve me as priests...they must bear the shame of their detestable practices. 14 Yet I will put them in charge of the duties of the temple and all the work that is to be done in it. 15 “But the priests...who faithfully carried out the duties of my sanctuary...are to come near to minister before me; they are to stand before me to offer sacrifices of fat and blood... 16 They alone are to enter my sanctuary; they alone are to come near my table to minister before me and perform my service.

Ezekiel. 44:10-16 portrays two categories of Levites and priests: those who were faithful to God in their first life; and those who were not faithful to God but were “carnal,” even drifting into idolatry. Jesus Christ is not interested in ministering together with Levites and priests who were idolaters in their first life and not dedicated to God. It should not confuse us that some of these priests were idolaters in their first life but still end up saved and in the Millennial Kingdom. They may have worshipped God and idols at the same time. Many Christians go to church and worship God, but also check the astrological column in the newspaper for daily guidance. Or they rely on objects such as a rabbit’s foot, a “lucky coin” or a “lucky hat” to help them, and when they do, knowingly
or unknowingly, they are practicing idolatry. Physical objects that people honor by
looking to them for “invisible help” are idols.

The Levites who served idols can do the work in the Temple, but “they must bear
the shame of their detestable practices.” This record is very sobering and should cause
any Christian who is living in sin to wake up and consider the consequences of his
actions. The good news is that there is no need for any shame at the Judgment. People
can avoid shame on the Day of Judgment by repenting of their ungodly lifestyle,
confessing their sin, and dedicating their life to Christ. No wonder the Bible says, “do not
use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature” (Gal. 5:13).

The Bible makes it clear that the bottom line for receiving rewards is obedience to
God’s commands. Every Christian should desire to obey God in order to receive great
rewards. This will involve finding out what the Lord wants done and then carrying
through with it. Few people have given up as much as Moses. He was a prince in Egypt.
He had attained “the good life,” including good food, power, prestige, nice clothes, etc.
He had a very posh lifestyle but gave it all up. Why? The Bible says he gave it up
because he saw the reward in the future.

**Hebrews 11:24–26:** “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to
be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated
along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a
short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value
than the treasures of Egypt, **because he was looking ahead to his reward.**

Moses gave up the good life because he “looked ahead” and saw that he would be
rewarded in the Kingdom. Do not be shortsighted. All of us should look ahead to the
reward we can have in the future in a way that will attain it. (Some other verses
that are not mentioned above and that speak of rewards include: Matt. 5:12, 19; 6:1, 5;
18:1-4; 25:14-29; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; and 2 Pet. 1:5-11; see commentary on those verses. For
a much more complete explanation of the Millennial Kingdom and rewards in the future,
see John Schoenheit; *The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul*).

5:11. **“we are persuading others.”** The verb “persuade” in this phrase is in the present
tense, active voice, and can be understood in one of two ways. It is either conative, “we
try to persuade” (Robertson), or durative “we are busy persuading” (Lenski). The
question is whether Paul meant to communicate what they were trying to do, or simply
relating what they were in fact doing. In truth, Paul was doing both, he was busy
persuading, trying to persuade others. In English, the translation “we are persuading” can
communicate both these senses and thus was the choice for the REV.

**“others.”** The Greek is *anthrōpos* (#444 ἀνθρώπος), and it used collectively of both
men and women. The REV often has “people,” but it was felt that was too stiff here, so
“others” brings the meaning across.

5:14. **“For the love of Christ urges us on.”** This is an important phrase and needs to be
properly understood. The Greek word “constrain” is *sunechō* (#4912 συνέχω) and means,
among other things, to hold together any whole, lest it fall to pieces or something fall
away from it, to hold together with constraint, to compress, to be held by or closely
occupied with, any business. What Paul is saying is that the love of Christ keeps him
focused on his mission. It is true love that keeps one focused on the goal of bringing
others to Christ and helping them grow.
5:15. “in place of everyone.” From the Greek preposition *huper* (#5228 ὑπὲρ). See Romans 5:6 commentary on “in place of the ungodly… for… in our place.”

“was raised.” The Greek verb is *egeirō* (#1453 ἐγείρω, pronounced eh-gay'-row), and it refers to getting up, raising or being raised or raised up. Checking the English versions one can immediately see that some read “rose again” (ASV; KJV; NASB; NIV; YLT) while others read something such as “was raised” (CJB; HCSB; ESV; NAB; NET; NRSV; RSV). Why the difference, and which is correct? The difference is due to the interpretation of the verb. *Egeirō* is one of the Greek verbs that has the same form (*egerthenti*; ἐγερθέντι) in both the middle and passive participle forms. If the verb is thought to be passive, then it should be translated “was raised,” but if it is in the middle voice, then it would more properly be “raised again.” The context and/or scope of Scripture will have to guide us as to the proper translation.

In this case, the scope of Scripture guides us quite firmly to the passive voice translation, “was raised.” Scripture says over and over that God raised Jesus from the dead (cp. Acts 2:24, 32; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30; Rom. 10:9; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:20; Col. 2:12; 1 Thess. 1:10; 1 Pet. 1:21).

5:17. “new creation.” When the natural man of body and soul is born again, he takes on the very divine nature of God (2 Pet. 1:4), which becomes part of him. Thus he is indeed a “new creation.”

“Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“things have become new.” Lenski correctly points out that the subject of “become” does not come from “have become new,” which contains its own subject. The subject is imported from the context, i.e., things (or perhaps “we”) have become new. The KJV imports “all things” from Revelation 21:5, but obviously not everything becomes new when someone is born again, just the things inside that believer. The Revised Version and the ASV, which have “they have become new,” misses the point. It is not the old things that become new; it is that the re are new things created.

5:18. “all this.” This is the meaning of this word in this context. Cp. Lenski.

5:19. “God was reconciling.” The emphasis of the verb is that God was reconciling, not that God was in Christ (cp. Vincent). God reconciled us to himself “through” (cp. Lenski) Christ.

5:20. “we are ambassadors.” We are “ambassadors” in that we speak for Christ. We represent his kingdom on earth. The Greek verb, *presbeuō* (#4243 πρεσβεύω) means “we are ambassadors,” and also “we are legates.” Our union with Christ (Rom. 6:3), includes the honor, privilege, and ability to act in his stead.

*Presbeuō* was used in the Greek language to refer to three different kinds of people: an “elder,” an “ambassador,” and a “legate.” Whenever we come across a Hebrew or Greek word that has more than one meaning, we must decide which of them is the correct or appropriate meaning in the verse. In this case, we can do that by “trying out” the meanings of *presbeuō*. Reading “elder” in this context does not make good sense, and thus “elder” is not the meaning here. Reading “ambassador” in this context makes sense, because we have the ministry and message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18 and 19). As ambassadors whose citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20), we are in a foreign country here on earth, spreading good will and trying to win support for our king and country. But we are also legates for Christ.
Communication in the Roman Empire was slow. In the Roman world, if a war broke out the Emperor may have not even heard about it for weeks, and then not been able to decide what to do simply because no matter what information he had and how many daily messengers arrived, their “news” was always old. Worse, when the Emperor’s orders actually arrived at the trouble spot—well, the situation was likely totally different or the trouble even over.

One way the Greco-Roman rulers dealt with the problem was through the office of the legate, a person with the authority to represent the ruler, a person delegated and empowered to act as the king himself in any given situation. About presbeutēs Barnett writes: “Such delegates—Jewish or Greco-Roman—came with the authority of the sender, in his place, to secure his interests,” and they were referred to as legates. (see Paul Barnett, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 310). Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary* adds, “In the Roman period presbeutēs is the Greek equivalent of [the Latin] legatus...It is commonly used for the imperial legates.” (Geoffery Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Vol. 6, p. 681. This ten-volume theological dictionary is often referred to as “Kittel’s Theological Dictionary.” Where the ellipse appears in the quotation, there are a number of references to ancient works to substantiate the point. ) Spicq adds, “…a legate is a noteworthy personage, at the top of the military hierarchy, and presbeuon and presbeutes are technical terms for imperial legates in the Greek Orient.” (Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, Vol. 3, p. 174, 175.)

The fact that each of us is a “legate” is an important point being made in 2 Corinthians 5:20, because even though we are ambassadors for Christ, we are also his legates—his personal presence on earth. As we walk by the spirit, in a very real sense we are “Christ” in the situation. We see this played out over and over again in the New Testament, especially in Acts. One notable example in Acts occurred when Peter was traveling around Israel teaching, and a woman named Tabitha who lived in Joppa, the old seaport city of Israel, died. The disciples found out Peter was in a nearby city and called for him. Notice how Peter acts in the place of Christ when raising the dead. He assessed the situation, then acted, saying “Tabitha, get up” (Acts 9:40).

Peter prayed about what to do, but once he received revelation guidance about what to do concerning Tabitha, he did not pray for God to raise her. He did not say anything such as: “Dear God, here lies Tabitha. Please raise her from the dead. Please put life back into her.” No, Peter did not pray like that. Rather, he acted like Jesus acted. When Jesus was in the presence of a dead girl, he did not ask God to raise the girl, he said, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!” (Mark 5:41). In fact, if we study Jesus Christ’s healings and miracles, there is not one single time Jesus asked God to do the healing. It was God’s power that did the work, certainly, but Jesus knew he was God’s representative on earth, so he healed a leper, saying, “Be clean” (Matt. 8:3). He healed a cripple, saying, “Stretch out your hand” (Matt. 12:13). He cast demons out of people by commanding them to leave, as we see in Luke: “Come out of him” (Luke 4:35). Peter knew that he was the legate of Christ, the personal presence of Christ, and he healed as Jesus did.

Paul healed the same way that Jesus and Peter did (Acts 14:10, 16:18). There is no record in Acts of anyone being healed where the one doing the healing prayed for God
to do it. In every specific case, the individual did the healing or miracle, but was clearly doing so by the power of God, which is why God always gets the glory.

We Christians are legates of Christ—the personal presence of Christ on earth. However, we have a decision to make. Just as a Roman legate could go to the hippodrome and sit and eat olives and watch the horse races all day long instead of going out and representing the Emperor, so Christians can act in ways that hang on to the flesh and not walk in the power of Christ. Walking in the fullness of the power of Christ does not “just happen,” it is a purposeful decision. We must realize the power we have, and then go into the world and walk it out in faith. So should 2 Corinthians 5:20 read “legates” instead of “ambassadors?” “Ambassadors” fits the context so well that it seems best to leave it as the reading in the text and have the reading “legate” in the margin as an additional meaning.

“We implore on behalf of Christ.” Although many English versions supply “you” and thus have something similar to “we implore you,” there is no “you” in the Greek text, and it is misleading to supply it. “We” Christians are ambassadors and legates for Christ, and “we” implore people who need it to be reconciled to God.

5:21. “sin offering.” The Greek is *hamartia* (#266 ἁμάρτια). It means “sin,” but it can refer to “a sin offering.” Many Greek lexicons do not mention that *hamartia* can mean “sin offering,” but that is one of its meanings. For example, *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* by Barclay Neman says *hamartia* means, “sin” and “sin offering.” *Hamartia* refers to “sin offering” many times in the Septuagint (cp. Exod. 29:14, 36; 30:10; Lev. 4:3, 8, 21, 24, 25, etc.). F. F. Bruce writes about the phrase *hamartian epoiesen* (“made him to be a sin offering”) in *The New Century Bible Commentary*: “…this remarkable expression…can best be understood on the assumption that Paul had in mind the Hebrew idiom in which certain words for sin can mean not only sin, but ‘sin offering.’” We must keep in mind that Corinth was a large Greek city. Both Acts (primarily 18) and the Epistles to the Corinthians indicate that the congregation in Corinth had a large percentage of Gentiles. They, as well as many Jews, used the Septuagint as their Bible, and so would have been very familiar with the use of *hamartia* as “sin offering.”

Albert Barnes (*Barnes’ Notes*) explains that Jesus had to be a sin offering, saying he could not become “sin,” nor “a sinner,” nor “guilty.” First, Jesus could not literally become “sin.” Sin is breaking the commandments of God. No person can become “sin.” We are not “sin,” and Jesus did not become “sin” for us. Nor could Jesus have become “a sinner.” Bauer’s Greek lexicon (BDAG) treats *hamartia* as if it should be translated “sin” but understood as referring to “the guilty one,” i.e., the sinful one. If that were the case, then by the figure of speech metonymy, “sin” would stand for the one who had sin, i.e., the sinner himself. Thayer’s Greek lexicon does a similar thing, and says that “sin” puts the “abstract for the concrete,” using “sin” but meaning “the sinner.” Thus, both Bauer and Thayer see this verse as saying Christ becomes “a sinner” for us, but that cannot be correct. For one thing, the whole Bible testifies to the holiness and sinlessness of Christ. More to the point, however, is that if Jesus did become “a sinner,” then he could not have been our savior, because the death of one sinner does not in any way impute righteousness to another sinner. There is no merit in the death of a sinner. The only reason Christ’s sacrifice is sufficient to provide salvation for all people is that he was not a sinner. Similarly, Christ could not have become “guilty,” as if “sin” were put by
metonymy for the effect of sin, which is guilt. Again, one guilty person cannot atone for the life of another guilty person. The correct conclusion, and one that Barnes arrives at, is that Christ is a “sin-offering.” He was sinless, and because of that fact he could give his life as an offering to God for the sin of others. The New Testament in the Language of the People by Charles Williams is one version that has “sin offering” in 2 Corinthians 5:21.

That Jesus was a sin offering for us shows us the great love, grace, and mercy of God. It truly confirms Psalm 103:10: “He [God] does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.” We all deserve death, in fact, well deserve it. But in His great love God provided a sacrifice that would justly provide a way for us to have everlasting life.

Chapter 6

6:1. “in an empty, fruitless, way.” The Greek is kenos (κενός), and it means, empty, vain, devoid of truth. Metaphorically it can mean destitute of spiritual wealth, of one who boasts of his faith as a transcendent possession, yet is without the fruits of faith. Also it is used metaphorically of endeavors, labors, acts, which result in nothing, are fruitless, or are without effect. Lenski points out that here, eis kenos (literally “unto empty”) means “in an empty, hollow way.” In this case, Paul entreats the Corinthians that they do not receive the grace of God, but then have no real fruit from it. Verse three makes this clear: the Corinthians could receive the grace of God, but then, instead of producing good fruit, would by their actions produce offences that would cause others to blame the ministry. Heinz Cassirer (God’s New Covenant) translates the phrase, “you must not receive God’s gracious gift in a manner tending to make it profitless.” Although most translations read “in vain” for eis kenos, that is far too harsh, and often leads to the mistaken theology that a person can lose his salvation. We Christians never receive God’s grace “in vain,” as if there was no profit to it. Salvation itself is priceless. However, Christians can, and sadly often do, receive the grace of God but then do not produce the fruit of it in their lives.

6:2. Quoted from Isaiah 49:8.

“Look!” The Greek word is idou (ἰδοὺ), and it is used to get our attention. It is the figure of speech asterismos, and the double use of it here in this verse should grab and hold our attention. NOW is the acceptable time! NOW is the time for salvation! Some people say, “Well, so and so will get saved when the time is right, on the Lord’s timetable.” That is fatalism (or Calvinism) and denies free will and the expressed meaning of the Word of God. God wants everyone to be saved right away so they assure themselves a place in the Kingdom and also can begin to store up rewards for themselves. For more on “Look,” see commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

6:4. “servants of God.” The Greek reads, “servants of God,” which in this context is the genitive of relation. This is not the genitive of possession, as if God owned the ministers, but rather of relation, servants (some versions read “ministers”) of the things of God.

6:6. “in holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]
6:7. “in...through.” This is another instance in which the verses in the English versions are obviously divided awkwardly. The shift from “in” for the first 19 things on the list to the last things on the list, marked by the Greek dia, is very clear.

“through.” The Greek is the preposition dia with the genitive case, and means “through” [see Appendix 11: “Greek Prepositions”]. The minister of the Good News cannot be someone who demonstrates his Christ-like character only when times are good and things are going well. The minister must purify his heart so that whether times are good or bad, he acts like Christ, can help others, and even can grow in character. As the minister lives day after day and year after year, he will pass through good times and bad. The minister of the Gospel works while some of his experiences are good and some are bad; some people are lauding him while some dishonor him; some reports about him are bad while some are good.

One of lesser known meanings of dia is “between,” and Lenski makes the case for dia meaning “between” in this context, and not “by,” or “through.” On this view of the verse, the minister of the Gospel works while some of his experiences are good and some are bad, and he is “between” them, some people are lauding him while some dishonor him, and he is “between” them; some reports about him are bad while some are good, and he is “between” them. While this is true, we felt that the word “through” was clear enough. A person going through glory and dishonor spends his time “between” them.

“the instruments.” R. C. H. Lenski has what we believe is a very good and sound interpretation of this verse. The Greek word that most versions translate as “weapons” or “armor” is hoplon (#3696 ὅπλον), which, like most Greek words, has more than one meaning (not all of which appear in the Bible). Hoplon can refer to any tool or implement for preparing a thing, armor (Rom. 13:12), arms or weapons used in warfare (John 18:3), or an instrument (Rom. 6:13). How are we to choose whether this word should be translated as an instrument or aid, or a weapon? The answer is the same way we always make that translation choice: by context. In the context of this verse there is a clear continuous parallelization between one good thing and one evil thing (glory vs. dishonor; evil report vs. good report; deceivers vs. true; unknown vs. well known; dying vs. we live; as punished vs., and yet not killed; grieved vs. always rejoicing; etc.). So if the phrase means, as most versions have, “by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left,” then it is the only time in the list a good thing is not juxtaposed with an evil thing—they are both positive weapons, just held in different hands. So in this case, the context makes it clear the verse is not referring to a weapon that is held in the right hand and the left, but rather “instruments,” or “aids” of righteousness, some of which are “of the right hand” and some of which are “of the left hand.”

“from the right hand and the left.” The Greek reads simply “of the right” or “of the right hand” and “of the left.” The key to understanding this verse is a biblical custom (more particularly a custom of the East than a custom of the Roman world, but to some extent it existent in the Roman world), that the right hand was the hand of blessing, and the left hand was the hand of cursing. The origin of the custom was the common practice of eating with a hand (not knives, forks, spoons, or other table utensils) and cleaning oneself after going to the bathroom with a hand and water (not toilet paper). In the biblical culture, it was the custom that people ate with their right hand and washed after using the bathroom with their left hand. Thus, the right hand became the hand of blessing, and the left hand was known as the hand of cursing. As the use of the right hand was
dominant in the culture, it was almost always the strongest hand, and so also strength and power are attributed to the right hand. Gifts and blessings were given with the right hand (Ps. 16:11; Ps. 80:17; Gal. 2:9; Rev. 1:16). Oaths were made with the right hand (Isa. 62:8). An honored person was placed at the right hand (on the right hand side; Ps. 110:1; Matt. 26:64; Rom. 8:34). If someone was very deceitful, then his right hand was false (Ps. 144:8, 11). Joseph was upset with his father Jacob when Jacob blessed Joseph’s two children because Jacob put his right hand on the head of the younger child, when by custom the right hand of blessing should have been placed on the older child (Gen. 48:9-20).

When we understand the custom of the right and left hand, 2 Corinthians 6:7 becomes a very graphic and powerful verse. The things in the right hand (the hand of blessing), and the left hand (the hand of cursing) can both be aids to righteousness if we have the proper attitude toward them. Both good and evil things can help us become more like Christ. Those people who are good to us certainly help us, but we also learn from those who are not good to us. We learn the value of kindness from the unkind, the value of patience from the impatient, the value of controlling what we say from those whose words are caustic, the value of staying calm from those who are easily angered, and so forth.

Thus this verse is similar to Romans 5:3 and 4, “…we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

6:8. This is another instance in which the verses in the English versions are obviously divided awkwardly. The shift from dia to hos is very clear.

6:9. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (♯2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

6:12. “You are not restrained by us.” There was nothing that Paul or his companions were doing that caused the Corinthians to hold back, it was simply that the Corinthians were not giving themselves totally to the relationship.

“bowels.” The Greek is splagchnon (♯4698 σπλάγχνον) and it means “bowels.” We believe that God is showing us a great truth by using the word “bowels,” just as He uses “heart” in many verses and even “kidneys” in some verses (Ps. 7:9; 16:7; 26:2; 73:21; Prov. 23:16; Jer. 11:20; 12:2; 17:10; 20:12; Rev. 2:23 [see commentary on Revelation 2:23 for more on “kidneys”]).

For centuries scientists and theologians thought that the ancients only equated “bowels” with a person’s emotional life because they were ignorant and superstitious. Recently, however, scientists are discovering that the bowels have a very large number of nerve cells, and actually can “think” on their own. In fact, there are as many nerve cells between the neck and navel as there are in the head. Of course, the nerves in the head are configured differently, and function differently, than the nerves in our gut, but we are now learning that the Bible is right in mentioning our heart, kidneys, belly, and bowels, and these are a very important part of a person’s emotional life.

Almost everyone is aware of times he or she has been afraid or upset but felt it in their bowels or stomach. If we are anxious our stomach often becomes “tied up in knots.” If we hear really bad news or are very afraid, we often become physically sick, lose our appetite, or even have diarrhea. In fact, involuntarily defecating is a common reaction to a sudden scare.
The fact that the bowels play a huge part in our emotional life is well represented in the Greek text. Unfortunately, the emphasis that God, by using the word “bowels,” places on the emotion in the verse is lost in most English versions of the Bible because “bowels” have been replaced by “heart,” “affection,” or similar words. While the translators mean well by trying to translate the Greek in a way that communicates to the modern reader, the great truth that the bowels are a huge part of a person’s emotional life is lost. We Christians need to be aware that God wrote the Bible in such a way that it would educate us about ourselves, His creation, and we lose that education when we take a clear word like “bowel” and translate it “heart.”

Also, when translators use “heart” instead of the proper translation “bowels,” we lose another great truth in Scripture: that biblically the heart is less associated with a person’s emotional life and is more associated with our mental life. Biblically, the heart refers more to a mental function while our bowels, kidneys, and belly refer more to our emotional life. Verses that involve our bowels include:

- **Luke 1:78 (KJV)** “Through the tender mercy [bowels] of our God;”
- **2 Corinthians 6:12 (NASB)** “you are restrained in your own affections [bowels].”
- **2 Corinthians 7:15 (NASB)** “his affection [bowels] abounds all the more toward you….”
- **Philippians 1:8 (NASB)** “I long for you all with the affection [bowels] of Christ Jesus.”
- **Philippians 2:1 (NASB)** “If therefore there is any…affection [bowels] and compassion,”
- **Colossians 3:12 (NASB)** “put on a heart of compassion [literally: “put on bowels”]”
- **Philemon 1:7 (NASB)** “the hearts[bowels] of the saints have been refreshed”
- **Philemon 1:12 (NASB)** “And I have sent him…my very heart [bowels]”
- **Philemon 1:20 (NASB)** “refresh my heart [bowels] in Christ.”
- **1 John 3:17 (NASB)** “But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart [bowels] against him, how does the love of God abide in him?”

6:13. “(I speak as to my children.)” Figure of Speech, *Interjectio*, or Interjection (cp. Bullinger, Figures of Speech).

6:15. **Belial.** The Hebrew word means “worthlessness,” and the phrase son or daughter of Belial is used many times (Cp. Deut. 13:13; Judg. 19:22; 20:13; 1 Sam. 1:16; 2:12; 10:27; 25:17; 30:22; etc.). By New Testament times it was clearly being used as a term for the Devil, as we see in this verse. For other names for the Slanderer (the Devil), see commentary on Luke 4:2).


**Chapter 7**
7:1. “spirit.” This is not referring to the “gift of holy spirit,” but is a use of “spirit” as “soul.” There are things that are specifically in the category of “flesh,” that defiles us, such as sexual sin or other sins directly involving the body. In contrast to the flesh, however, is the soul, which as a kind of “spirit,” is sometimes referred to as spirit. In this context, “soul” type things that we need to cleanse are our thoughts and attitudes.

7:9. “I am rejoicing.” The Greek is chairo (#5463 χαίρω), rejoice, as it is in the present active. Paul was in the act of rejoicing (cp. Lenski’s translation).


Chapter 8

8:2. “generosity.” The Greek word for “generosity” (#572 ἁπλότης) can also mean “sincere concern, simple goodness” (BDAG).

8:8. “as a command.” The Greek phrase kata epitaggê (κατὰ ἐπιταγῇ) is a technical phrase that means “by the command of; by order of.” In this case, the command would have been given by Paul to the people of Corinth. See commentary on 1 Timothy 1:1.

“comparing it with.” Cp. NIV; NET. By comparing the Corinthians’ love to the earnestness of others, Paul proves whether their love passes the test. It is when their love stands in contrast to the giving of others that this test can occur.

8:13. “as a matter of equality.” This phrase comes from a Greek idiom, literally, “out of equality.” See BDAG’s entry on the word for “equality,” isotes (#2471 ἰσότης): “state of matters being held in proper balance… as a matter of equality.”

8:15. Quoted from Exodus 16:18.

Chapter 9

9:3. “I am sending.” This is what is known as the epistolary aorist (Kistemaker, p. 310). The Greek is in the past, “I sent,” but at the time Paul was writing he had not yet literally sent the brothers. They would actually be coming with the letter. To avoid confusion we have translated according to the present tense meaning, as do many versions (ESV; NIV; NRSV; NET).


9:5. “generous gift.” The Greek word for “generous gift” is the same word for “blessing” in the verse, eulogia (#2129 εὐλογία). We agree with BDAG that the sense of “blessing” here is that of a generous gift. The idea of “gift” comes out as “bounty” in the KJV. Because “bounty” seems an archaic translation, and the English word “bounty” has acquired other meanings that could cause confusion here, most modern versions read “gift” (cp. ESV; NIV; NASB; HCSB; NRSV; NAB; NET).


9:10. “increase the harvest of your righteousness.” The phrase “harvest of your righteousness” means the rewards given to people by Christ for their righteous deeds. God will cause our harvest to grow, meaning he will increase the rewards we reap at Judgment Day. Righteousness here is to be understood in the sense of righteous acts accomplished by the believer (e.g., Acts 10:35), and not to be understood as the state of
righteousness given by God (e.g., Rom. 5:17). Galatians 6:9 gives the key to understanding this verse: “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (ESV). Hence, Williams translates this phrase: “enlarge the harvest which your deeds of charity yield.”

9:11. “through us.” The meaning of this phrase is not specified, and can be broadly applied. It seems the most natural meaning is that Paul is writing as if he and his companions are middle men, who bring the gift that the Corinthians give to those in need, which then produces great thanksgiving to God. However, the phrase can also refer to the fact that it was “through” Paul that the Corinthians were encouraged to give in the first place, so the whole process of the gift, from the encouragement to give it to the actual delivery of it, was “through” Paul and his companions.

That God would inspire this phrase shows us that He always keeps in mind those who are encouraging others to do good works, and those who help others do good works. Not everyone can help out with the things of God in the same way, or the same level of visibility to others, but God sees every heart and every effort we put forth to help with His work.

Chapter 10

10:1 “Now I myself, Paul, entreat you by the meekness and clemency of Christ…” The verses that open 2 Corinthians 10 must be understood in light of the fact that false apostles had entered the Church and were spreading lies and false doctrine. This can be easily seen by reading chapters 10-12. These false apostles were accusing Paul of being two-faced, being bold in his letters when he was away from Corinth, but being timid when he was personally present in Corinth. Furthermore, they accused Paul of living by the standards of the world. Paul begs the Corinthians to listen to him, and hopes that he will not have to be bold with them as he will have to be with the pretenders. Paul uses the analogy of a war in this section of scripture, and asserts that he fights with spiritual weapons, and with them demolishes arguments, lies, and false doctrines, and will take captive the lies (thoughts) that are circulating in the Church. Furthermore, he will bring these disobedient people to justice, but he will only be able to do that when the Corinthians themselves are ready to stand firmly on the truth.

“clemency.” See commentary note on Acts 24:4, and 1 Timothy 3:3. The Greek is epieikeia, (#1932), “consideration springing from a recognition of the danger that ever lurks upon the assertion of legal rights lest they be pushed to immoral limits. The virtue that rectifies and redresses the severity of a sentence” (Zodhiates, Word Study Dictionary). Occurs only here and Acts 24:4. Paul is being very calm here, asking to be heard on the basis of the meekness and clemency of Christ. Thus, even if there are Corinthians who are set in their mind against Paul, they should still be meek enough to hear him out, giving clemency to Paul.

“timid… bold.” This was the accusation of Paul’s accusers. They accused him of being timid (actually, “low”) when he was with them, but “bold” in his letters when he was away. Paul uses their words to obviate their arguments, and hopefully make the Corinthians aware that they are lies. Paul was very bold when he was in Corinth, debating
in the synagogue, standing against the Jews, and even being dragged into court before Gallio (Acts 18:1-18); and he had been just as bold in his letters (cp. 1 Corinthians).

10:2. “Yes, I implore you…” For the de meaning “yes,” see Lenski.

“daring.” Greek is tolmāō (#5111 τολµάω), “to show boldness or resolution in the face of danger, opposition, or a problem, dare, bring oneself to (do someth.)...have the courage, be brave enough” (BDAG). Paul’s accusers say he is timid when he is present, but now they will find out the truth, for Paul will be daring with them, showing firm resolution in the face of their opposition. Having established the Church himself, he now goes to war, fighting with courage and even daring, wielding the sword of the spirit to keep the people sound in the faith.

10:5. “We are casting down arguments and every high-minded thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God.” This verse is about Paul’s defense of the truth against the arguments of the “super-apostles” (11:5; 12:11) and others who brought in ideas that were against Paul and opposed to Christ. Although we often use this verse to teach that each Christian should take captive his own thoughts so that he can be an obedient Christian, that is not the primary reading of the text. The “thoughts” that needed to be taken captive were the false logic, lies, and false doctrines of those people who came in after Paul. They taught another Jesus and another gospel (11:4), and Paul calls them “false apostles,” and deceitful workmen” (11:13). If a Church is going to be healthy, the false doctrines and beliefs have to be “taken captive.” The general principle still applies, however, for a healthy church is made up of healthy Christians, and if a person is going to be spiritually healthy and obedient to Christ, he must take his own thoughts captive to Christ. The fact that the primary meaning of the verse is taking captive the lies and false doctrines in the Church explains verse 6 (see below).

“thought.” Greek is noema (#3632 νόηµα), “A mental perception, thought; 2. specifically, (an evil) purpose” (Thayer).

10:6. “as soon as your obedience is complete.” Paul states that he is ready to bring to justice the people who are disobedient, but he must wait until the obedience of the Corinthians is complete. The point of bringing the disobedient ones, the ones spreading lies and false teaching, to justice is to have a healthy church. But if the Church itself is not ready to discipline those who are bringing lies and false doctrine, what is the point? The Church at Corinth “put up” with false teaching too easily (11:4), so Paul writes that he is ready, but will only be able to act when the Corinthians are ready. It is never easy, fun, or “nice” to confront lies and false doctrine, and there are many who are even critical of that, elevating the importance of “self expression” and “personal beliefs” above the truth, but we must make no mistake; there is a truth, and it comes from God to the Church. We must be willing to fight for it and defend it or we might as well not “play church” at all.

10:7. “look.” The word for “look” in this verse is blepete, from blepo (#991 βλέπω). It can be understood in two different ways, either as a command (“look!”) or an indicative statement of fact (“you are looking”). This difference comes out in the varying translations: E.g., “Look at what is before your eyes” (ESV—command); compared with, “You are looking only on the surface of things” (NIV—statement of fact). The difference amounts to this: is Paul at this point in the letter chastising the Corinthians for looking at people according to the flesh? Or is he telling them to look at the evidence that is before their eyes? According to the context of the letter, we understand the word to fit better as a
command. Paul is here asking the Corinthians to consider the clear evidence of Paul and his companions’ lives compared to that of the “super-apostles.”

10:9. “I do not want to.” The word “want” comes out of the sense of the purpose clause (hina + the subjunctive mood). It is Paul’s intended purpose not to appear as though he were frightening; therefore, since it is his purpose, it is what he “wants.”


“is of no account.” From exoutheneo (#1848 ἐξουθένω), See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:20.


Chapter 11

11:2. “virgin.” The Christian Church is being compared to a virgin bride by the figure of speech hypocatastasis. The Church is not literally a virgin bride, but the things expected of a virgin bride such as spiritual chastity, purity, and devotion, all apply to the Church. [See Appendix 13: “The Bride of Christ”.]

11:3. “Serpent.” This is a reference to the Slanderer (the Devil). Since the Slanderer is not a literal serpent, his being called that is the figure of speech hypocatastasis (a comparison by implication; see entry on “dragon” in Rev. 20:2). Calling the Slanderer a “serpent” compares him with a serpent, and imports the characteristics of a serpent onto him. This verse should have put to rest once and for all that the “serpent” in Genesis 3:1 was not some kind of snake, but rather a reference to the Slanderer himself. The Bible never tells us the personal name for the Devil, the one he had before he rebelled against God. We know the names of important angels such as Michael or Gabriel, but all we have for the Devil are appellatives and descriptions that let us know about his nature and his power [For a list of the names of the Slanderer, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

The fact that God never gives the Slanderer’s proper name in the Bible put Him in a bind when it came to Genesis. How would He introduce his arch-enemy in the Genesis record? He did it by calling him, “the serpent.” Then, God gave enough, and clear enough references in the rest of the Word to let us know who “the serpent” is. Sadly, most Christians do not read the Bible carefully enough, or understand the figures of speech it uses such as hypocatastasis, to recognize who the serpent of Genesis actually was.

11:6. “unskilled in public speaking.” The Greeks took great pride in public speaking, and had schools, and even contests, for public oratory. Some used that against Paul, as if one had to be a “trained speaker” to be logical and know and present the Word of God. Paul was trained as a Rabbi, so he certainly was trained, just not in the Greek form of oratory.

11:12. “as our equals.” Cp. NIV; NRSV. Literally, the Greek reads “just as we are.”

11:14. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark
1:13. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

11:20. “hits you in the face.” This passage, vv. 4 and 19-21, sheds exposing light on the radical form of Christian pacifism that interprets Jesus’ teaching to “turn the other cheek” as meaning one should passively endure physical abuse. In these verses Paul is expressing disappointment with the Corinthians. He says they “put up with” a list of things they should not be putting up with, including false Christs and spirits (11:4), enslavement, domination, and being hit in the face (11:20). The word for “hit in the face” is dero (#1194 δέρω), meaning “beat” or “strike.” It is clear from its inclusion in this list that a Christian ought not to put up with being physically struck in the face. The word Jesus used for turning the other cheek in Matthew 5:39 is a different word: rhapsizo (#4474 ῥαπίζω), usually translated “slap.” It referred not to a fierce punch, but to a slight backhand meant as an insult. Jesus’ point was not that one ought to endure physical abuse; his point was to overlook foolish insults.

11:21. “to my shame.” This is a Greek idiom that is missed by the KJV translators. Literally it reads, “I speak according to shame,” which comes out in the KJV as “I speak as concerning reproach.” However, this is in unclear to the English reader, and does not communicate Paul’s meaning. By saying “I speak according to shame,” Paul refers to his own hypothetical shame, and speaks of it with sarcasm. The translation, “to my shame… we were too weak for that” captures the sarcastic sense of the verse very well.

11:24. “…received from the Jews forty lashes minus one.” This was a tradition of the Israelites that originated from the Mosaic Law. Deuteronomy 25:2-3 says, “…the judge shall make him [the criminal] lie down and have him flogged in his presence with the number of lashes his crime deserves, but he must not give him more than forty lashes. If he is flogged more than that, your brother will be degraded in your eyes.” To ensure that Israelites adhered to the Mosaic Law, the tradition was established to give thirty-nine lashes to prevent breaking the Law if there was a miscount. The one giving the lashes was subject to punishment if the stripes exceeded forty. These lashes were originally administered with a rod, but later the rod was exchanged for a leather strap consisting of three leather thongs. (Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible; Baker Book House, Vol. III, p. 2642; James Hastings, A Dictionary of the Bible; Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. I, p. 526).

11:25. “adrift at sea.” This is from the Greek phrase en to butho, “in the sea-depth;” the word for “sea-depth” is buthos (#1037 βυθός), and to be “in the buthos” is an idiom for “adrift at sea” (BDAG).

Chapter 12

12:4. “taken.” The Greek word is harpazo (#726 ἀρπάζω), and it means to seize, to carry off or carry away by force, and it can often have the connotation of carrying someone or something away speedily by force. Orthodox theology misunderstands this verse and teaches that “Paradise” is heaven, but it is not, “Paradise” is on earth in the future. Because orthodox theologians teach Paradise is in heaven, most English Bibles translate harpazo as “caught up” into Paradise. But “Paradise” is not “up.” They are both future. Paul was not caught “up” to them by a revelation vision, he was “taken,” “forcibly taken,” or “forcibly taken quickly” to them. Paul was “taken” to Paradise, the future
earth, in a vision. Visions of the future, or of the presence of God, occur with some regularity in the Bible (see commentary on Stephen’s vision, Acts 7:55).

The first heaven and earth existed in the past (some theologians say before Genesis 1:2, while some theologians say before the Flood of Noah). The second heaven and earth are now. The third heaven and earth are future. Revelation 21:1 speaks of the third heaven and earth when the Apostle John, who is writing the book of Revelation, says, “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth.” This “new” heaven and earth are the third heaven and earth. They do not exist now, but they will in the future.

Much of the misunderstanding in orthodox Christianity about these verses is due to the fact that Christians confuse “heaven” and “Paradise.” Most commentators say being taken to the third heaven in verse 2, and being taken to Paradise in verse 4, are the same, but they are not. To understand “Paradise,” we must understand how it came to be used in the Bible, and we must start in Genesis.

The Hebrew word eden (#5731ין) means “delight” or “luxury,” and the “Garden of Eden” (Gen. 2:8, 15) is the “Garden of delight.” (It is unhelpful that the translators of the English Bibles decided to transliterate the Hebrew word eden as “Eden,” instead of translating it into “Delight.”) The result of that decision is that very few Christians see that God so loved people that He created a “garden of delight” for us. When most Christians read about the “Garden of Eden,” they never think to ask what the phrase means, they only ask where it is on the face of the earth.

When the Old Testament was translated into Greek about 250 BC, in the version we know as the Septuagint, the Greek language had a word that accurately captured the concept of a garden of delight: paradeisos (#3857παράδεισος). The Greek language had acquired paradeisos as a loan-word from the Persian language, and it meant an enclosed park or pleasure garden, a “garden of delight.” Thus it was natural that the Hebrew phrase “garden of eden” (garden of delight), was translated by the Greek word paradeisos (garden of delight). The Latin paradisus came from the Greek, and our English “paradise” came from Greek through the Latin.

The Garden of Eden, Paradise, was a place on earth, and paradeisos occurs about 25 times in the Septuagint, sometimes referring to the Garden of Eden, sometimes referring to another garden, but always to a garden on earth. Thus it was natural for the thief on the cross (see commentary on Luke 23:43), and Paul’s audience, to think of Paradise as a place on earth. (There are some non-canonical books that refer to paradise as a place for the dead, but the biblical canon is consistent that it is a place on earth). When Jesus comes from heaven and conquers the earth (Rev. 19:11ff’), and sets up his kingdom on earth, then the earth will once again be an “Eden,” a “Paradise.” The Old Testament prophecies made it clear that on the future earth there would be no war, no sickness, no hunger, no injustice, and even the animals would become peaceful [For more details, see commentary on Matthew 5:5, “the meek will inherit the earth”].

2 Corinthians 12 starts out with Paul recounting a revelation vision that was given to him. Although he does not directly say it was given to him, verse 7 makes it clear he is the “man” who got the revelation. In his revelation vision he was taken into the future, and he saw, just like the Apostle John did years later (Rev. 21:1), the third heaven and the third earth. He refers to the third heaven as “heaven” in verse 2, and he refers to the third earth as “Paradise” in verse 4. Thus his mention of “heaven” and “earth” is a kind of polarmerismos (describing something in its entirety by mentioning the two extremes; see
commentary on Acts 9:28). Paul had a “surpassingly great revelation” (v. 7) which included seeing both the new heaven and the new earth (Paradise).

12:7. “to beat up on me.” This translation is at once very literal, and yet communicates idiomatically in English. The Greek verb is kolaphizō (#2852 κολαφίζω), which indicates a beating with the fists, a violent and harsh treatment. Paul was physically beaten, as well as emotionally badgered.

12:8. “Three times I pleaded with the Lord.” This is a perfect demonstration of how we Christians are to handle trouble—take it to the Lord. Far too many times when we Christians are in difficult situations we complain or mope about it and forget to take our problems to the Lord. Of course, when we take our problems to the Lord, we would like to think he would just solve them for us, but what happened with Paul as recorded here in Corinthians is very typical of what happens to us: Jesus Christ reminds us that his grace is sufficient for us and that his power is actually brought to its goal (completed, perfected) through our weakness.

Victory in Christ is often very different from the world’s view of victory. To the world, victory involves winning, strength, health, youth, vitality, and having “a great life.” But we live in a fallen world and under the penalty of sin, and every person has problems and sicknesses, and “victory” involves being faithful to be loving and godly day after day. Many times we cannot escape our problems, but we are victorious in Christ if we bear our burdens while maintaining godly attitudes and actions.

Paul’s pleading with the Lord and the Lord answering him is an example of the “fellowship” (intimate joint participation) that we are to have with Jesus Christ [For more information on our fellowship with Jesus, see commentary on 1 John 1:3]. The Greek verb translated “pleaded” is parakaleō (#3870 παρακαλέω; pronounced par-a-ka-leh'-ō), and it literally means “to call to one’s side.” Of course, there are dozens of reasons a person might call someone to come near, and so it is natural that parakaleō has dozens of different meanings, including: to speak to, to exhort, to encourage, to comfort, to console, to entreat, to ask for something, to beg, and to teach. The wide semantic range of parakaleō explains the large number of different translations in the English versions (ASV, KJV “besought;” BBE “made request to;” HCSB, NIV “pleaded;” NASB95 “implored;” NET “asked;” RSV “appealed to”). Each of these translations correctly represents an aspect of parakaleō that is applicable in this context, and the translators had to make the difficult choice of which aspect of parakaleō was most emphasized, and pick an English word that represented that; a very hard choice indeed.

In this case, Paul had a problem, so he pleaded with the Lord about it, and this is written so we can follow Paul’s example, even as he said: “Be imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). We are to talk to Jesus about our problems and pray to him for help. [For more on prayer to Jesus Christ, see Appendix 15: “Can We Pray to Jesus?”].

The “Lord” in the verse is Jesus, not God, as can be seen from the context. Abridged, verses 8 and 9 read: “Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this...And he said to me, ‘My...power reaches its fulfillment in weakness.’ Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ will rest on me.”

The one with the power in this context is clearly Jesus. First Paul pleaded with the Lord about his problems. Then the Lord answered and spoke of his power. Then Paul
identified the one who was speaking to him as the Lord Jesus Christ, saying that he will gladly boast in his weaknesses so that “the power of Christ” would rest on him (12:9).

12:9. “reaches its fulfillment.” The Greek verb is teleō (#5055 τελέω), and it means to bring something to its end, or finish; to complete something. In many cases, when something is finished, it is “perfected,” but it is not correct to say in English that Christ’s power is “made perfect” in our weakness, because Christ’s power is “perfect” no matter what state we are in. Our weakness does not make his power perfect, it is perfect on its own. Rather, when we are weak and Christ works in us, his power reaches its end, or fulfillment, in us. Through our weakness Christ’s power reaches its goal, and is shown to be Christ’s power, not our power.

“rest on me.” The word “rest” in the Greek literally means to “pitch a tent over, to set up a dwelling place,” from episkenoō (#1981 ἐπισκεννῶ). Paul is saying that the power of Christ will set up camp over his life and dwell over him.

12:11. “moral obligation.” This is from the Greek word ophelō (#3784 ὤφελω). It is stronger than what the Corinthians “ought” to have done; the word refers to an obligation or debt (BDAG). For clarity in English we have switched the framing from “I” to “you,” like the NJB and NLT. The meaning is the same; it is easier to read “you have a moral obligation to me,” than “I have a moral obligation owed by you.”

12:14. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

12:15. “souls.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is used of the individual himself. Thus, while the verse could read something such as, “I will most gladly spend and be spent for you.” (HCSB; cp. KJV), by saying “souls” we can see that Paul is not just saying in general terms that he is willing to sacrifice himself for others, but is specifically concerned about their mental and emotional state as well. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

12:16. “took you in by deceit.” Paul is employing the figure of speech eironeia, which we would call “irony” or “sarcasm.” Bullinger defines this figure as “The expression of thought in a form that naturally conveys its opposite” (Figures of Speech, p. 807). By writing, “we took you in by deceit,” Paul shows the ridiculousness of such a statement and thus powerfully communicates the opposite.

12:19. “defending ourselves.” There is beautiful courtroom imagery in this verse that can be missed in English. Paul is here asking the Corinthians if they presume he has been attempting to clear himself of charges before them. He has not. Rather, in Paul’s mind, it is before God that he stands or falls, and God is his only Judge. The Greek word for “defending ourselves”—apologeomai (#626 ἀπολογέομαι)—refers to a public defense in a trial, and, by metaphor and extension, to defending one’s self in an everyday life situation. Paul is saying that it is not before the court of the Corinthians that he pleads his case, but before the court of God who sits as Judge he is speaking in Christ.


“arrogance.” For this word, the KJV “swelling” is very literal, although unclear as to what the “swelling” indicates. It is from phusiōsis (#5450 φυσίοσις), which refers to “swelled-headedness” (BDAG), or “an inflated, puffed up, exaggerated view of one’s
own importance” (Luow-Nida)—in other words, *arrogance*. Paul is referring to the phenomenon that often happens in arguments, when love for the other person and what is right gives way to a blinding force of care for one’s own pride and position.

**Chapter 13**


13:3. “among you.” In this case, it is best to translate the *en* (#1722 ἐν) as “among” you, rather than “in” you. The difference is this: “among you” refers to Christ’s power in the fellowship community of the Corinthians, while “in you” would speak of his power for each individual Corinthian believer. The translation “among you” is best because the context of verses 1-2 is speaking of the Corinthians as a group, and the “you” is plural, also referring to the group.

13:4. “we also are weak in him.” The words “in him” mean “in union with him” (see commentary on Romans 6:3). We are used to thinking of being “in Christ” and thus having been crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20), having died with Christ (Rom. 6:8), having been buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12), and being raised with Christ (Eph. 2:6). However, we are also “weak” in Christ. Christians are not spiritual bullies, asserting ourselves and getting our way because we are so spiritually powerful. We are spiritually powerful, but our power is used the same way Christ and Paul used their spiritual power. Christ said to learn about him, for “I am meek and humble in heart” (Matt. 11:29). Christ became a sacrifice whose life was poured out for others, and that must be true of us too.

“to serve you.” This is coming out of the preposition *eis* (“unto”)—it is an *eis* of advantage, meaning “for you,” “for your advantage.” Cp. NIV and Kistemaker, who also render the phrase “to serve you.”

13:9. “fully equipped.” The Greek is the rare noun, *katartisis* (#2676 κατάρτισις), and it only occurs here in the New Testament (although the verb occurs in verse 11). According to Louw Nida, it means to make someone completely adequate or sufficient for something, to furnish completely, to cause to be fully qualified. It can refer to the completion or perfection or equipping of the person (“soul” in the classics), or the character. The word means more than just having a mature or complete character, although that is certainly included. Also, closing the letter by saying that Paul was praying for their character seemed unkind. Rather, he is praying that they be fully equipped in every way. Some versions read “restoration,” although that too seems harsh for the ending of an epistle. The fact is that if the believers are fully equipped, they would be in the will of God and need no “restoration.”

13:11. “rejoice.” The Greek word *chairō* (#5463 χαίρω), literally meaning “rejoice,” was also used as the standard greeting; it means both “hello” and “goodbye.” In this verse the versions differ on whether Paul employs the term as a salutation (“farewell”; cp. NIV, NRSV, KJV, ASV) or as a command to “rejoice” (cp. ESV, NASB, HCSB, NET, NAB).

“Let yourselves.” The first two verbs are passive, hence “let yourselves,” which is necessary to communicate the passive. The last two are active. Importantly, the passive verbs point out that often we are our own worst enemies when it comes to godliness. We dig in our heels and refuse to let God do His perfect work in us, equipping and perfecting
us, and we do not listen to the admonition of others. We have to be humble and meek (coachable), and let ourselves be guided in godliness.

“Let yourselves be admonished.” Paul has been urging and admonishing the Corinthians through the whole letter, and now he appeals to them to let his advice into them; into their lives; to allow themselves to receive his admonition. The Greek word for “admonished” is in the passive voice, which here is permissive in meaning; “be admonished” thus means “permit yourselves to be admonished.” The NIV is not literal here but captures the meaning well with the translation, “listen to my appeal.”

The word, parakaleō (#3870 παρακαλέω), “admonished,” could also mean “be encouraged” (e.g., NET, HCSB) or “be comforted” (e.g., NASB, KJV), so although we can only bring one meaning clearly into the English, there are other meanings that are important. Nevertheless, we feel the primary meaning, given the context of the reproof throughout the epistle, is an appeal for the Corinthians to receive Paul’s exhortation.

13:14. “fellowship of the holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]
Galatians

Chapter 1

1:1. “not from men, neither through man.” This statement shows the doubt and confusion that people had about Paul and his teaching (cp. 1:7). It also points to the truth of the Gospel and its divine authorship. Critics might say, “Anyone can say they are apostles of God, but how do we know?” Paul’s words and works spoke for themselves, and when he wrote, he wrote Galatians, he wrote the words of God. It is easy to be a doubter and a critic. The honest person takes the time to check the evidence and understand the arguments, and then is meek enough to accept the conclusion and its implications.

“through Jesus Christ and God the Father.” True ministers are called, and placed in their calling by God and Jesus Christ. Every person has a calling and place in the Body given them by God and Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-26), therefore just because someone is called to a position in the Body he or she is not better than anyone else. Nevertheless, some positions in the Body carry more authority and responsibility than others when it comes to the practical aspects of running the Body here on earth. While we should not boast about the position in the Body we have, occasionally it is the will of God to tell others about the authority one has in order to maintain the order in the Body. This is such a case. Paul’s authority as an apostle needed to be recognized to keep the Body from being confused and scattered. He was the called apostle of God, not the Judaizers who were contradicting him, and it was right and appropriate for him to make that point.

“out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “from among the dead.”

1:3. “Grace to you, and peace.” The Greek text does not say, “Grace and peace to you,” even though many English versions read that way. By separating the phrases the way it does, the Bible shows us that “grace” and “peace” are not equal; instead, God’s grace is preeminent. We have peace with God because we have grace from God, offered through faith in Jesus Christ.

“God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is what we consider to be the most likely reading of the original Greek text (cp. the textual note on the NET Bible; First Edition).

1:4. “deliver.” The Greek word is exaireō (#1807 ἐξαίρεω), and it means to take something out of its place; to pluck out, draw out, or remove. Hence it can mean to rescue by virtue of drawing someone out of danger. Although many English versions have “rescue,” that seems to be a secondary meaning here. The word “rescue” means to “free from danger,” and places the emphasis on the fact that the person is out of danger. While that is certainly a part of the meaning of exaireō in this context, the force of exaireō is not just that we are out of danger, it is how we got out of danger, by being pulled out and put somewhere safe. Yes, Jesus will rescue us from this evil age, but it will be because he will pluck us out of this age and get us safely to the next age. Just like a “delivery truck” that delivers goods from one place to another, Jesus will “deliver” us out of this age and deliver us safely into the Messianic Age in new and everlasting bodies.
1:5. “for ever and ever.” The Greek phrase is *tous aiōnas tōn aiōnōn* (τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων), and it occurs 20 times in the New Testament. It can refer to time that does not end, “eternity future,” or it can refer to a time that is very long but does come to an end, depending on the context. [See Appendix 5: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”].

1:6. “the One.” This is God. God calls each person to Himself by way of the grace He offers through Jesus Christ. Sometimes Jesus calls us, but as the agent of God (cp. Rom. 1:6). God has always called people to Himself (cp. Acts 2:39; Rom. 11:29; 2 Cor. 1:9; Phil. 3:14; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:11; 1 Pet. 5:10). Some commentators say it is Christ who calls, but God calls us through His Son. This is especially clear in this verse, which speaks of “the One” who calls us “by the grace of Christ,” i.e., by the grace associated with Jesus Christ. We capitalized “One” in the REV to be helpful in showing that God is being spoken of.

“grace of Christ.” This genitive includes the genitive of relation and the genitive of origin. It refers to the grace related to Jesus Christ because it was he who made it available to us, and it refers to the grace that we have that he has given to us.

1:7. “confusing you.” The Greek word is *tarassō* (#5015 ταράσσω), and it literally refers to shaking something back and forth, agitating it or stirring it up. Thus, it means to agitate or trouble, or “to cause one inward commotion, take away his calmness of mind, disturb his equanimity; to disquiet, make restless” (BDAG), disturb, throw into confusion (Friberg). There is no way to tell from the context if the people of Galatia were actually “troubled” by the conflict between the Judaizers teaching and Paul’s, but the fact that they were abandoning the grace of Christ to go back to the Law shows that they were indeed confused.

“turn...upside down.” The Greek word is *metastrephō* (#3344 µεταστρέφω), and Thayer’s Greek Lexicon points out that from the time of Homer (c. 850 BC?, but perhaps even earlier), it means “to turn about, turn around.” It means to turn something to its opposite (Friberg). Lightfoot writes: “ Properly, ‘to reverse, to change to the opposite,’ and so [metastrephō is] stronger than diastrepsai, which is simply ‘to distort,’ ‘wrench.’” The Judaizers were trying to bring Christians back under the Law. Salvation would then no longer be just by grace through faith in Christ, but would be works based, and approval before God would be works based, not faith based. This was not merely distorting the Gospel, it was turning it upside down, making it the opposite of what it really is.

Salvation by grace is the simple, freeing, and empowering. Salvation by works is a curse (3:10) and a yoke of bondage (5:1). The need to feel that we have some part in our own salvation, or that it “only makes sense” that we have to earn it some way is so strong in most people that salvation by works has always tried to creep back in to the doctrine of the Church. Only constant vigilance and an understanding of the love and grace of God and the sacrifice of Christ will keep it at bay, and allow the true Gospel of salvation by grace to reign in people’s hearts.

1:8. “accursed.” The Greek word is *anathema* (#331 ἀνάθεμα). In its broad sense, *anathema* was used of something that had been dedicated to God. As such, something that was *anathema* could be either blessed or cursed, depending on what God wanted to do with it—the thing itself was just *anathema*; dedicated to God. In the Hebrew OT, the concept of *anathema* was represented by the Hebrew word *herem* (#02764 הֶרֶם). Something *herem* (dedicated to God), as in the NT, could be either blessed or cursed,
kept or destroyed. A field that was herem belonged to the Lord and would be maintained for His benefit (Lev. 27:21). On the other hand, if a person sacrificed to an idol god, he was herem and was then executed (Exod. 22:20). Cities that were devoted to God (herem) were destroyed (cp. Jericho; Josh. 6:17), and animals were killed and thus destroyed. When the Hebrew OT was translated into Greek about 250 BC in the version we know as the Septuagint, anathema was used of herem when the things that were dedicated were destroyed or ruined, but other words, such as aphorizō (set apart) were used when the dedication to God resulted in a blessing (cp. Lev. 27:21).

The New Testament harkens back to the wider OT use of herem, however, and thus Luke 21:5 uses anathema in the good sense of an acceptable offering to God without the implications of a curse. However, the other times anathema is used in the New Testament (Gal. 1:8, 9; Acts 23:14; Rom. 9:3; 1 Cor. 12:3; 16:22), it refers to something cursed, or handed over to God’s judgmental wrath. The word anathema has turned up in some ancient Greek sources, and in the Greek secular writings, something that was anathema was subject to destruction by the gods. Paul’s use of the word anathema here in Galatians 1:8, 9, “dedicated to God,” in this context means under His curse. The sentence is a very hard, harsh statement, and shows how serious a sin it is to pervert the Word of God.

There are some translations that have the consequence of the curse instead of the curse itself in this verse. For example, the NIV has “eternally condemned,” while the NET and GWN have “condemned to hell.” However, those interpretations are too harsh. We must keep in mind that some people who pervert the Word of God are Christians and have a guarantee of salvation through faith in Christ. We all know that just because a person has faith in Christ does not mean his doctrine is correct. Some very sincere people who have faith in Christ are nevertheless very wrong about their doctrine. These people will be blessed for their faith and have everlasting life, but the consequences of their error will be severe, although exactly how, or when God will deal with such people is not discussed in the verse or context. In the future at the judgment, certainly, but there are no doubt consequences in this life also.

In light of the fact that some people who teach error are Christians, to translate this verse as “condemned to hell” or another similar translation is too harsh. It is better to leave the word “accursed,” and understand it as being “delivered up to the judicial wrath of God” (cp. Longenecker; Word Biblical Commentary: Galatians). God knows peoples’ hearts, and is in a position to deal with people in ways that He sees fit, and the word anathema is perfect for that situation, because it means to dedicate to God for Him to do with as He sees fit.

1:9. “contrary.” The Greek preposition para (#3844 παρά) with the accusative case can mean “against, contrary to,” and that is the meaning here. God is the author of the true Gospel, but the Adversary is always generating ideas and theologies that are contrary to the truth of God. That means there are always competing theologies in the world, and it makes the promise “keep seeking and you will find” (Matt. 7:7) very important. If we will diligently seek with a humble heart, God will lead us to the truth.

1:10. “Indeed.” Although the Greek word is gar (usually translated “for”), Lenski writes, “In this instance γὰρ cannot mean ‘for’ (our versions) as either stating a reason or offering an explanation… γὰρ is but the explanatory adverb which is here used in a question in order to point to what the previous
statements make decidedly plain and thus make the question more urgent
and the desired answer more inevitable.”

Paul has just said that anyone who teaches another Good News than what he had
 taught was accursed. It is obvious that he is not trying to soften his message so it is
 acceptable to everyone. Rather, he is acting in his capacity as the apostle to whom was
 committed the information of the Sacred Secret. Thus he says, “Indeed, am I now seeking
 the favor of men…,” clearly not.

“seeking the favor.” The Greek is peithō (#3982 πείθω), which often means “to
 persuade,” (and is translated that way in the KJV), and it does not mean that in this
 context (how could someone persuade God?); it means “seek the favor of,” “try to
 please,” “try to gain the approval of.” This sentence has a harsh tone to it, but is
 necessary in order for Paul to continue his relationship with the Galatians. Other people
 were accusing Paul of not teaching the truth, and Paul is making his point very clearly.
 He is a servant (or “slave”) of Jesus Christ, and is trying to please him.

“still.” There has been a lot of theological discussion about the word “still” in this
 verse. The most obvious reference is to Paul’s earlier life as a Pharisee, when he
 advanced beyond the rest of his peers by being more zealous for the Law (1:14). Now he
does not care about that, but only acts to please the Lord.
1:11. “of human origin.” The Greek text reads, “according to man,” and in this context
that phrase means “of human origin”. That is clearly explained in the next phrase, where
he writes: “For I did not receive it from man…it came to me by revelation.”
1:12. “revelation.” The Greek compound word (noun) is apokalupsis (#602
ἀποκάλυψις), from the preposition apo (away from), and the verb kaluptō (#2572
 καλύπτω), which means “to cover,” or “to hide.” Apokalupsis means to lay bare, make
 naked, and hence is used of disclosing something, revealing something, and thus making
 something visible or known; it is also used of an appearance or manifestation. The fact
that in this verse it is a singular noun is the reason that some versions say “a revelation”
instead of just “revelation.” However, Paul did not get the Gospel he preached as a single
revelation, but rather as a series of revelations over a period of time, and from what we
know of the Epistles that were written after Galatians, he would receive more before his
life and writing ended. Therefore, the translation “a revelation” makes the verse unclear.
The singular “revelation” in this context is a collective singular, such as the word “fruit.”
Apokalupsis is also the Greek title of the Book of Revelation, which is the unveiling of
the future for us to see ahead of time, including the Tribulation, Jesus Christ coming from
heaven, the future judgments, and the Eternal Kingdom of God.

Genuine biblical “revelation” is not well understood in the Christian world, so it is
important to explain a little about it. The English word “revelation” comes from the word
“reveal,” which means “to make known.” As it is used in the Bible, the word “revelation”
refers to something made known by a spiritual source, which may be God, the Lord Jesus
Christ, the Devil, or demons. In its secular usage, “revelation” can refer to something that
has a profound impact on a person or when someone learns something that helps him
understand some aspect of life. For example, someone might say, “It was a revelation to
me to learn that my headaches could be cured by getting more sleep.” However, that is
not the way “revelation” is used in the Bible.

In order to better understand what “revelation” means in the Bible, it helps to
know what it is not. “Revelation” is not what someone learns from reading the Bible.
When the Bible was originally given, it was revelation to the prophet who wrote it down. When a person reads it, he learns, but that type of learning is not “revelation,” it is using our faculties of logic, memory, judgment, etc. “Revelation” is also not what someone feels very strongly about. When a person feels very strongly about something, there is a danger that some of those strong opinions will “leak over” into what he says comes from God. This is as true in regard to doctrine as it is for personal feelings and opinions. Lastly, revelation is not what someone knows from his five senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching). What a person observes through his senses may be accurate, but it is not “revelation.”

As it is used in the Bible, “revelation” is information that is revealed to someone by a spiritual source. The Bible places revelation into two categories, knowledge and wisdom. The manifestations of holy spirit that are revelation are “a message of knowledge” and “a message of wisdom” (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:8). It is fitting that God categorizes all revelation as either knowledge or wisdom, because all information is either knowledge or wisdom. Knowledge is the “facts concerning the case,” and is information. “Wisdom” has many aspects and in today’s language can have several definitions. However, the first definition of wisdom in the first edition of Webster’s Dictionary (published in 1828) captures its meaning: “the right use or exercise of knowledge.” Knowledge is the facts of the case; wisdom is “what to do.” The actual source of any revelation a person receives is either God, Jesus Christ, the Devil, or a demon. All revelation comes from one of these four spiritual sources. God and Jesus Christ both originate communication to people, and so does the Devil and his demons. Angels are not a “source” of revelation. They are messengers, bringing information from God or the Lord to people. Both the Hebrew word mal’ak and the Greek word aggelos (pronounced an-ge-los, hence our “angel” and not “aggel”) mean “messenger,” and angels deliver messages; there is no evidence in Scripture they are the source of any message they bring.

How is revelation communicated to people? When looking at the ways God, Jesus, the Devil or demons can give a revelation message, the first major distinction we must recognize is that it will come internally (from inside the person) or externally (from outside the person). All revelation will either come to a person externally and thus usually be perceivable by others, or it will be internal, given directly to the person’s mind.

Revelation from God or the Lord Jesus that comes to us externally can come in a multiplicity of ways. Examples of how God has communicated a message of knowledge or wisdom externally include His speaking audibly (Deut. 4:12), sending an angel (Judg. 13:3-5; Luke 1:26-37), sending a prophet (2 Sam. 12:1-12), having Balaam’s donkey give the message (Num. 22:28-30), putting dew on a fleece (Judg. 6:36-40), and writing on a wall (Dan. 5:5).

Demons also come into concretion and give revelation to people. The Devil did so to Eve in the Garden of Eden and came to Jesus Christ when he was in the desert (Matt. 4:3). Demons come into concretion many times as ghosts and apparitions of all sorts, and this often happens with mediums and necromancers. Demons are also expert at manipulating physical objects to communicate a message, and thus all forms of divination are an abomination to God (Deut. 18:10-13). Crystal ball divination, tea leaf
reading, and similar practices are all ways that demons communicate messages in the senses world.

Both God and the Devil give revelation “internally” also. In certain circumstances demons can enter into people and communicate directly to their minds (this is often known as being “possessed,” but a better translation is “demonized”). If a demon enters a person’s body and communicates with his mind, the individual will see visions, hear voices, or “just know” things. The person who has the demon may or may not know it. Psychics usually think they have a “gift,” but in actuality there is no such gift. Psychics are demonized, but are tricked into thinking they have a gift because often their intentions are good. Contact with demons is never “good,” because they blend truth with error just as the Devil did with Eve in the Garden, and they do good only to gain the opportunity to do evil.

God and Jesus Christ give much of the revelation to Christians via the gift of holy spirit. When an unsaved person becomes saved, the Lord Jesus gives him the gift of holy spirit (Acts 2:33, 38; Eph. 1:13), which then becomes an integrated part of him, filling him completely and enabling him to get revelation via the gift of holy spirit inside him. When a person has holy spirit, it is easier for God to communicate with the person, which is why in the Old Testament God put holy spirit on those with whom He wanted to communicate. Examples include: the 70 elders of Israel who helped Moses (Num. 11:17, 25); Othniel (Judg. 3:10); Gideon (Judg. 6:34); Jephthah (Judg. 11:29); Samson (Judg. 14:19); King Saul (1 Sam. 10:6); Amasai, (1 Chron. 12:18); King David (1 Chron. 28:12); Azariah (2 Chron. 15:1, 2); Jahaziel (2 Chron. 20:14); Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:20); John the Baptist (Luke 1:15); Elizabeth (Luke 1:41); and Zechariah (Luke 1:67); (cp. Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 1 Samuel 10:6, 10; 16:13; 2 Kings 2:9; 1 Chronicles 12:18; 2 Chronicles 20:14; Matthew. 3:16; and Luke 2:25).

The way that revelation via the gift of holy spirit works is that a message of knowledge or wisdom originates with God or the Lord Jesus, who communicates to the holy spirit in the Christian, which then communicates with that Christian’s mind or body. The gift of holy spirit can communicate easily with the mind, just as the body can communicate with the mind.

Revelation can come to one’s mind or to one’s body. Revelation that comes to one’s mind comes as a thought, emotion, or senses experience (i.e., a sight, sound, etc.). When revelation comes via holy spirit to one’s body, it comes as a feeling or sensation (pain, pressure, heat, cold, etc.). It is not always easy to tell whether a thought or feeling is from God or from one’s own mind or body. That is why the Bible tells us it takes “constant use” (Heb. 5:14) to be able to accurately discern whether a thought is coming into our mind from God, or whether it is one of our own thoughts. As one matures in the Lord, he learns more able to discern the revelation of God from his own thoughts, ideas, emotions, and feelings.

How revelation via the gift of holy spirit works can be charted as follows:

- God (or Jesus Christ) $\Rightarrow$ holy spirit in you $\Rightarrow$ your mind = a thought or emotion.
- God (or Jesus Christ) $\Rightarrow$ holy spirit in you $\Rightarrow$ your body = a feeling or sensation.

Once we understand that revelation usually comes as a thought or feeling we can understand why “constant use,” or “practice,” is essential if we are going to reliably
discern revelation from our own thoughts and feelings. Actually, a number of Bible versions have the word “practice” in Hebrews 5:14, including the ESV, NASB, RSV, and NRSV. The word “practice” needs to be properly understood. It is good in that it implies continual repetition, and that is what we should be doing, especially with speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, and prophecy, which are more directly under our control. The weakness of the word “practice” is that every time you operate the manifestations, you are not just “practicing,” but “in the game,” in touch with God and the Lord, and operating the power of God.

Revelation via holy spirit, a message of knowledge and a message of wisdom, comes in seven distinctive ways. You get information from the Lord the same way you gather information from the world around you. The Lord will give you revelation that you (1) see, (2) hear, (3) smell, (4) taste, or (5) touch, or sometimes you (6) “just know.” Also, the Lord may give you (7) an emotion.

When the Lord gives a person a vision, sound, smell, etc., via holy spirit, it may seem as real as if it were actually happening in the physical world, but it is happening only in the person’s mind. Other people around him are not experiencing what he is. For example, when Stephen saw heaven open and the Lord Jesus standing at God’s right hand (Acts 7:55 and 56), he “saw” it as clearly as if it had physically occurred. It was as real to him as his natural sight. Nevertheless, it was a revelation vision via the gift of holy spirit, and the others who were with Stephen did not see it. Similarly, when the Lord gives revelation smell, the one receiving the revelation will smell something, but others will not.

Once we understand that a message of knowledge and a message of wisdom come to us by (1) seeing, (2) hearing, (3) smelling, (4) tasting, (5) touching, (6) “just knowing” and (7) emotion, we can expand the chart explaining how revelation works.

- For revelation vision: God (or Jesus Christ) ⇒ holy spirit in you ⇒ your mind (the visual center) = you see a vision as if it were real.
- For revelation sound: God (or Jesus Christ) ⇒ holy spirit in you ⇒ your mind (the auditory center) = you hear a sound or voice as if it were real.

Receiving revelation works the same basic way for all seven ways God gives it and getting revelation from demons works in a very similar way. When a demon inhabits a person’s mind and stimulates his visual center, the person will see a vision. If the demon feeds information to the auditory center of the brain, he will hear voices. Revelation given via holy spirit is usually a very quick experience. It does not usually “hang around” so we can confirm it, study it, etc. God wants us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and if we do, we are focused on Him and what He tells us. Revelation is usually a “still, small voice” (1 Kings 19:12-KJV, or as the NIV states, a “gentle whisper”), coming soft and fast, so we must become practiced in recognizing it.

The Bible has many examples of revelation. Seeing: 2 Kings 6:17 (Elisha’s servant saw the angel army). Hearing: 1 Samuel 9:15 and 16 (KJV), “Now the LORD had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying....” Many English translations leave out the part about Samuel’s ear, despite it being an important part of the biblical record and clearly stated in the Hebrew text. Taste: 2 Kings 4:40: The prophets put some stew in their mouths and knew it was “death.” That is a good example of how revelation by taste works. In this case, God gave him a message of knowledge by taste. The prophets did not need a message of wisdom because once God showed them the stew was
“death,” their human wisdom could guide them. **Touch:** Jeremiah 1:9, The LORD touched Jeremiah’s mouth. In Mark 5:30 Jesus felt the power leave when his garment was touched. Sometimes when a person is ministering healing to another, the minister will actually feel the other person’s pain by revelation. **Knowing:** Matthew 9:4, “Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said….” Jesus “knew” their thoughts by revelation. There are times when the message of knowledge or wisdom we receive comes in the form of “just knowing” what is going on. **Emotion:** 1 Samuel 11:6, “When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he burned with anger.” Ezekiel 3:14 is another example of a prophet feeling strong emotion due to the spirit of God. Just as sometimes revelation is “just knowing,” sometimes it comes as an emotion. Emotion is very important in the life of a godly Christian, and God can give us a revelation emotions, or augment an emotion we already have.

It takes great maturity to handle revelation well. There is nothing more exciting and more fulfilling than to know we are in touch with God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and that they are working in us. All of us need to keep in mind the Scriptural admonition that to whom much is given, much shall be required (Luke 12:48 KJV). When a person is given revelation, it is “much” in the eyes of God, and we should all be prepared to do much. Obviously, we are all examples for others, so living a holy and obedient life is fundamental. We should also be prepared to obey whatever God tells us. Revelation is not a game of “if we like it, we’ll do it.” We must be prepared to do whatever He tells us.

Mature Christians do not think “all,” or even most, of our thoughts, feelings, or emotions are from the Lord. As humans, we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14), and God has equipped us to deal with life without His minute-by-minute guidance, especially on small matters (though He can and does help us with small matters). The Bible says we need to practice so we can know which thoughts and emotions are revelation and which are not, and there would be no such directive if all our thoughts and emotions were revelation.

When a Christian does receive revelation, he should be wise in speaking about it. Some people seem to need the approval of others, or think it will elevate them in the Christian community if they constantly say, “The Lord showed me…” or “The Lord told me….” It is rarely the right thing to do, or wise, for a Christian to parade the revelation he has received in front of others. If the Lord really did give him revelation, it will show up in the form of his living a joyful and victorious life, and people will be aware that he is walking by revelation without him constantly telling them. [For more information on the revelation manifestations, see commentary on 1 Cor. 12:8].

**“from Jesus Christ.”** The Greek is a genitive, “of Jesus Christ,” but it is clear from the context that this is a genitive of origin because Paul is telling how he received his information. He says it did not come from a person, nor was he taught it, as if in a school or under a specific tutor or teacher. Instead, he says he received it by revelation, and in that context the revelation he received was “of Jesus,” or better in English, “from Jesus.” Thus, Paul got his information in a fashion somewhat similar to the way the Apostle John got the book of Revelation. God taught it to Jesus, then Jesus taught it (Rev. 1:1). In John’s case, Jesus taught an angel who then taught John, but Jesus taught Paul directly, with no angel intermediary.

**1:13. “intensely.”** The Greek is huperbolē (ὑπερβολή), from which we get the English word “hyperbole,” or exaggeration. **Huperbolē** refers to something being done to
an extreme degree, or even excess. English versions translate it various ways, trying to catch the essence: “an extreme degree” (HCSB); “violently” (ESV, NRSV); “savagely” (NET), “intensely” (NIV); “exceedingly” (YLT). We felt the word “intensely” captured the essence of Paul’s attack on the Church (cp. Acts 8:1, which speaks of a great persecution of the Church).

“destroy.” The Greek word is portheō (#4199 πορθέω), and it means to overthrow something; to destroy it. Even though there are other Greek words for “destroy,” we felt that was the best translation here. Paul was trying to “overthrow” the Church, but typically when we use the English word “overthrow,” it infers that the over thrower will take over the position of what was overthrown. For example, a revolutionary overthrows a government to replace it with something else. That would not be the case here. Paul was not trying to take over what the Church was doing, he already felt the Temple and the Jewish institutions were the proper way to serve God, and the Church was just a lie. He just wanted to destroy it.

1:20. “(In what I am writing to you...).” This verse clearly displays Paul’s love for the Galatians and his passionate desire that they believe the truth of what he was saying. This is the figure of speech Interjectio (Interjection), a form of parenthesis thrown into the text to express feeling (Cp. Bullinger, Figures). In this case, the apostle Paul has deep feelings for the Galatians, many of whom have been turned against him (Cp. 1:6; 3:1; etc.), and so he pleads with a volume that leaps off the page, “before God, I am not lying!” The addition is unnecessary to the context, and so it is parenthetical. If the addition were a necessary part of the context and not parenthetical, the figure is called Ecphonesis or “Exclamation” (See Bullinger, Figures of Speech).

“Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. It is the figure of speech asterismos (cp. Bullinger; Figures), and it adds special emphasis here for two reasons. The first is that this is the only place in Galatians that it occurs, and the second is that the verse itself is already the figure interjectio, and so to place an asterismos inside the interjectio adds special emphasis. For more on “Look,” see commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

1:21. “Syria and Cilicia.” After Paul had spent time with the apostles in Jerusalem, the Grecian Jews tried to kill him (Acts 9:26-29). Paul was stubborn enough to stay in the fight at Jerusalem at the risk of his life, but the Lord was gracious to him and appeared to him in a vision and told him to leave (Acts 22:17-21), so the believers took him to Caesarea (the port of Israel) and sent him back home to Tarsus (Acts 9:30). On his trip to Tarsus the boat would have almost certainly followed the coastline, most did, and thus he would have stopped in Syria, and then gotten off in Cilicia, the province where Tarsus was located.

Chapter 2

2:2. “revelation.” For what “revelation” is, see commentary on Galatians 1:12 and 1 Corinthians 12:8.

“held in high regard.” The Greek verb is dokeō (#1380 δοκέω), and when it is intransitive, as here, it means, to seem or appear to be; to be recognized as something or to have a reputation for something. Thus this verse is saying that there were people in the
church at Jerusalem who “seemed to be,” or “appeared to be,” or “were recognized as” or “were reputed to be,” pillars (cp. Gal. 2:9), or “were held in high regard.” God is not saying these people were pillars, but that they “seemed to be,” or were “regarded to be,” pillars.

It is important that we see what God is trying to tell us here, because He is practically shouting. The word dokeō appears 4 times in 8 verses, all of them referring to the leaders in Jerusalem. If we hear what God is saying, He is not acknowledging James and the others as the true leaders of the Church, but rather saying that they had a reputation for being the leaders, and/or seemed like the leaders. Hendrickson says that the word dokeō “implies a degree of resentment” (New Testament Commentary). However, we must remember that Galatians is not Paul’s words, but the words of Jesus Christ. It was God and Jesus who were stating in Galatians that those people who had taken the reins of leadership only seemed to be leaders.

We know from Acts and the Epistles that Jesus Christ was working powerfully in Paul, giving him revelation of the Good News to the Church of God. By the time Paul went to Jerusalem “fourteen years after” his conversion (Paul’s conversion is the most probable starting point of the fourteen years), it would have almost certainly been between 44 and 47 AD. Galatians itself was likely written in 48 AD, and so by then the “leaders” at Jerusalem were God’s true leaders by reputation only. That is not to say that they did not do good things for God, only that when it came to God’s program for the Christian Church and bringing Jews and Gentiles into One Body, and moving away from the regulations of the Law, they had not caught that vision; they were stuck in their old ways.

The majority of the commentators correctly assess that the Jews, who were contending with Paul about things like making Gentile converts without them being circumcised, wanted James and Peter to side with them in the argument, and thus elevated them over Paul as the “real leaders.” In that sense, James, Peter, etc., were “of reputation,” and “held in high regard.” However, most of the commentators are blind to the fact that James, Peter, and the other leaders in Jerusalem thought they themselves were God’s chosen leaders for the Christian Church even though they had missed what God and Jesus were doing in the Church through Paul’s ministry.

We need to be aware that the “James” in Galatians 2:9 is not the Apostle James who was the brother of the Apostle John (Matt. 4:21), but was James the brother of Jesus. James did not believe that his half-brother Jesus was the promised Messiah until after Jesus was raised from the dead. He did not believe by the Feast of Tabernacles, less than a year before Jesus’ death (John 7:5), and the evidence is that he still did not believe when Jesus was dying on the cross, which is why Jesus told the Apostle John to take care of Jesus’ mother Mary (John 19:27). Historians have concluded that after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his family and showed them that he was the Messiah, and then Mary and her sons became part of the group that waited in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14). James is not mentioned as any kind of leader in the church at Jerusalem until Acts 12:17, after the Apostle James was killed. It is quite possible that the persecution of Herod Agrippa (Acts 12) was so severe that all the Apostles left Jerusalem, and Jesus’ half-brother James became a ranking elder. By the counsel in Acts 15, he seemed to be leading the Jerusalem church.
By the time Galatians was written, Paul was receiving the revelation to the Church and writing Church Epistles, while the church at Jerusalem was still focused on the Law (Gal. 2:2ff; Acts 21:20). We need to pay close attention to Galatians 2:6, because it tells us that the leaders in Jerusalem who were held in high regard had been the genuine leaders in the past, but not now. God says this by saying they had once been held in high regard: “whatever they were at one time….” In other words, at one time, years ago perhaps, they had been true leaders, but now they were only regarded as leaders by the people. That rings true to what we read in the Bible. There is no doubt that people like Peter had been the true leaders of the Church. But for whatever reason, as the Christian Church developed and God moved powerfully to include the Gentiles, James, Peter, and the other leaders in Jerusalem, resisted God. That is understandable, because they were proud of their Jewish heritage and loved the Temple and the way it centralized religion and worship, but the fact that their actions are understandable does not make them right. God was including the Gentiles and moving away from the Temple, and the Church leaders needed to respond to that but did not.

The Jews who held to the Law ignored and refuted Paul’s teaching and God’s move to establish the Christian Church and move away from Israel as the “chosen people.” By the time Paul went to Jerusalem as per Galatians 2:1, though James, Peter, and John were there, false brothers had infiltrated the Church (Gal. 2:4), and the leaders there only seemed important and seemed to be pillars (Gal. 2:2, 6, 9). It is possible that later, when Peter interacted with Paul at Antioch (cp. Gal. 2:11-21), he “saw the light” and moved away from Jerusalem. In fact, it is possible that all the original apostles did. It is even possible that they were mostly gone by Acts 12, because only Peter is mentioned at the counsel in Acts 15, and by the time Paul came to Jerusalem in Acts 21, only James is specifically mentioned. Thankfully, the Jews in Jerusalem gave Paul and Barnabas official permission to go the Gentiles (Gal. 2:9), which they did.


“added nothing to my message.” The Greek reads, “added nothing to me,” but the context is what Paul was teaching and so “to my message” seems to be the correct thought. Some commentaries think it refers to the Apostles adding things for Paul to do in his ministry, but if that is included in the meaning, it seems to be a minor part.


2:14. “…why do you compel the Gentiles to live as the Jews live?” We stop Paul’s quotation here at the end of verse 14. The NIV takes the quote all the way down through verse 21, however, it seems unlikely that Paul meant to record this much of the conversation to Peter.

2:15. “Gentile sinners.” The national attitude of the Jews was such that they considered all Gentiles sinners, just as the Greeks considered all non-Greeks “barbarians.” The Galatian Christians would recognize that Paul was speaking of the natural prejudice in the Jewish culture, and not saying that all Gentiles were actually sinners.

2:16. “knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.” The Greek text here is stronger than the English. The words translated “but” are ean me, and properly mean “except.” Thus the Greek carries the strong sense: “…a man is not justified by the works of the law; a man is not justified except through faith in Jesus Christ….”
“faith in Jesus Christ.” This is the objective genitive. See commentary on Romans 3:22.

2:18. “…I prove myself to be a transgressor.” If the Christian rebuilds the Law in his life, then by doing so he proves that he was a transgressor by tearing it down (i.e., not living by it) in the first place. We are either justified by works or by faith, not by both.

2:19. “For through law I died to law, that I might live to God.” This is a very difficult verse. Lightfoot (St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians) seems to understand it well. First, in the Greek text there is no definite article with “law.” It is not “the Law,” but just “law.” Thus “law” in this verse does not refer specifically to the Mosaic Law, but to law in general, including rules, regulations, and even what we refer to as moral law. To understand why “through law I died to law,” we must understand the progression one is in once there is a law. First, law creates sin (“sin is not reckoned where there is no law” Rom. 5:13). Second, law creates in me a knowledge or awareness of sin (“I would not have known what sin was except through the law” Rom. 7:7). Third, I sin. We all have sin nature, and perfect obedience is impossible, so we sin (Rom. 3:23; 8:3). Fourth, law punishes sin. In fact, the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Law creates and reveals sin, but then provides no remedy for it. Man is hopelessly lost with no way to keep the law. How can we escape? The only way is to throw off the law altogether (die to law) and be justified through Christ. We are not justified in God’s sight by law, we are justified by faith apart from law. That is what the context says happens.

Chapter 3


3:2. “did you receive the spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith?” This question is the figure of speech eirōnia (irony; sarcasm), because the Galatians obviously knew the answer. The question was not asked to gain information but rather to make his point. (Cp. Bullinger, Figures of Speech).

“hearing with faith.” This is a difficult genitive, and the scholars are in considerable disagreement about it, calling it an objective genitive, a subjective genitive, a genitive of possession, etc. For one thing, the Greek word akoē (#189 ἀκοή) can mean “hearing or listening to” or that which is heard or listened to, i.e. the message or the news. Thus “listening with faith” and “the news about faith” (and more) are possible. Lenski refers to it as a genitive of possession: being made to hear what belongs to the faith. Wuest refers it to as a genitive of possession: being made to hear what belongs to the faith. Wuest says it is the message announcing faith, which is close to Meyer, who says it is the news concerning the faith. Expositor’s says listening in faith. Some say it is faith in the news announced. The context seems to be very helpful, because it refers to God working in the life of a believer, and how does that happen? By faith. In fact, one can hear and not have faith, and thus not receive and be rejected (Heb. 4:2). One must hear with faith.


“in connection with you.” This is the “in” in the sense of sphere and relation. In that light, it can be translated, “in connection with” or even sometimes, “in union with” (see
commentary on Rom. 6:3; Eph. 1:3; Col. 1:17). The important meaning of *en* for the study of this verse is that it can mark a close association, or a limit. The statement, “in connection with you” is made because it was God’s direct promise to Abraham that in connection with him everyone on earth (specifically, the “nations,” which we know as Gentiles, but at that time there were no Jews, only Gentiles), would be blessed. We later find out that God was certainly referring to Abraham’s descendant, the Christ (Gen. 22:18), but also because God would bless Abraham because of his faith, and that blessing would apply to all people.

3:12. Quoted from Leviticus 18:5.

“instead of.” This is a rare, but recognized, use of the preposition *huper*, which is often in these cases translated “on behalf of.” Noting the use of *huper* as “instead of” in this passage, A. T. Robertson writes: “There are a few other passages where ὑπὲρ [huper] has the resultant notion of ‘instead,’ and only violence to the context can get rid of it. One of these is Galatians 3:13” (A Grammar of the Greek New Testament, Hodder and Stoughton, p. 631). We were under the curse of the Law, and thus destined to be the subjects of its penalty, which is death. However, Jesus Christ became the curse instead of us, and died, hung on a tree, fulfilling the Law and ending the curse for those people who accept him as Lord and thus come into union with him. When he died, we died with him (Rom. 6:5-8).

3:14. “so that.” It is truly God’s way, and God’s irony, which makes no sense to the world, that the greatest blessing, the promise of salvation and the power of the gift of holy spirit, would come by way of the greatest sacrifice, shame, and degradation: Christ becoming a cursed thing for us. The greatest curse brought the greatest blessing.

The two purpose clauses in the verse, both starting with the Greek word *hina*, “so that,” are coordinate, they make two different points, based on the fact that Christ had “become a curse for us.”

“the blessing of Abraham.” Abraham was promised the land (Gen. 13:14-17; 15:7), but that is not primarily the blessing spoken of here. The blessing in this verse is the one spoken of in Galatians 3:8, five verses earlier, that the Gentiles would be saved by faith. That was one of the great promises foretold in Genesis 12:3, “In you all the nations will be blessed” (see commentary on verse 8). We should keep in mind, however, that the result of everlasting life through faith was that we would get to participate in what God promised Abraham, which was the land (cp. also 3:18, where “the inheritance” would involve the land).

“through faith.” When a person has faith in Jesus, he gets “born again” (1 Pet. 1:3, 23), and what is born inside him is the gift of holy spirit. That is why this verse says we get the promise of the spirit by faith. At the moment a person has faith in Jesus Christ, he gets born again and has the guarantee of salvation, and also receives the gift of holy spirit [For more on faith, see commentary on Eph. 2:8].

“the spirit that was promised.” The Greek text reads, “the promise of the spirit,” and this is a genitive of apposition, and means, “the promise, that is to say, the spirit,” or more colloquially, “the spirit that was promised.”
If we were to expand verse 14 to include the concepts in it, we could end up with something like: “Jesus became a curse instead of us, so that via our union with Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham, that anyone could be declared righteous in the sight of God by trust (and be saved!), might come to the Gentiles, and so that by trust we might receive the gift of holy spirit that had been promised.” [For more on the promised holy spirit, see commentary on Ephesians 1:13 and John 7:39].


3:19. “because of transgressions.” The Law was not added in order that transgressions would come. See commentary on Romans 5:20. Hence, the word charin (#5484 χάριν), should be translated as “because,” as most versions do. The word can also be used to show purpose, “indicating the goal” (BDAG, def. a) and could be translated “for the sake of.” But we feel, along with most translators, charin here is “indicating the reason” (BDAG, def. b), that the Law was added “on account of” transgressions.

3:22. “The promise” is metonymy for what was promised.


3:29. “of what was promised.” The Greek phrase is kata epanggelia (κατὰ ἐπαγγελία), and it is traditionally translated, “according to the promise.” However, epigraphical evidence shows us that the phrase is not saying that we are heirs “according to the promise,” as if there was a promise that we would be heirs (“I promise you will be an heir”). Rather, the Greek idiom means that we are heirs of what was promised (“I promise the land, and you will inherit it”) (cp. text note in The Source New Testament by Nyland). Thus, The Kingdom New Testament, by N. T. Wright, translates the phrase as, “You stand to inherit the promise.” Richard Longenecker in The Word Biblical Commentary gets the sense of the phrase as “heirs of God’s covenantal promise.” James Dunn gets the sense of the whole passage in Galatians:

The claim of 3:7, “Know then that those from faith, they are Abraham’s sons,” had been startling. Now Paul has completed his attempt to justify it, with an argument outrageous in its bold simplicity. To believe “into Christ Jesus” (2:16), to be “baptized into Christ” (3:27), was to become so identified with Christ as to share in his status, not only before God (“sons of God”—3:26), but also in relation to Abraham, as Abraham’s seed, and therefore participant in the promise given to Abraham and his seed (3:16). (James Dunn, The Epistle to the Galatians).

The Christian, whether Jew or non-Jew, gets to share in the promise that God made to Abraham because he is saved and is “in Christ.”

Chapter 4

4:3. “the basic principles of the world.” In the context, the basic principles of the world is the Law. Note Robertson, who notes Lightfoot.

4:4. “the fullness of the time.” The phrase means, the full or complete time, i.e., the proper time. God had been at work in history for many centuries preparing for His Son and the spread of the Good News. The almost universal knowledge of the Greek language made it easy to spread the Gospel even via letters, and preserve it in scrolls, and shortly thereafter, books. The world was prepared for the Gospel in written form. Roman roads
and Roman law helped the spread of the Gospel in spite of its intolerance of it. What happened to Paul was a good example: his Roman citizenship and Roman justice helped him in most of his travels, including Philippi (Acts 16:37-40), Corinth (Acts 18:15), in Jerusalem (Acts 22:25), in Caesarea (Acts 25:12), and in Rome, where he was released after two years (Acts 28:30). The world was prepared for people to travel with the Gospel and teach it everywhere. Throughout the Roman Empire there were miserable conditions, tyranny, oppression, slavery, and profligate behavior. Centuries of war, destruction, and enslavement of the losers, had devastated the empire. Entertainment had become murder. The world was ready for a Savior. Greek and Roman philosophy had proven itself powerless to stop the downward spiral of the human mind, soul, and spirit, and Greco-Roman religion was “powerless, and worse than powerless, in checking their bad propensities” (Life and Epistles of St. Paul, p. 10). The world was ready for enlightenment and true purpose. There are other things, of course, and we cannot hope to understand all the things God had in mind when He said that it was the proper time for His Son to come into the world.

4:5. “in order that.” The two “in order that” clauses show that the prior condition to being adopted was that Christ redeemed those who were under the law. Without Christ paying the redemption price, no adoption would be possible.

“the adoption.” See commentary on Ephesians 1:5.

4:6. “‘Abba’ (Father)” The Greek text preserves the Aramaic transliteration, abba, which is the word “father” (the Aramaic is in the vocative voice, as if calling out to God), and then the noun, patēr (#3962 πατήρ; pronounced pä-tair’), which means “father.” It is often taught in Christian circles that abba is a term of special endearment for “father,” but that is not technically correct. Abba is the standard word for “father” in the Aramaic language. However, before Jesus introduced God as the “Father,” and before Christians became children of God via the New Birth, the Jews would have considered it inappropriate, presumptuous, and even wrong to call God, “Father.”

In the Old Testament, the holiness of God kept Him separate from people, which is why even the High Priest could only go into His presence in the Holy of Holies one day each year, and even then only when covered by a blood sacrifice and with enough incense burning that it would have been difficult or impossible to see clearly in that dark room. So although the word abba does not in and of itself convey a special closeness, when we call God “Father” in any language, it reveals a closeness in the relationship that had not existed before the time of Christ.

As for the phrase, “Abba, Father,” there are several ideas as to what it means and how to translate it. The first and perhaps the most simple is that because Jesus, speaking Aramaic, called God, “Abba,” and because the Apostles and Paul were Hebrews, the term Abba came into the vocabulary of the early Church as an expression of their new-found closeness to God. In that sense, “Abba” would express their closeness to God and patēr would be the explanation of what Abba meant, which was needed by those Gentiles who were newly introduced to the Christian faith. Understanding the phrase that way, the translation in the REV, “‘Abba’ (Father),” is a good rendition. This explanation also fits with what we see in the New Testament. For example, when “Abba, Father” appears in Mark 14:36 in Jesus’ prayer to God in the Garden of Gethsemane, we know that Jesus did not call God “Abba” in his native Aramaic and then translate it into Greek. In his Gospel,
Mark added *patēr* after the word *Abba* as an explanation for his audience, which by then included a large number of Greeks.

There are also scholars who agree that because Jesus used *abba* of his Father, the term *abba* came to be used by the early Church. However, they think that when people were teaching or describing Jesus’ relationship to God, they would use the term *abba*, and then immediately follow it with *patēr* so the audience would understand. Then, over time as the stories were retold, the phrase “*Abba, Father*” came into Christianity as a kind of liturgical formula, and it was sometimes used in prayers. Even today some Christians start their prayers with, “*Abba, Father.*” According to this explanation, the translation, “*Abba, Father*” would be correct, and the doubling of the word “Father,” especially expressing it in different languages, would be the result of the people’s love for, and emotion about, God.

It is difficult to say which of these two understandings about “*Abba, Father*” is correct as it applies here in Galatians, but since it seems clear that in Christ’s prayer in Gethsemane he would have not have said, “*Abba, Father,*” but rather just “*Abba,*” and that “Father” was added later as an explanation, we believe that is good evidence for continuing that pattern in Galatians 4:6 and Romans 8:15.

“*Father.*” See commentary on Romans 8:15.

4:7. **“Since.”** The Greek word “if” can be translated “since” if there is no doubt about the subject. Note NIV on Ephesians 3:2. Although the KJV reads “heir of God through Christ,” the best texts omit Christ and the reason for its addition is clear. Saying we are heirs “through God” leaves much for the reader to ponder. We are heirs through “*the work of*” God, “*the son of God,*” etc.

4:8. **“not gods by nature” (Cp. Wuest).**

4:9. **“Are turning.”** See Robertson.

4:11. **“in vain.”** Paul was not saying that the Galatians were not saved (there is nothing about salvation in the context), but rather that he had spent all that time turning them from the Law, all to no purpose, because they went right back to it.

4:13. **“infirmity.”** The Greek is *astheneia,* (#769 ἀσθένεια), “weakness, illness.” Paul preached where he did for the first time because of an infirmity. Many guesses have been made as to what this was, but the simple fact is that we do not know.

Some commentators have suggested that the translation should be, “despite my bodily illness,” instead of “because of my bodily illness.” Lenski points out that all the texts have the phrase with the accusative, and thus “because of” is correct. He points out that the proposal to have “despite…” is “due to the supposition that when Paul came from Paphos and landed at Perga and then continued on to Pisidian Antioch in Galatia, he had not intended to stop here but purposed to go on past this country [of Galatia]. But whither did he intend to go?” Lenski then shows how the geography is such that it seems clear that Paul always intended to go to Galatia, but likely not as fast as he was seemingly forced to go by his illness, which was likely helped by the higher altitudes of central Galatia. If he had not been sick, he may have stayed on and around the coast longer.

Some people believe that this sickness Paul refers to is the “thorn in the flesh” of 2 Corinthians 12:7. That cannot be because Paul’s “thorn” was permanent, while the sickness he mentions in Galatians got better.

4:14. **“was a temptation to you in my flesh.”** Paul’s sickness in Galatia is mentioned nowhere but here. It was a temptation to the Galatians, because no one wants to attend to
4:17. “Shut you out.” The Greek is general. The Judaizers wanted to isolate the Galatians from Paul and his companions, and thus from Christ (Gal. 5:4).

4:23. “according to the flesh.” Abraham had a promise from God that he would be the father of many nations. When Sarah got too old to have children, Abraham relied on an old Mesopotamian custom that allowed the husband to have sexual intercourse with a slave or servant, and the child would be considered the child of the barren couple. Thus Abraham had Ishmael through Hagar (Gen. 16). Nevertheless, God clarified His promise, making it clear that Sarah would have a son (Gen. 17:16). This took faith in God and His promise, because Sarah was now beyond the age of childbearing (Gen. 17:17; 18:11).

4:27. Quoted from Isaiah 54:1.


Chapter 5


“cut yourselves off.” This is the translation of the Greek verb, katargeō (#2673 καταργέω), which is used more than 25 times in the NT, and has many meanings, differing according to the context. As to this verse, Lenski writes: “The basic idea is, “to make idle, inactive” so that nothing results; the preposition [apo] adds the idea that this action removes “away from Christ,” separates us from him...the AV [KJV] translates the sense...well.” The King James Version says, “Christ is become of no effect unto you.” Darby translates the verse: “Ye are deprived of all profit from the Christ as separated from him....”

The verb is in the passive voice, letting us know that being separated from Christ, or having Christ become of no profit, has happened to the Galatians. However, it is clear that they have done this to themselves by the decisions they have made, and God has had to respect their freewill decisions. Thus, the Moffat Bible has captured the sense of the verse very well: “You are for justification by the Law? Then you are done with Christ, you have deserted grace.” The NRSV gets the sense well, and keeps the play on words in the translation as well: “You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ.”

It is important to translate katargeō properly here, although the translation considered “proper” cannot be divorced from the inherent bias of the translator. We firmly believe that once a person has confessed Jesus as Lord (Rom. 10:9) and is “born again,” he has a guarantee of salvation and his everlasting life is never in doubt (see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:23).

Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon notes that katargeō can, in some contexts, mean to be severed from, separated from, discharged from, or loosed from. Since a Christian’s salvation is never in doubt, we cannot be “separated from,” or “cut off from,” or “severed from” Christ in an absolute sense, but we can be in a practical sense. However, because
we want to translate the meaning of the text as clearly as possible, simply using “severed from” in this verse introduces an ambiguity that can be avoided by a clearer translation. There is another factor to consider in the translation, however, and that is the word play that is occurring in the context. Paul is addressing legalism and being in bondage to the Law, but he is using the example of circumcision—the cutting off of the foreskin. So in verse three he says if a person lets himself be circumcised (“cut off,” so to speak), then he will be cut off from Christ, and thus the work of Christ in freeing us from the Law will be of no effect. We feel we can make the verse quite clear and preserve the word play by saying the Galatians had cut themselves off from Christ.

It is possible to be a Christian and lose sight of the work of Christ and what he has done for us. We are righteous in Christ, holy in Christ, redeemed in Christ, etc., all because of our faith in Christ, not our “goodness” or obedience to the Law. If we begin to rely on the Law or good works again, we are “cut off” from all the success we have in Christ, and, like those under the Law, are doomed to fail because human efforts will never attain the standards of God. It is not that we lose our salvation or are “severed” from the Body of Christ if we return to the Law, but we lose the value of the work of Christ—it is if he never came and accomplished anything on the cross.

5:5. “the righteousness for which we hope.” The righteousness of hope (literal) is a genitive of apposition. The hope, that is to say, righteousness. The unusual use of the genitive of apposition in English makes a clearer translation important.


“faith working through love.” Cp. NIV; BDAG’s translation. Literally, the phrase reads, “faith working itself through love.” The translation “expressing itself” comes from energeō (#1754 ἐνεργέω) in the middle voice. The middle voice means the action is brought on itself, hence, faith works on itself: This is important because for faith to count, it need not perform works external to itself—faith works itself out. Hence the translation “faith expressing itself.” Properly translated, this verse says that true faith inside a Christian will express itself in love.

Roman Catholic doctrine takes the verb “works” to be in the passive voice (See discussion in Lenski). In which case it would mean the only thing that counts is faith “having been worked” by love. If this were true, faith would not be complete in itself, it would need love and good works to give it its form. The Roman Catholics teach that it is love that makes faith work. However, this interpretation does not fit with the context. First of all, the verse itself is stating that outward works (circumcision) do not count for anything. And secondly, the thesis of the entire book of Galatians is that works will not gain salvation, but faith alone is necessary (e.g., 2:16; 3:2-11, 22-26).

5:12. “I wish.” The Greek word ophelon (#3785 ὀφελόν) is used to express a fruitless wish. This is the figure of speech hyperbole, exaggeration.

5:13. “serve.” The Greek is the verb douleuō (#1398 δουλεύω) from the noun doulos, slave. It means to perform the duties of a slave, or serve as, or like, a slave. One can so love another that he pushes himself, serving like a slave, but out of love, and that is the meaning in this context. It would not be wrong to translate this verse, “but through love, serve one another as slaves,” or even, as the NRSV, “through love become slaves to one another.”

5:16. **“walk by the spirit.”** The word “walk” is a Semitic idiom, meaning “live by” (cp. Thayer’s Lexicon).

There is no definite article “the” in the Greek text but we supply it because the verse makes more sense in English that way. The “the” is not needed in the Greek text before the words “holy spirit” because the preposition en can make the pneuma (spirit) definite without the article. In this case, the Greek text does not have a definite article before “holy spirit.” The preposition en is before the phrase which means it can be understood as if the “the” was actually present. In Greek, if a preposition governs a noun, it is the context that determines whether the noun is definite or not, and therefore whether there should be a “the” or not in the English translation. Daniel Wallace writes in *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (p. 247): “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.” A. T. Robertson writes: “...the article is not the only means of showing that a word is definite. ...The context and history of the phrase in question must decide. ...[As for prepositional phrases], these were also considered definite enough without the article.” Robertson then cites some examples that use ek (Grammar of the Greek New Testament, pp. 790-792).

The word “spirit” refers to the new divine nature that is born inside each Christian at the time he is saved. This is clear because it is contrasted with “flesh,” which in this case mainly refers to the old nature and the impulses produced by it, although the actual flesh has influences also, such as hunger or sleep, which may need to be interrupted in order to fully do the will of God. God created people in such a way that their will can control their behavior, and the good Christian learns to live by the new, godly nature created inside him.

5:17. **“the flesh.”** The Greek is sαρx (#4561 σάρξ) and translated literally as “flesh,” however, in the NT the word “flesh” has a number of different meanings. It can simply refer to the flesh, the physical skin and muscle of both man and animals (Luke 24:39); the physical body as a whole (Acts 2:26); or a living creature (Matt. 24:22). It can also refer to our animal nature and weakness as humans without any suggestion of depravity (Mark 14:38). This can manifest itself when we are tired, hungry, etc. It is not sin to sleep or eat, but we can give in to what our “flesh” desires when we should not, and that can become sin. The word “flesh” can also refer to our sin nature, or our bodies driven by our natural desires of the flesh and our sin nature as well. That is the case in this verse. The word “flesh” mostly points to our sin nature (note the context), but can also involve just our fleshly desires. [For more on our inherent sin nature, see commentary on Rom. 7:17].

**“Indeed.”** The Greek is gαρ (#1063 γάρ), and is most often translated “for” and understood to communicate a reason for something. However, there are other uses of gαρ, and this case is what some scholars refer to as the “confirmatory gar,” which confirms and clarifies what has already been stated. Meyer is correct when he says, “It introduces a pertinent further illustration of what has just been said” (Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament). For more on the confirmatory gαρ, see commentary on Romans 9:3.

**“with the result that.”** The spirit and the flesh oppose each other, battling within us, with the result that we do not do what we want. The last clause in this verse is hina (#2443 ἢνα), “so that,” with the verb thelō (#2309 θέλω), “to want” in the subjunctive mood; this construction is forming a result clause, which expresses the unintentional consequences of an action (see commentary on Matthew 2:15; “resulting in...what was spoken being fulfilled”). It is the result of our internal struggle between our flesh and our
spirit that we do not do what we want. E. W. Bullinger noted that the new, holy, nature of the Christian “necessitates conflict with the Old Nature: and this conflict is therefore the best assurance that we are ‘in Christ’” (Bullinger, *The Giver and His Gifts*, p. 18).

Bullinger felt that the best assurance a person had of being a Christian was the constant struggle between the desire to do evil and the desire to do good that raged within him, and testified that non-Christians who do not have a new holy nature have no such struggle. Although it is certainly true that some Christians have a huge internal struggle between doing good and evil, many non-Christians who are raised in moral environments struggle with good and evil, and many Christians have given in to their evil impulses for so long they no longer acutely feel any internal battle between good and evil.

There are three “desires” or “wills” involved here. The flesh, the spirit, and “you.” We may desire something, but if it is worldly, we will not be able to participate without becoming slaves to the flesh (God has designed life so that people cannot give themselves over to worldly pleasure without consequences). We may want the fruit of the spirit (joy, peace, etc.) without disciplining ourselves to walk by the spirit. That will not happen either. We have to realize we need to get to the point we want what the spirit wants if we are to be truly successful and blessed in this life and the next.

5:19. “Obvious” as many versions. Open to all. Lenski even says “public.” Not that someone involved in the works of the flesh works them “obviously, in the open,” but that the works themselves openly declare the flesh and its desires.

“Adultery.” Although in the KJV, it was a late textual addition and is not included in most modern versions or the REV.

“sexual immorality.” Sexual immorality is a subject covered in quite a few verses in the New Testament. The Greek word is *porneia* (#4202 πορνεία; pronounced por-nā'-ah). There are a number of sexual sins included in the concept of *porneia*, but the most basic is sexual intercourse outside of marriage. The ten volume *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* has 17 pages on *porneia* and related words. This extensive work shows that the meaning of *porneia* usually meant illicit sexual intercourse, but over time was broadened to include illicit sexual behavior of all types. There are, however, other biblical words that more tightly define other ungodly sexual behaviors. For example, though *porneia* is sometimes used of adultery in the New Testament, there is another word that specifically refers to adultery. The basic meaning of “sexual intercourse outside of marriage” never left the word *porneia*, even when it was broadened culturally to include other sexual misconduct. The narrower meaning of *porneia* is reflected in versions like the *KJV* that use “fornication” instead of something more inclusive like “sexual immorality,” but the broader definition of *porneia* in the New Testament usually makes “sexual immorality” a preferred translation.

A study of the Greek Old Testament [the Septuagint] shows that Greek-speaking people used the word *porneia* in its standard sense of sexual intercourse between a man and a woman who were not married to each other. A study of the New Testament gives the same evidence, that the usual or standard use of *porneia* was fornication or adultery, not other types of sexual misconduct. Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 list *porneia* when speaking of reasons for divorce. In John 8:41, the Pharisees upbraid Christ by saying, “we were not born of fornication [porneia],” referring to the fact that Mary was thought to have had intercourse before she was married. 1 Corinthians 5:1 uses the word *porneia* for the
sexual contact between a man and his father’s wife. In lists where sexual sin of all kinds is being cited as wrong, “porneia” is often included with other more specific sins. In summary, porneia primarily means illicit sexual intercourse between a man and woman, but includes other kinds of immoral sexual behavior as well.

“Unrestrained behavior.” The Greek aselgeia (#766 ἁσέλγεια) means without social or moral restraint: giving oneself a license to do whatever one wants at the time. Lenski says “unbridled conduct.” See commentary on Jude 1:4.

5:20. “selfish ambition.” The Greek is eritheia (#2052 ἐριθεία). In Aristotle it “denotes a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means” (BDAG). It contains tones of selfish ambition, strife, rivalry, etc. Those who attempt to get ahead unfairly, and build rivalries, show this. For a more complete understanding, see the note on “selfish ambition,” Romans 2:8.

“dissentions.” The state of being in factious opposition.

5:21. “murder.” Omit “murder.” If it was added, it was added quite early, but very early and excellent texts and witnesses omit it. It may have been added by a scribe remembering Romans 1:29. See Metzger, Textual Commentary.

5:22. “fruit of the spirit.” This list refers to the “fruit,” the things that are produced in us as we live according to the new nature that has been created inside us (see commentary on 5:16 above). Producing the fruit of the spirit requires active cooperation between the human will and the new, divine nature. The divine nature cannot grow the fruit of the spirit on its own, the will is simply too powerful. A person who wills to be unloving, or impatient, or without self control, will not be forced to have those qualities by the spirit of God that is born within him. On the other hand, the new nature of holy spirit is constantly at work to produce fruit in the person (Phil. 2:13), and so if a Christian truly desires to develop the fruit of the spirit, even though it may be difficult depending on his or her basic disposition and the way he or she was raised, it can be done.

The list of the fruit is the figure of speech asyndeton; a list without a final “and” (see Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible). In contrast to the figure of speech polysyndeton, which places an “and” between each item in the list and by that literary device emphasizes each thing in the list, the figure asyndeton does not have the standard “and” between the last two items of the list. This means that the reader goes through the list as if he were on a playground slide, sliding past the things on the list and getting to the conclusion, which is what the asyndeton is emphasizing; in this case, “There is no law against such things.”

Among other things, the fact that the list is an asyndeton lets us know there are other “fruit” of the spirit that are not on the list. For example, although “longsuffering” is on the list, “patience” (hupomonē) is not. Neither is “humility,” certainly a fruit of the spirit, and the list of godly fruit that are produced in the life of a committed Christian could be multiplied. The figure asyndeton shows us that the point of this list is not to give us every fruit of the spirit, but rather to give us an idea of some of them, especially in contrast to the works of the flesh, the list in the previous verses.

“Love.” The Greek word is agapē (#26 ἀγάπη). Love is difficult to specifically define. It is the very nature of God, for God is love (1 John 4:7-12, 16). Love is known from the action it prompts (John 3:16; 1 Cor. 13:1-8). Christian love is not an impulse from the feelings, nor does it always run with natural inclinations, nor is it lavished only upon those things that are naturally liked or naturally found lovely or beautiful.
Agapē love is an exercise of the will in deliberate choice, and is why God can command us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44; Exodus 23:1-5). Agapē love is commanded, showing that it is related to obedience, commitment and action and not necessarily feeling and emotion. “Loving” someone is to obey God on another’s behalf, seeking his or her long-term blessing and profit. Love energizes faith (Gal. 5:6), and empowers us to give and keep on giving. There can be a cost to genuine love. Love is the distinctive character of the Christian life in relation to the brethren and to all humanity. The “loving” thing to do may not always be easy, and true love is not “mushy.” For example, punishing criminals to keep society safe is loving, and asking someone to leave your Christian fellowship because they persist in flagrant sin is loving, but never easy. (1 Cor. 5:1-5). Christians are to be known for their love to one another (John 13:35).

“joy.” The Greek word is chara (ἐχαράχαρα). Biblically, “joy” has two meanings. As it is defined in the Bible and most English dictionaries, it can refer to a feeling, an emotion that wells up within us when something wonderful happens to us. The Bible has many examples of that “feeling of joy,” the emotion that can accompany something good happening to us (Matt. 2:10; 13:44; Luke 15:7; 24:52; John 16:21; Acts 12:14; 2 Cor. 7:13; 2 Tim. 1:4; Philemon 1:7; 3 John 1:4). However, the problem with that emotional kind of joy is we cannot feel it whenever we want to. It has to happen to us, and it does not happen very often.

The second meaning of “joy,” refers to an inner light and lightness, an inner effervescence or bubbling. This kind of joy is a quality of life, not simply an emotion. It is grounded in our relationship with God and comes from knowing and believing Him, and what He has given us and what He promises us in the future. It is excited by the acquisition of good or the expectation of good. The “goods” we possess now are the gift of holy spirit, the wonderful Word of God, and many other blessings from God. The goods we will possess include forever being with Christ in Paradise. These things cannot be taken from us by trials of this life, and for that reason true joy is not extinguished by the cares of this world. Joy should be visible so that others can be won by it. Joy was evidenced in Christ’s life and walk (John 15:11). Joy gives us a sound basis for optimism; it helps us look at the future that is desirable and possible (Hebrews 12:2). It strengthens us for the work we are called to do (Nehemiah 8:10). God commands us to have joy, which He can do because it comes from believing His Word and focusing on Him and His promises (1 Thess. 5:16; Phil. 3:1). Joy comes from a choice of our will, based upon how we think about our circumstances. Joy can result from the way we choose to interpret the things that happen to us, especially painful things. The apostles rejoiced after being beaten that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus (Acts 5:41). Joy is related to an attitude of thanksgiving.

God expects us to learn life lessons from the world around us, and we can learn a great “joy lesson” from the moon. When the moon looks fully at the sun (a full moon), it is lit up with light, and shines brilliant white in the night sky. However, when the moon looks at the earth (a lunar eclipse), it is dark, depressing, and usually has a red tint to it as if it were angry. We are like the moon. When we look at the earth and focus our attention on the things of this life, we become dark-minded, depressed and/or angry. However, when we look at the Son, and focus our attention on the things of God, we become full of light (joy) and shine into the lives of those around us. Let us learn from the moon to focus
our attention on the Son. We will have an inner joy that will give us strength for life in this difficult world, and we will shine blessings into the people around us.

“peace.” The Greek word is eirēnē (#1515 εἰρήνη). Peace is peace, quietness, rest, tranquility. It is an inner quietness born of strength, exemption from the rage and havoc of conflict or war, internal or external. It is associated with the elimination of one’s enemies. As influenced by the Hebrew word shalom, which was the ancient Jewish salutation and formula of well-wishing, it includes the concept of total well-being including security, safety, harmony, prosperity, and happiness. True peace includes the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ and so fearing nothing from God. Peace is not the state of being undisturbed simply because you do not care what happens. Rather, it is the state of quietness that comes from knowing that there will be a righteous end to life and the world. God is a God of peace (2 Cor. 13:11). Christians have peace with God (Rom. 5:1). Jesus is the prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). The peace of God will guard your heart (Phil. 4:7).

“longsuffering.” The Greek word is makrothumia (#3115 μακροθυμία).

“Longsuffering” is from the Greek makrothumia: makro (“long”), and thumia (“passion, anger”). Longsuffering is the ability to hold back anger for a long time. It is to persevere patiently and bravely; to be patient in bearing the offenses and injuries of others; to be mild and slow in avenging; slow to anger, slow to punish. It is that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish. It is to be what happens in difficult circumstances with people instead of getting angry too quickly. It is associated with mercy, and is used of God. However, it is not being a “door mat,” and simply allowing yourself to be used or abused. Similarly, true longsuffering is not being “too spiritual” or “too holy” to get angry at people, nor is it tolerating sin indefinitely.

In contrast to longsuffering, “patience” (hupomonē; #5281 ὑπομονή) is the quality that does not surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial; it is the opposite of despondency and is associated with hope (1 Thess. 1:3). Interestingly, while makrothumia (longsuffering with people) is used of God, hupomonē, (patience with things) is not. This may be due to the fact that God has to put up with people, who have free-will, but He never has to put up with the same trials from things and life in general that people do. In his book, Synonyms in the New Testament, R. Trench writes:

“We may now distinguish makrothumia and hupomonē in a way that will be valid whenever they occur. Makrothumia refers to patience with respect to persons, hupomonē with respect to things. A man is makrothumei if he has to relate to injurious persons and does not allow himself to be provoked by them or burst into anger (2 Tim. 4:2). A man is hupomonē if he is under a great siege of trials and he bears up and does not lose heart of courage.”

Longsuffering (makrothumia) and patience (hupomonē) occur together in Colossians 1:11, 2 Corinthians 6:4,6; 2 Timothy 3:10; James 5:10,11. Longsuffering is an important quality of Christian leaders, (2 Tim. 4:2), and it is an important part of the process of leading people to Christ (Rom. 2:4).

Somewhat similar to makrothumia is the Greek word is anochē (a noun: Strong’s #463 ἀνοχή], which most Greek lexicons define as forbearance, tolerance, clemency, patience. It refers to enduring, putting up with something, being patient, and holding
oneself back. Richard Trench (Trench’s Synonyms of the New Testament) writes that it “signifies, for the most part, a truce or suspension of arms.” See commentary on Romans 2:4, “forbearance.”

“kindness.” The Greek word is chrestotes (#5544 χρηστότης). A generous, warm-hearted, friendly nature. It is sweet, mild, and full of graciousness. It is a virtue that pervades and penetrates the whole nature, that mellows anything harsh or austere. Christ’s yoke is “kind” (chrestotes, not “easy” as many translations have), because there is nothing harsh, sharp, or galling about it (Matt. 11:30). You can put on Christ’s yoke without worrying about getting painful blisters, splinters, etc.

“Kindness” is willingly ready to do good, and it expresses itself in deeds towards another. It springs from an inner disposition to benefit others, but is engaged and aroused by their need. True kindness must be distinguished from sentimentality: It can be easy to feel sorry for someone who has gotten themselves into a mess, and begin to “caretake” them, which actually weakens them. In many situations, what a person really needs to become strong is to repent and get busy restoring their own life with the help of the Lord. Those who offer kindness always need to be aware of the line that differentiates kindness from caretaking. God is kind, even to the unthankful (Luke 6:35), and God’s kindness leads people to repentance (Romans 2:4; 2x). It is the responsibility of every believer to be kind to others (Eph. 4:32). Love is kind (1 Cor. 13:4).

“goodness.” The Greek word is agathosune (#19 ἀγαθωσύνη). “Goodness” is uprightness in heart and life, a moral excellence. The person who exhibits the fruit “goodness” is upright and honorable, and is acceptable to God. “Goodness” can be called the “fruit with teeth,” because goodness, while it has a lot in common with “kindness,” very clearly also contains the idea that it is a good thing to uphold standards, enforce the law, and punish wrongdoers. The grammarian Richard Trench writes: “A man may display his agathosune, his zeal for goodness and truth, in rebuking, correcting, and chastising.” If there is no “goodness” in the Christian’s life, evil continues without fear of consequences. “Goodness” is usually associated with activity rather than inner nature, although the good actions spring from the good heart: “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart” (Luke 6:45).

Goodness is not self-absorbed or comfort-oriented. Many “good” tasks are uncomfortable to perform. “Goodness” is anchored in God and in His revelation to man. In the Scripture, “good” is often contrasted with “evil” and it is the Word of God that must define that which is good and that which is evil. Moral relativism leaves both “good” and “evil” up to the feelings and inclinations of the individual. In a system without Godly standards all kinds of “good” things become “evil.” In this kind of system, holding people accountable becomes evil (you may hurt their “self-esteem”), punishment of any kind becomes evil (they were not really at fault, but were victims of society), saying that someone is wrong becomes evil (why be so narrow minded), etc. Also, without godly standards, many “evil” things become “good” (taking advantage of another’s mistake, such as getting too much change back on a purchase but not telling the cashier; living together without being married; not returning something you find even if you could locate the owner if you tried; etc.)

“faithfulness.” The Greek word is pistis (#4102 πίστις). The word pistis can mean “faith” or “faithfulness,” and here “faithfulness” is the better translation. Faith is trust, and we are to trust God, and thus believe His promises. Faithfulness
means continued faith or perseverance. It is a steadfast adherence to God and His will. We trust God because God is trustworthy, but more than that, we are to continue in that faith day after day, thus being “faithful” toward Him. Many people have “faith” for a short time. The true fruit of the new nature is being full of faith day after day after day. Those given a trust must be faithful (1 Cor. 4:2).

5:23. “meekness.” The Greek word is praoites (#4236 πραότης). The quality of humility that recognizes one’s own frailty and neediness, causing a willingness to listen to reproof and correction, as well as to help others without unduly asserting one’s authority or overpowering others. Meekness is a submissive attitude toward the will of God. It is coachability, the ability to take coaching, teaching, and even reproof from others without any resistance or temptation to seek revenge and retaliation. Meekness is first and foremost toward God. It is that temper of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting. It must be clearly understood that godly meekness is a mental posture of power, not weakness. The common assumption is that meekness is synonymous with “mousy” or “cowardly,” but the Lord was “meek” because he had the infinite resources of God at His command (Matt. 11:29). Someone who is meek can afford to be so because his strength and confidence allows him to listen to others. Moses was the meekest man on earth at his time, but his walk was a walk of powerful signs and wonders (Num. 12:3). Meekness is a way of being, opposed to boldness of manner, and is to be the default manner for leaders in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 4:21; 2 Cor. 10:1).

“self-control.” The Greek word is egkrateia (#1466 ἐγκράτεια). Self control is mastery over oneself. The root word is kratos, which means power in action; strength exerted, and the derivation of egkrateia may be en kratos, or power within, thus the power over oneself and one’s desires (Kittel; Theological Dictionary). As used by the Greeks, egkrateia, self control, is the virtue of one who masters his desires and passions, especially his sensual appetites. God designed the human will to control the human mind and body. The concept of “self-control” implies that there is a standard to conform to, and the Word of God provides that standard. Godly self control is not trying to reform the flesh by self-discipline (although self-discipline is important), or overcoming sinful tendencies by outward religious practices. True self-control comes from a combination of free-will decisions and the new nature inside that is trying to reproduce itself in outward man. It is, after all, a “fruit of the spirit,” not a “fruit of the will.” A commitment to self-control without being motivated by love for others feeds prideful ambition and self-glorification. Christians are not to live like unbelievers who indulge the flesh (Eph. 2:3). Christians are to control themselves (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

5:25. “Since.” Even as the NIV, NJB. The word “if” can be understood as “since” if the condition is not in doubt.

“keep in step with.” Although many versions say “walk,” this is not the standard word for walk, which has the cultural connotation of “live by,” but rather it means “to march in a line” (as in the military), to march in rank and file, “to be in line with a person or thing considered as standard for one’s conduct, hold to, agree with, follow, conform” (BDAG). In other words, the spirit is setting the pace and moving forward, and now it is up to us to match its pace and keep in line.
5:26. “conceited.” Greek is from *kenos* (empty) and *doxa* (glory). It is vain or empty glory. Thinking something has merit when it does not. “glorying [bragging, boasting] without reason, conceited, vain-glorious, eager for empty glory” (Thayer).

**Chapter 6**

6:1. “gets.” Punctiliar aorist, “gets to be” (Lenski).

“trespass.” The Greek is *paraptoma* (#3900 παράπτωμα) which is to “misstep,” “to fall by the wayside.” This “misstep” is not necessarily intentional, although it can be. Thus, in life, “trespasses,” are much more common than “sins.” Meanings of *paraptoma* include: “faults,” “deviations from truth,” “lapse,” “error,” “mistake,” “wrongdoing.”

6:2. “burdens.” The Greek word translated “burdens” is *baros* (#922 βάρος), which refers to a load, but also can refer to a hardship produced by the load. It refers to a hardship that is regarded as particularly burdensome and exhausting. In Matthew 20:12 *baros* refers not to difficulties in general but to the specific hardship of working for the entire day. In a number of languages hardship resulting from work may be expressed in terms of the effect upon the workers, for example, “to get tired from working” or “to become weak as the result of working” (Louw Nida). Because of verse 5, which sets the context, the translation “hardship” makes more sense here than the load itself.

People carry their own loads, but other Christians are to help with those loads and with the hardships produced by them. It is often unclear how much of a person’s burden a Christian should carry. Each situation stands on its own, but some general principles apply. Just as in medicine a person who breaks a leg has to use crutches, but if the crutches are used beyond when they are needed, the leg atrophies and becomes weak. We bear one another’s hardships, but not to the point the person becomes weak. Help that we offer to others keeps them from breaking under their load, but does not weaken them. Many people are lazy and would love for others to carry their burden, but doing that only produces more weakness and laziness, it does not help the person.

6:5. “will have.” Each person will (future) have to bear his own load. There are loads that each of us have that cannot be shared and must be carried alone. Cp. RSV.

6:6. “fellowship fully.” This verse has been hotly debated by commentators. Many of them think that the verse is telling those instructed to “share with,” i.e., give to, those who instruct them. This is clearly expressed in the New Living Translation, which is a very free translation: “Those who are taught the Word of God should provide for their teachers, sharing all good things with them.” However, there are some serious problems with this interpretation.

First, if Paul was asking for the believers to pay their teachers, the verse is worded in a very unclear and unusual manner. The word *koinôneō* (#2841 κοινονέω) would not be the natural way to say that the people should give to ministers. It seems totally unlikely that Paul, having reproved the Galatians for their return to the flesh, would, at the close of the epistle, ask for money. Nevertheless, money is such a “sacred cow,” to so many people, and there are so many commentaries that say that the verse means that people should pay their ministers, that we feel it is appropriate to quote extensively from commentaries that make the point that this verse is not about money.
“The word koinwnein contains the key to the true meaning of the verse. Our versions [i.e., the KJV, RV, ASV, etc.] understand it here, and in Romans 12:13, Phil. 4:15, in the sense of communicating [giving] to others; but I find no warrant for this in Greek usage. In Romans 15:27 it signifies distinctly to receive a share, and elsewhere to become a partner and share in common with others (1 Tim. 5:22; 1 Pet. 4:13; 2 John 11; Heb. 2:14). Here in like manner it enjoins upon the leaders of the Churches the duty of admitting all the members to participate in any spiritual blessing they enjoy. It continues, in fact, the protest against the arrogant pretensions and selfish exclusiveness of the Judaizing leaders.” (Expositor’s Greek Testament, Vol. 3, p. 189).

R. C. H. Lenski writes:

The verb koinonein is seemingly not properly understood [by most commentators]. When this is regarded as meaning “communicate,” “all good things” become material, and somehow or other it is thought that Paul says that pupils should reward or pay their teachers…This idea is also put into koinonia, the noun which is thought to mean “contribution” in Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13; Heb. 13:16; and this view has gotten into some of the dictionaries [lexicons]. The noun always = fellowship, and in the case of alms a fellowship that is exercised by means of alms. …The verb means…to be or to make participant, the latter, however, in the sense “to share something with somebody, thereby not making him a fellow with oneself; but making oneself a fellow with him….The one who instructs has the “all good things; the one being instructed is to proceed to participate in them, in “all” of them. The riches are with the teacher of the Word, the poverty is with the pupil, and the pupil is to institute “fellowship” with the teacher so that he, the pupil, may be enriched. …With those [teachers] who have the burdens and with those who have these good things we should keep fellowship, making ourselves fellow with them.

This is just about the opposite of the common view. …Could Paul tell the Galatians in this letter that they owed material contributions to him and his helpers? Could he do such a thing with no further word of explanation? Paul never took money for his work. When he speaks of this subject in 1 Cor. 9 he does so with the fullest and clearest explanation. See the same thought in 2 Cor. 11:7-12….

We ought also not to forget the Judaizers who also came as teachers, on whose greediness 2 Cor. 11:20 enlightens us. When such greedy fellows were working in Galatia, Paul could scarcely write the Galatians to share “in all good things” (material) with their teachers. …We need not discuss “the one instructing.” Paul had not left the Galatian churches in an unorganized state; he had them elect elders and pastors who were qualified to teach. … “In all good things” that were possessed by their instructors, Paul and his assistants among them, the Galatians should ever cultivate fellowship for their own enrichment. Then all would, indeed, be well with them. Pay for these teachers? There is no reason to mention it in this epistle. Sowing for the flesh and sowing for the spirit deal with a subject that is far greater, namely with the desire for all good spiritual things in which the Galatians should seek to share” (Galatians, pp. 302-304).
Lenski translates the verse: “Moreover, let him who is being instructed in the Word be partaker with the one instructing him in all good things.”

Kenneth W. Wuest translates the verse: “Moreover, let the one who is being taught the Word, constantly be holding fellowship with the one who is teaching in all good things.” Wuest writes:

The word *communicate* [in the KJV] means “to share, to be a partner in a thing with a person,” here “to hold fellowship with another person.” …The one who is taught should hold fellowship with his teachers in all good things. What the good things are is defined by the context. …the good things of verse 6 refer to spiritual things, since they are contrasted to the evil things just spoken of.

Now, the Judaizers had precipitated a situation in the Galatian churches in which those who followed their teaching broke fellowship with the true teachers of the Word. Paul is exhorting these to resume their fellowship with their former teachers and share with them in the blessing of grace which their teachers were enjoying.

…The interpretation that makes the one taught assume the responsibility for the financial welfare of his teacher is not possible in this instance of the use of the word *koinoneo*. This is the word Paul uses in Phil. 4:15, where he speaks of the obligation of the one taught to make the financial needs of his teacher his own, thus sharing his earthly goods inasmuch as the teacher has shared with him is heavenly blessing. But Paul does not use it so here, and for the following reasons: *First*, the context which speaks both of the evil (6:1-5) and the morally good (6:9,10) is against the interpretation that financial support is in the apostle’s mind here. *Second*, the context defines the good things as being of a spiritual, not a material nature. Third, it would be the height of folly for Paul to inject such a delicate subject as the pocket book of the saints…into the already discordant atmosphere of the Galatian churches. …Fourth, if Paul were exhorting the saints to contribute financially to the support of their former teachers, the Judaizers would be quick to say that the apostle was attempting to win the Galatian saints back to grace for financial reasons…. He [Paul] would not lay himself open to this charge by such an unwise act” (*Wuest’s Word Studies*, Vol. 1, pp. 169-171).

The one comment we would make about Wuest is that when Paul used the term *koinoneo* in Philippians 4:15, he did not expect that it would communicate the meaning of money, but rather he said, “no church fellowshipped with me in regard to giving and receiving.” Thus, even in Philippians 4:15, “fellowship” was defined in the context as fellowship in the financial arena. Vincent agrees with the commentators above, stating that *koinoneo* means “hold fellowship with…not impart to” (*Vincent’s Word Studies*; Vol. 4).

The point of Galatians 6:6 is that the true teachers have the “all good things” and the pupils are to fellowship with them, participating in all the good things that the teachers have. The context then follows suit. God is not mocked, if we sow sparingly (by not having fellowship with those who have all good things) then we will reap sparingly (we will not partake of those good things). If we sow to the flesh (circumcision) we will reap corruption, if we sow to the spirit (freedom in Christ), we reap everlasting life (“life” in the more powerful sense of “life indeed,” not just being alive).
6:7. “mocked.” The verb μυκτηρίζω (#3456 μυκτηρίζω) ,“mocked,” is literally, to turn up the nose at, treat with contempt; thus, it is to mock.

6:8. “Corruption.” Robertson points out that the meaning of the Greek word depends on the context, which is certainly the case here. It can mean (cp. BDAG):

- breakdown of organic matter: dissolution, deterioration, corruption,
- destruction of a fetus: abortion.
- ruination of a person through an immoral act (i.e., the seduction of a young woman)
- inward depravity
- total destruction of an entity: hence, destruction in the last days.

If a person sows to the flesh, it can result in many types of corruption. His deterioration, corruption, ruination, depravity, and if he is unsaved eventually his total destruction in Gehenna. Given the wide range of meaning, “corruption” is a good translation.

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].

6:10. “while.” There is some debate about whether the verse should read, “while” we have opportunity, or “as” (i.e., “when”) we have opportunity. The Greek can go either way. We believe that God is pointing out that we always have opportunity to do good (you can always pray for someone) so let us be doing good. The verse does not seem to be saying that we should be waiting for an “opportunity” to arise and then do good. However, when a special opportunity for good arises, and those occasions do occur, then we can and should take advantage of those times also.

“work that which is good.” It is easy to say, “do good,” like so many translations, but the Greek uses the word “work,” and we believe that is because doing good so often involves work. We must be willing to “work” to help others, not just “do” good when it is convenient for us.

6:11. “with my own hand.” It was common for Paul and other Romans to use an “amanuensis,” a professional scribe, to take dictation and write down the body of a letter. Then, at the end of the letter, the author would write some form of closing in his personal handwriting, but because he was not a professional scribe, that ending often had larger letters and was not as clean and neat. We do the same kind of thing when we type a business letter but sign our name. It was Paul’s practice to end his epistle in his own handwriting (2 Thess. 3:17; cp. 1 Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18; Philemon 1:19). Paul’s own handwriting at the end of Galatians had big letters. The way verse eleven is worded however, it is possible but not likely that Paul wrote the entire epistle by himself, and the entire epistle had large letters.

Skeptics say Paul did not write the epistles that bear his name, but that is just unsubstantiated speculation. There is no “proof” Paul did not write the Pauline epistles. Paul signed his epistles personally. It was his handwriting. Furthermore, the people who carried Paul’s epistles to the local churches could testify that Paul wrote the epistle, and people in those churches were able to authenticate that these epistles had come from his hands. There is no reason that an epistle bearing the name of Paul but written by anyone other than Paul would have been accepted by the Church.
Other evidence also supports that Paul wrote his epistles. For example, Saint Clement of Rome was a leading figure in the church at Rome and the first Apostolic Father of the Church. Little is known of his life, but according to the Church Father, Tertullian (160-220 AD), he was consecrated by Peter (it cannot be determined if he is the Clement of Phil. 4:3). Clement wrote to the Corinthian Church in 97 AD, and urged them to pay attention to the epistle that Paul had sent them. This is early and solid evidence that Paul did indeed write the epistles that bear his name.

Also, if the epistles were written later than the life of Paul, some of the content would not have made sense to the Christians who received them. Many of the names and titles of people who are mentioned would have been forgotten. Furthermore, when Paul lists someone as being with him when he wrote, such as “Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy” (1 Thess. 1:1), those people would all have been dead too, making the letter not just a forgery in the name of the author, but an obvious forgery in its content. The same would be true of the greetings that Paul sends to and from people at the end of most epistles—those people would be dead too, and thus could not send or receive greetings.

We do not like fakes and frauds today, and the situation was the same in biblical times. In fact, because of the persecutions and personal risk of being a Christian, it is likely that members of the early Church would have reacted even more strongly to a letter sent in Paul’s name by someone who was not Paul than we would react today. When the evidence is weighed, it shows Paul did indeed write the epistles that bear his name.

6:12. “Make a good showing.” Not, as the NIV, a good impression, but rather to show off, an ostentatious display of their religion in a way people could see it.

“are trying to compel.” Present active.

6:14. “But for me on my part.” The opening is an idiom, thus the versions all differ as to exactly how to translate it. Most of them get the sense. We more closely agree with Lenski.

6:15. “neither…nor.” Great example of the power of an ellipsis. The “is everything” is demanded by the context, but in ellipsis, the words that are present receive the emphasis. Thus, the phase would read like, “For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a NEW CREATION is everything.”

6:16. “standard.” The word “standard” is the Greek word κανών (#2583 κανών) from which we get the “Canon” of Scripture. Originally, a κανών was a rod for measuring, then other meanings developed. Cp. BDAG:

1. a means to determine the quality of someth., rule, standard
2. set of directions or formulation for an activity, assignment, formulation for public service. Others (incl. NRSV, REB) emphasize the geographical component and render sphere (of action), province, limit.
3. In the second century in the Christian church κ. came to stand for revealed truth, rule of faith.

We felt that “rule” did not communicate properly, because knowing that it was not circumcision nor uncircumcision that was important, but rather the new creation, was not a “rule,” but rather a new standard.

“even upon the Israel of God.” The term “Israel of God” occurs only here, so we must define the term from the vocabulary itself, from the context, and from the scope of Galatians, indeed, from the scope of the message of the Epistles. A careful reading of the verse shows that the “Israel of God” are those who keep in line with the standard that
neither being a Jew nor being a Gentile means anything, but the new creation means everything; thus, in this Age of Grace it refers to those who have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and not relied on the flesh for righteousness.

It was clear in the Old Testament that Israel was the chosen people of God (but the term “Israel of God” was never used), but as a nation they rejected the Messiah and are unsaved (cp. Rom. 10:1-3). The true “Israel” are those who choose God even as God chose them.

Some versions translate the Greek *kai* (“and, even”) as “and” in this verse, as if there was a separate group called the “Israel of God” apart from those people in the first part of the verse. The KJV is an example of such a translation: “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.” It makes no sense that there is a separate group of people who are called the “Israel of God,” and who occur only in this verse and are not defined anywhere else in the Bible. How would we ever know who they were? It makes much more sense that the *kai* is connecting the Israel of God with the group who keeps in line with the standard that there is neither circumcision or uncircumcision in Christ. Thus the REV has: “And as many as will keep in line with this standard, peace be upon them, and mercy, even upon the Israel of God.” The RSV deals with the *kai* another way, by not translating it at all: “Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God.” Leaving the *kai* untranslated is often done, depending on the context and specific use of the *kai*. Not translating the *kai* makes the Israel of God those who “walk by this rule.”

It makes perfect sense that Paul would use the phrase “Israel of God” to describe Christians here at the end of Galatians. Much of the book had been spent on issues that the Jews brought up, and Paul’s teaching that the Jews and Gentiles were now one body and not still divided into two groups. Thus, in the context of the book, it makes sense that Paul would use the phrase “Israel of God” to refer to the Church as a parting reminder to both the Jews and Gentiles that now there is only one favored group, the Body of Christ, the “Israel of God.”

**6:17. “From now on, let no one cause trouble for me.”** Paul was not saying that from now on he did not want to be troubled by people, but rather that his fighting with the Galatians about law and grace was done. The issue was settled.

“the marks.” The Greek word “stigmata” can refer to marks, tattoos, or brands. Slaves were sometimes branded, but usually only when they were runaways or rebellious. Also, sometimes devotees of a pagan Temple branded themselves, but does this fit Paul? Probably not. Sometimes men in the army tattooed the name of their commander on their flesh, but that was self-inflicted and probably not what is being referred to here. The best way to translate seems to understand that the “marks” were real, scars of past floggings, and there were some parallels in the Greco-Roman world people would identify with. The idea that the “stigmata” were the same as the scars of Christ is a modern idea with no biblical foundation.

**6:18. “your spirit.”** This is a synecdoche for “you,” with the emphasis on the spiritual side of life. Paul could have said “your body,” and meant “you,” or “your soul” and meant you, but the fact that he said “spirit” emphasizes the spiritual side of life, and the things which “spirit” can mean such as attitude. It is not our “spirit” that needs grace, we need grace.
Ephesians

Chapter 1

1:1. “holy.” The Greek is *hagios* (#40 ἅγιος). It is an adjective, but used as a noun and best translated “holy ones.” Through the ages the word “saints” has acquired a meaning that is not biblical, and thus it can be confusing, especially to new Christians. Every Christian is a “holy one” because each Christian has God’s gift of holy spirit sealed inside him.

“faithful.” The Greek is *pistos* (#4103 πιστός). It means “faithful” or “believing.” The translation “faithful” is difficult because Ephesians is not just to the faithful. Lenski goes with “believing,” which is certainly true.

1:3. “Blessed.” The Greek is *eulogētos* (#2128 εὐλογητός), and it means “blessed, or praised.” It is an adjective, and so “blessed” is the better translation here, especially in light of the fact that the word is used three times in the verse.

“Blessed...has blessed...blessing.” This is the figure of speech polyptoton, or “many inflections,” in which the same root word is being used in different parts of speech. The polyptoton emphasizes the blessing that each party has. “Blessed” (*eulogētos*; #2128 εὐλογητός) is an adjective; “has blessed” (*eulogeō*; #2127 εὐλογέω), is a verb (participle); and blessing (*eulogia*; #2129 εὐλογία) is a noun. This is the only verse in the Bible that has “blessed” three times.

“in Christ.” The word “in” is translated from the Greek preposition *en* (#1722 ἐν). Ephesians 1:3 is the use of *en* that Greek grammarians refer to as the “static *en,*” which defines a relationship or sphere of influence. We need to understand the static use of *en* (in) because although we understand how a person can be “in” a room, English does not typically use “in” to describe a relationship, such as “in Christ” or “in the Lord.”

The preposition *en,* like all prepositions, has many different meanings and shades of meaning, depending on the context. In fact, the BDAG Greek-English lexicon says of *en:* “The uses of this preposition are so many and various, and often so easily confused, that a strictly systematic treatment is impossible. It must suffice to list the main categories, which will help establish the usage in individual cases.”

Christians have been blessed “in Christ,” and it is only by virtue of being “in Christ” that we are blessed. We are not good enough to deserve the blessings we have from God apart from Christ. To fully understand what it means for the Christian to be “in” Christ we must first understand the basic meaning of the “static *en,*” and then see how being “in Christ” after the Christian Church began on the Day of Pentecost differs from being “in Christ” before the Day of Pentecost.

In the case of Christians being “in Christ” or “in the Lord,” the “static *en*” can be understood to mean “in connection with,” “in association with,” or “in union with.” The BDAG Greek-English lexicon says:

“Especially in Paul or Johannine usage, to designate a close personal relation in which the referent of the ἐν-term is viewed as the controlling influence: under the control of, under the influence of, in close association with...In Paul the relation of the individual to Christ is very often
expressed by such phrases as ἐν Χριστῷ [in Christ], ἐν κυρίῳ [in the Lord], etc.,... “in connection with, in intimate association with, keeping in mind.”

Bratcher and Nida translated the phrase in verse 3: “For in our union with Christ he has blessed us...” They go on to say, “‘In our union with Christ’: this much-used phrase in the Pauline letters (literally, ‘in Christ’) is generally taken to indicate the believer’s union with Christ. Here it states that condition existing for the blessing which God gives to the believer” (A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians). Bratcher and Nida are correct that the basis for the blessings of God in the life of a Christian is the fact that the Christian is “in union with” Christ.

Jesus introduced the vocabulary of being “in” another person at the Feast of Dedication, which fell in December (John 10:22). However, at that time he only spoke of him being in the Father and the Father in him (John 10:38). Some months later, during Passover time at the Last Supper, Jesus again spoke of his being in the Father and the Father being in him (John 14:10, 11, and 20), but he also spoke of believers being in him and the Father, and he and the Father being in believers (John 14:20; 15:4-7; 17:21, 23, 26). Before the start of the Christian Church, which included the New Birth and the Body of Christ, the extent of believers being “in” Christ was that they would be unified with Christ by obeying him and walking in love. That certainly was the context of John chapters 14 and 15.

When the Christian Church started on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), it became available to be “in” Christ in a whole new way: by being part of his Body, the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is the spiritual entity that consists of every person who is born again (1 Cor. 12:27; cp. Romans 12:4,5; 1 Cor. 10:16; 12:12-20; Eph. 1:23; 3:6; 4:4; Col. 1:18; 3:15). Like our physical body, this spiritual body is comprised of many members, and Jesus Christ is its head (Eph. 5:23). The Body of Christ is unique to the Administration of Grace (cp. Eph. 3:2), and is never mentioned outside the Epistles to the Christian Church.

Because Christians are spiritually united with Jesus and part of the Body of Christ, when Christians are said to be “in Christ,” there is more than just a connection due to us obeying and following Christ; we have an actual spiritual union with Christ. The Christian was crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20), died with Christ (Rom. 6:8), was buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12), and was raised with Christ (Eph. 2:6). Thus, in most cases it is appropriate to think of our relation with Christ as a union with him, although sometimes “in connection with” or “in association with” seems more appropriate. For the purpose of the translation of the New Testament, however, in many cases it seems better to understand that the phrase “in Christ” means “in union with Christ” or “in connection with Christ” than to keep translating it “in union with Christ (but see Rom. 6:3 REV).

Several English versions besides the REV use the word “union” in Romans 6:3 to express the relationship that exists between Christ and the believer who is “in” Christ, and many of them add the word “union” in other places in the New Testament as well (cp. The New English Bible; Goodspeed’s translation; Charles Williams’, The New Testament in the Language of the People; and Cassirer’s translation, God’s New Covenant).
Christians have many blessings because of being “in union with” Christ that are not blessings due to our own works. We have already seen that we were crucified with Christ, died with Christ, were buried with Christ, and were raised with Christ. Some of the other blessings that Ephesians lists as our having by virtue of being “in Christ” are: blessed in Christ (1:3); chosen in him (1:4); being the praise of the glory of God’s grace (1:6); redeemed (1:7); claimed as God’s possession (1:11); sealed with the promised holy spirit (1:13); raised up and seated in the heavenlies (2:6); created (2:10); made near (2:13); created into a new man (2:15); being built into a sanctuary of God (2:21, 22); Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members, and fellow partakers of the promise (3:6); and, forgiven (4:32). All of these blessings and more are by virtue of us being “in union with” Christ; part of his Body.

Far too often Christians fail to understand the blessings they have “in Christ.” The blessings of God “in Christ” in our lives are an accomplished reality: we do not work to get them; we already have them. Now we give our lives to God in thanksgiving for the blessings He has given us. [For more on “in” and the relationship it refers to, see commentary on John 10:38]. [The Greek preposition εἰς can have the same meaning as ἐν and refer to a relationship; for more information on that, see commentary on Romans 6:3]. [For information of the permanence of salvation and that the blessings of God which accompany salvation cannot be lost, see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation”].

“spiritual blessing.” This is the only use of “spiritual blessing” in the Bible, and it is important that we pay attention to it because Christians have been blessed, but often we do not seem to directly experience those blessings in our physical life. Nevertheless, the spiritual blessings are real. For example, we have a guarantee of salvation (Eph. 1:14; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5), which is surely a blessing, but we have to apprehend it by faith to really enjoy it at this time.

“heavenlies.” The Greek is epouranios (#2032 ἐπούρανιος) a plural adjective. Similar to the fact that the word “heaven” is always plural in Hebrew because it is a plural noun, this could be the plural of majesty for “heaven.” The word epouranios occurs 5 times in Ephesians. They are all adjectives and all plural, and we have translated all of them, “heavenlies.”

There are versions that read “blessed us…in the heavenly realms,” and there are versions that read “blessed us…with every blessing in the heavenly realms.” The blessings are with God in heaven, conferred upon us here on earth. It is not that we in the heavenly realms are blessed, because we are on earth. (Although some would argue that Eph. 2:6 says we are in heaven, that is the idiom of the prophetic perfect; see commentary on “seated” in Eph. 2:6.)

1:4. “us.” It is very important to understand that the “us” is a plural pronoun. It is common to hear a Christian say that God personally chose him or her for salvation and use this verse to prove that point. But it is important to fully understand the implications of making that statement.

This verse has been central to the Calvinist-Arminian debate for centuries. John Calvin (1509-1564) taught that God chose who would be saved and who would not be—that the individual could not make that choice, God made it for each person. James (Jacob) Arminius (1560-1609) disagreed with Calvin’s teaching and emphasized man’s
free will. The debate between the basic theology of Calvinists and Arminians has continued now for centuries.

Ephesians 1:4 does not just say God “knew” who was going to be saved, but that He “chose us” before the foundation of the world. If this verse is referring to individuals, as many people believe, then it is saying that before the foundation of the world God chose some people to be saved while leaving others unsaved. That is exactly what Calvinists teach: that it is God who chooses who will be saved and who will be damned. It is not a freewill choice that we ourselves can make; rather the choice was made for us before the foundation of the world. Calvinists claim that God chose people for salvation even before the foundation of the world, and then gives them His “irresistible grace” such that they are never able to refuse salvation. This is why churches that follow the Calvinist doctrine, such as Presbyterian churches, do not have altar calls and ask people to come forward if they would like to be saved. In those denominations the doctrine is that the individual cannot make the choice to be saved: it is made for him, so there is no point to having an altar call.

In contrast to the Calvinists, the Arminians and those people who believe in free will assert that people make their own choice to be saved or not. They point out that in verses such as Ephesians 1:4, the pronouns are plural. In other words, it was not individuals who were being chosen to salvation, but “us,” the group, the Body of Christ, the Church. In other words, before the foundation of the world God planned to have a “Christian Church,” “the Body of Christ,” and planned that those people who joined the Church would be saved. God knew that there would be some people would get saved and join the Church—there have always been people who follow after God. But He did not choose who would join and who would reject Him. It is the individual’s choice whether or not to get saved and be a part of the Church.

A rough analogy to the Arminian position would be a college that does not have a basketball team but decides to form one. Long before a single player is chosen for the team, university staff get together and plan things out. They build the arena and court, practice area, and locker rooms. They hire the coach and staff. After all that, they make it available to play ball, and individual athletes begin to choose to play for the school. It can rightly be said that the “team” was chosen before the court was ever built. They were not chosen as individual players, but the team was chosen to play for the school and represent the school. In the same way, God chose the Church and planned for it before the foundation of the world, and now we have chosen to join the Church and play for God’s team.

We agree with the Arminians, and assert that God did plan for a special group on which He would pour His grace, and He planned for that group before the foundation of the world.

“in him.” This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in Christ.”

“foundation.” This refers to the foundation of our earth today, even before Adam and Eve were created. It does not seem to make as good sense to translate it “overthrow,” because the destruction of the Genesis 1:1 creation is not so much in mind as the simple fact that in God’s mind, His Church even predates his creation of mankind.

“world.” kosmos (#2889 κόσμος).
“to be holy and without blemish.” There is a lot packed into this phrase. To say that we “should be holy…” (KJV, ESV), causes people to miss the point that Christians are holy in God’s sight by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ and the gift of holy spirit that God has given to each Christian, which is why we are said to be “saints” (holy) in the opening of the various Church Epistles. The Greek verb “be” is in the infinitive mood, which Robertson (Word Pictures in the New Testament) notes as the infinitive of purpose, in other words, God’s purpose was that we be holy, and He blessed us in Christ, making us holy. This is part of the meaning here, which is repeated in 5:25-27, where Scripture says, “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy…to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” The Church is holy because of the work of Christ, however, also packed into the idea of “to be holy” is that we should live holy lives. Each Christian is spiritually holy, but God did not make us that way with the idea that we then would ignore our flesh and fulfill the passions it produces on us (Eph. 2:3). God made us spiritually holy, and He made us to work hard to live a holy life as well.

“without blemish.” This is a term that relates to the fact that sacrifices had to be without blemish to be accepted by God. We have blemishes, but He chose us and made us both “holy” and “without blemish.” The Greek is amomos (#299 ἄμωμος) and appears eight times in the NT. All of them can be related to the perfection an offering to God had to have, and all can be translated “without blemish.”

“in love.” There is a big debate about whether this phrase goes with verse 4 or 5. The commentators are pretty well split. We think it goes with verse 4 for two major reasons. 1. God chose us to stand to be “holy,” “without blemish” and “in love.” Love is part of the way we are to stand before Him. Furthermore, v. 5 already says God acted from His “good pleasure” so placing “in love” in v. 5 seemed like an unnecessary duplication. 2. “It is Paul’s usual, if not constant, habit to place en agapē after the clause it qualifies (Eph. 4:2,15,16; 5:2; Col. 2:2; 1 Thess. 5:13; cp. also, though in association with other terms, 1 Tim. 4:12; 2 Tim. 1:13).” (W. R. Nicoll, The Expositor’s Greek New Testament, Vol. 3, p. 251).

1:5. “us.” The “us” is plural and refers to the Church, the Body of Christ. It does not refer to God choosing individuals, but rather God choosing the Church. See commentary on Ephesians 1:4, “us.”

“decided in advance.” The Greek word is proorizō (#4309 προορίζω), and in Ephesians 1:5 it is an aorist participle. The basic meaning of the word is to “decide upon beforehand,” or to decide in advance. Bratcher and Nida (A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians) have, “having decided ahead of time.” Proorizō is a good example of a word whose meaning has to be defined from the context and scope of Scripture. In a context like this, proorizō could possibly refer to God choosing ahead of time the people He will save and the ones He will condemn, with the individuals having no choice in the matter, and there are many theologians who think that is what the verse is saying. However, in Ephesians 1:5 proorizō can also refer to God’s deciding how He will save people; His choosing the path or plan to salvation. In this case, God decided in advance that He would save people by way of faith in Christ. We have to remember that, in the context of Ephesians, the “us” is plural and refers to the Church, not to individuals. God did not choose who would be saved and who would not—that is our choice—God decided there would be a group of people who He would save by faith in Jesus Christ,
and we now decide if we want to join that group. [For more information on Calvinism and Predestination, see Appendix 8: “On Calvinism and Predestination.”]

“would be adopted.” The Greek is ὑιοθέσια (#5206 ὑιοθέσια), and it only occurs five times in the New Testament, all in the Church Epistles (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). According to Vine it means, “the place and condition of a son given to one to whom it does not naturally belong.” The Greek Lexicon by Louw and Nida says: “to formally and legally declare that someone who is not one’s own child is henceforth to be treated and cared for as one’s own child, including complete rights of inheritance.” ὑιοθέσια literally means, “to place as a son.”

Adoption” clearly indicates that a Christian is a member of God’s family. In the Roman culture, the adopted son or daughter had four major changes: a change of family, a change of name, a change of home, and a change of responsibilities (Charles Welch, Just and the Justifier, p. 212, with a fuller explanation on pp. 208-213).

Most importantly, by using the word “adoption,” God emphasizes that salvation is permanent for the Christian, which is why it appears only in the Church Epistles. Some versions translate ὑιοθέσια as “sonship,” but we believe that is not as good as “adoption.” While it is true that someone adopted into the family attains sonship (the status of a son), “adoption” is more accurate to the Greek meaning of the word, and it correctly expresses the fact that the adopted child is permanently placed in the family.

Birth seems so much more desirable than adoption that it is fair to ask why God would even use “adoption.” The answer is that the Romans recognized that when a baby was born, “you got what you got,” whether you liked it or not. This would include the sex of the child, birthmarks, etc. Thus, according to Roman law, a naturally born baby could be disowned from the family. However, people adopting a child knew exactly what they were getting, and no one adopted a child unless that specific child was wanted as a family member, so according to law an adopted child could not be disowned. He or she was permanently added to the family. Many early believers were Roman citizens, and using the word “adoption” was one of God’s ways to let the Church know that He chose the children brought into His family, and they could not be taken from it. The Roman historian William M. Ramsay writes:

“The Roman-Syrian Law-Book…where a formerly prevalent Greek law had persisted under the Roman Empire—well illustrates this passage of the Epistle. It actually lays down the principle that a man can never put away an adopted son, and that he cannot put away a real son without good ground. It is remarkable that the adopted son should have a stronger position than the son by birth, yet it was so.” (W. M. Ramsay, A Historical Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, reprinted 1979; p. 353).

Roman customs and laws differed from those of the Jews, and it is by understanding Jewish laws and customs that we see why “birth” is used in Peter and James, and “adoption” is used in Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians: “Among the Jews, adoption had no importance, and hardly any existence. The perpetuity of the family, when a man died childless, was secured in another way, viz., the levirate. Only sons by blood were esteemed in the Hebrew view” (Ramsay, Historical Commentary…Galatians; p. 341). The “levirate” that Ramsay refers to was the law stating that if a man died childless, his wife was to marry the man’s brother, and then her oldest son would be counted as the child of the dead man and carry his name (Deut. 25:5-10; Mark 12:18-27).
God made salvation permanent for Christians, which was radically different from before the Church started on the Day of Pentecost. He worked very hard to communicate that change to His Church, which is composed of both former Jews and former Gentiles (when a Jew or Gentile believes, he or she does not lose his nationality, but in God’s eyes is now a Christian, a new creation in Christ). Thus, in Scripture that has a distinctively Jewish flavor, such as Peter and James, God speaks of “birth” (anagennao, 1 Pet. 1:3, 23; apokueo, James 1:18), because birth and genealogy were very important to the Jews. They would immediately understand that a child “born” into God’s family was a permanent member of His family. God also uses a word for “birth” (paligenesi) in Titus 3:5 (It is noteworthy that all three of these Greek words for birth are unique to writings to the Christian Church, another indication of the permanence of Christian salvation.

However, in books such as Romans, Ephesians, and Galatians, which were addressed to people with a Gentile background, He also speaks of “adoption.” The same truth is communicated by both terms: the Christian becomes a permanent member of the family of God, because he is forever sealed in Christ (Eph. 1:13), and has a guaranteed hope (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14; NIV, ESV). While no verse in the Old Testament even hints that one day God would make salvation permanent, the permanence of salvation for Christians is the hallmark of the Sacred Secret.

This total change to permanent salvation is clearly taught in Galatians 4:1-5. The first three verses of the chapter show that before Jesus came, though the people of God were heirs, they were equal to slaves, being under guardians and enslaved to the basic principles of the world. God’s equating Old Testament believers to minor children equal to slaves is very important, because a slave is not guaranteed a place in the family. Galatians goes on to say that when the fullness of time came, God sent His Son (4:4) so that we might receive “adoption” into His family.

Galatians 4:5 then says: “[God sent His Son] in order that he might redeem those who were under the law in order that we might receive the adoption.” The two “in order that” clauses show that for people to be adopted into God’s family, Christ first had to redeem them, and before Christ redeemed them they were under the law. Without Jesus paying the redemption price, no adoption was possible. Thus no Old Testament believer was adopted into God’s family because adoption was not available yet. Adoption was available only after Christ died, and God started to bring people into His family by “adopting” and “birth” on the Day of Pentecost, 50 days after Christ died on the cross. Thus, permanent salvation was not available until Christ died, and was first made available when the Church started on the Day of Pentecost. For more on the permanence of Christian salvation, see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be Like Christ, Appendix A: “The Administration of the Sacred Secret.” The words “as sons” do not appear in the Greek text. If we are adopted, then we are adopted. The phrase “as sons” was apparently brought into the KJV from the Latin Vulgate.

“to.” The Greek preposition is eis (1519 εἰς). Prepositions are very flexible and have many meanings. Bullinger gives some of the ways that the Greeks used prepositions in a mathematical sense, but that only applied in some cases and in math. It is wrong to think that the Greeks were not as flexible with their prepositions as we are. The word “unto” is archaic and unnecessary. “To” is perfectly acceptable.

“good pleasure.” The Greek word is eudokia (#2107 εὐδοκία). This word is difficult to translate. It contains the idea of good, of pleasure, and of intent. Thus some
translations go with “kindly intent.” We decided to stick with the ASV and let the word “will” carry the fact of intention.

“he.” Here it refers to God, and the REV keeps pronouns that refer to God in lower case except in a few contexts. The primary reason for doing this is that there are places in the text where who the “he” is, is very unclear, and by capitalizing it now we will be forced later to put a specific meaning on it that the biblical text does not place on it.

1:6. “for.” The preposition eis can denote purpose or result. In this case, result is the primary meaning, although God also purposed it for that end.

“freely gave us” The root of this phrase is “grace,” and the Greek has a wonderful word-relation: “his grace, in which he graced us.” At this point we have decided to go with the ASV, which carries the meaning of the word and is very clear.

“in the Beloved One.” This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in Christ.”

1:7. “in whom.” This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in Christ.”

“redemption.” See commentary on Colossians 1:14.

“transgressions.” This is a difficult word to exactly translate. The Greek is paraptōma (#3900 παράπτωμα) which is to “misstep,” “to fall by the wayside.” This “misstep” is not necessarily intentional, although it can be. Thus, in life, “trespasses,” are much more common than “sins.” Meanings of paraptōma include: “faults,” “deviations from truth,” “lapse,” “error,” “mistake,” “wrongdoing.” We went with “transgressions.” Often we trespass from a lack of wisdom and experience. It is a blessing to know that Jesus not only forgave our intentional sins and faults, he forgave us our trespasses as well.

“riches.” The Greek word is singular, but the plural translation is okay because “riches” is a singular reality. We could have gone with “wealth” but that has too strong a connotation of money.

1:8. “lavished on.” The phrase that is more literal, “made to abound toward us” is awkward for the modern reader and “abound” is not normally considered a verb. We went with “lavished on,” as do a number of the modern versions.

“prudence.” The Greek is phronesis (#5428 φρονήσει), and Louw Nida, BDAG both agree. Thoughtful, planning, prudence.

1:9. “having made known.” “Making known” is better translated “having made known,” especially in light of the context, which is past.

“sacred secret.” The Greek is musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) and is best translated “secret” rather than mystery. The Greek word musterion means a “secret” in the religious sphere. A secret can be known if it is revealed, while a mystery denotes something unknowable (Vine, Expository Dictionary, “Mystery;” Bullinger, Lexicon, “Mystery;” Thayer, Lexicon, “musterion”). The musterion was revealed. This fact can also be seen within Scripture itself. Ephesians 1:9 says that God “made known to us the musterion of His will.” God made His “secret” known to us when He revealed it in His Word. By definition making known a mystery would be impossible. Versions of the Bible that translate musterion as “secret” include The New English Bible, The International Standard Version, the Complete Jewish Bible by David Stern, The Bible by James Moffatt, J. B. Phillip’s New Testament, The New Testament in the Language of the People by Charles Williams, The Better Version of the New Testament by Chester
Estes, Young’s Literal Translation, and The Emphasized Bible by Joseph Rotherham.

[For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

“in him.” This is not “himself.” It refers to Christ, as does the “in him” in verses 4, 7, 10, 11, and 13. Although there are some versions that go with “in himself,” the middle voice (of “he purposed”) is already reflexive, so saying “in himself” would be redundant and unnecessary.

1:10. “the administration of the fullness of the times.” The definite article, “the,” is implied, and in Greek, the preposition (in this case, eis) before the noun can make the noun definite without there being a definite article in the text. The administration of the fullness of times is a future administration, most likely what we sometimes call “the Everlasting Kingdom” (cp. Rev. 21, 21).

“in the heavens.” This is the literal Greek, which takes the form of the Hebrew text, in which “heaven” is always plural (prob. a plural of majesty to emphasize the largeness of the heavens, cp. note Eph. 1:3).

1:11. “in whom.” This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in Christ.”

“we.” The word “we” refers collectively to the Church, the Body of Christ, not to individual Christians. See commentary on Ephesians 1:4, “us.”

“were claimed as God’s possession.” This whole phrase is translated from the one Greek verb kleroō (#2820 κληροω). There is disagreement among scholars and translators as to whether this verse is speaking of believers receiving an inheritance from God, or the believers themselves being God’s inheritance. The decision about the meaning of the verse and how to translate it is made more difficult because this particular verb only occurs in this one place in the New Testament. To understand the verb kleroō, it helps us to understand the noun, kleros, which was a “lot” (as in casting or drawing “lots”). In the biblical culture, casting lots was a common way to make decisions. The “lot” could be dice, bones, stones, etc. For example, the soldiers who crucified Jesus did not want to cut up his robe, so they cast lots to see who would get to keep it.

In Greek culture the verb kleroō was used in several ways. The basic meaning was simply “to cast lots” or “to determine something by casting lots.” However, that basic meaning was expanded so that kleroō also came to be used for that which was assigned by lot. A third meaning that is harder to articulate but vital for the understanding of this verse is that kleroō was used such that the thing chosen or won was itself the “lot.” In that usage, kleroō meant, “to make a ‘lot,’” in other words, that something would become a possession, heritage, portion, or private possession as if won by lot. In Ephesians 1:11 the believer becomes God’s chosen possession, His “lot.”

It is important to realize that the word kleroō was used for someone or something that was a possession even when a “lot” was not specifically cast. We today do the same thing, and use words that have roots that were once meaningful but now are just part of the word. For example, we can have an “auspicious occasion” even though there was actually no “auspice,” no “favorable sign” that preceded the occasion. Similarly, God did not actually “cast lots” for us as if by chance some people were chosen to be His and some were not. The word kleroō was used to emphasize the point that we became God’s chosen possession.
The commentators and the translations are divided as to how to translate klerōō in this verse. Is the verse saying that in Christ we received an inheritance (HCSB; ESV; KJV; NASB; NRSV)? Or is it saying that in Christ we became an inheritance, i.e., became God’s chosen possession (NAB; NET; NIV; Rotherham; Williams)? Part of the problem in deciding the meaning of the verse is that to some extent both interpretations are true. We can even see this in the immediate context, because verse 14 says that the gift of holy spirit sealed in us guarantees us our inheritance, while verse 18 says that the believers are God’s inheritance. So not only are both concepts of inheritance—us receiving an inheritance in Christ, and us being an inheritance in Christ—in the Bible, they are both in the first chapter of Ephesians!

Nevertheless, we believe that for the sake of translation into English, the stronger position is that in Christ the believer is claimed as God’s inheritance, God’s possession. In the Old Testament, Israel was God’s possession (Deut. 4:20; 7:6; 9:26, 29; 14:2; 32:9). Deuteronomy 32:9 is very well known: “For the LORD’s portion is his people.” Also, us being made God’s possession fits the flow of the sentence better. It makes more sense to say that we became God’s possession so that we will be to the praise of his glory (v. 12), than to say that we received an inheritance so that we will be to the praise of his glory. Also, although in the context of Ephesians 1 the “inheritance” relates to our salvation, there are uses of inheritance in the New Testament that are about rewards, and our rewards are earned and not guaranteed. Lastly, in his commentary on Ephesians, Harold Hoehner also lists some grammatical reasons that support the reading that in Christ we become God’s portion.

In conclusion, we would say that the primary meaning in this verse and context is that we become God’s possession, but also part of what is being said is that in Christ we receive an inheritance.

“being marked out beforehand.” God planned for the Church, the Body of Christ, before the foundation of the world. This is not “predestination,” even though many versions use that word. [For being “marked out beforehand,” see Appendix 8: “On Calvinism and Predestination”. For the word “we” referring collectively to the Church, see commentary on Ephesians 1:4, “us.”]

“plan.” We felt that “counsel,” as some versions have, was not the clearest translation. It is not that God had a large council meeting and many people were involved. “Plan” is much better.

1:13. “in whom.” This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in Christ.”

“when you heard...and when you believed in him, you were sealed.” This verse is a great key in properly understanding salvation, the new birth, and receiving the gift of holy spirit. Every Christian receives (is “baptized in”) the holy spirit the moment he has faith in Christ. The individual may not outwardly manifest the holy spirit by things like speaking in tongues or prophecy at that time (in fact, he may never outwardly manifest the spirit), but he has the holy spirit born and sealed inside him.

The King James Version can confuse people about the timing of believing and being sealed with the holy spirit. It reads, “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth...in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.” The two times the phrase “after that” is used in the KJV can confuse the modern reader and make him think that a person is sealed with holy spirit some time...
after he believes. This is not the case. R. C. H. Lenski states the truth quite succinctly: “The moment we come to faith the sealing occurs. The thought is not that we must believe a while, and that some time later in the course of our believing the Spirit is bestowed.” The problem is that 400 years ago when the King James was written, the phrase “after that” was sometimes used when “when” would have been more appropriate (cp. Mark 8:25; Acts 1:8; Gal. 3:25; Eph. 1:13; 1 Thess. 2:2; Titus 3:4). The confusion caused by the use of the phrase “after that” does not occur in the modern versions, because they do not use that phrase.

“promised holy spirit.” The Greek texts read, “the holy spirit of promise.” This is a genitive of relation, and means the holy spirit that was promised. The gift of holy spirit that we have today was promised in the Old Testament in verses such as Isaiah 32:15 and Joel 2:28. The Old Testament prophets and Jesus foretold its coming, saying it would be a new spirit that would be “poured out” (i.e., given in fullness) into all the believers (Ezek. 11:19, 20; 36:26, 27; Joel 2:28, 29; John 14:17; cp. Isa. 32:15; 44:3-5; Ezek. 37:12; 39:29; John 15:26; 16:13).

It is very confusing to some Trinitarians that the holy spirit was promised, because if “the Holy Spirit” is an eternal member of the Trinity, how can he be promised for the future? Realizing that “the holy spirit” is the gift of God and not a member of the Trinity clears up that difficulty.

We also need to understand that although the holy spirit that we have was promised, it was not promised “to” us. It was promised in the Old Testament and Gospels to be given in the future, but a study of the verses in the Old Testament that speak of the coming of the gift of holy spirit refer to the Millennial Kingdom. God, by grace, gave us the gift of holy spirit that He promised to give to people in the Millennial Kingdom.

It is also important to realize that we today do not have the same gift of holy spirit that God gave to Old Testament believers such as Moses or Deborah. Rather, what we have is the firstfruits of the gift of holy spirit that God promised to pour out in the Millennial Kingdom. [For information on the gift of holy spirit we Christians have, see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, The Gift of Holy Spirit: the Power to be Like Christ, and Appendix A of that book, “The Administration of the Sacred Secret”].

During the Old Testament and Gospel periods, God gave the gift of holy spirit in a very limited way: it was upon only certain selected people, and He gave it conditionally and by measure. However, God promised much better things for Israel’s future. He promised that in the Millennial Kingdom He would “pour out” holy spirit in abundance to everyone who believed. Furthermore, what God promised to Israel, He has given grace to the Christian Church, which explains why holy spirit in Christians is called “the promised Holy Spirit [holy spirit]” (Eph. 1:13), and the “firstfruits of the Spirit [spirit]” (Rom. 8:23). Therefore, the things about holy spirit that were foretold for the Millennial Kingdom apply to Christians also, even though holy spirit was not specifically foretold for Christians. Christians even have holy spirit with manifestations that were not promised in the Old Testament, and these are speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues. The Church Epistles make the point that the gift of holy spirit that Christians have today is “the promised holy spirit” (Acts 2:33, Eph. 1:13).

Jesus spoke to his disciples about the promised holy spirit in Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4. In the Old Testament God promised to give holy spirit to Israel, not the Church. No one knew there was going to be a Christian Church, because it was part of the Sacred
Secret that God hid in Himself (see commentary on Ephesians 3:9). God promised that holy spirit would be poured out in the kingdom of Christ, but because He has given it to Christians, Scripture calls what we have the “firstfruits” of the spirit (Rom. 8:23).

God calls what we have “firstfruits” because we have today what He promised for the believers in the Millennial Kingdom. There are some major differences between the gift of holy spirit that God gave in the Old Testament and the gift of holy spirit God promised to give in the Millennial Kingdom, which we today get by grace.

1) **In the Old Testament and Gospels, holy spirit was upon only a few believers, but in the Millennial Kingdom it will be in all believers.** Even though there were millions of Israelites who lived during Old Testament times, only a few were blessed to receive the gift of holy spirit. In contrast to that, in the Millennial Kingdom God will pour out the gift of holy spirit on every believer. Verses such as Joel 2:28, 29 and John 7:38 make that very clear. Today, in the Administration of Grace, every believer gets holy spirit just as will happen in the Millennial Kingdom.

2) **In the Old Testament and Gospels, God gave holy spirit in a limited way, by measure, but in the Millennial Kingdom it will be poured out in abundance.** In contrast to the limited measure of holy spirit God gave in the Old Testament and Gospels, He promised to give holy spirit in abundance in the Millennial Kingdom. We read that Joel said, “…I will pour out my Spirit [spirit] on all people” (Joel 2:28; cp. also Isa. 32:15; 44:3). The words “pour out” are significant, and indicate great abundance. There is no place in the OT or Gospels that God’s gift of holy spirit is said to be “poured out,” but that is the promise for the Millennial Kingdom. It needs to be noted, however, that even though God promised He would give people an abundance of holy spirit, He did not specifically promise that they would be filled, even though that is clearly implied. In contrast, it is clear in Scripture written to the Church that every Christian is filled with holy spirit.

3) **In the Old Testament and Gospels, God gave holy spirit conditionally, and the recipient could lose it.** King Saul is an example of a person in the OT who lost the gift of holy spirit because of his disobedience to God (1 Sam. 16:14), and David prayed that God would not take it from him (Ps. 51:11). In the Millennial Kingdom, holy spirit will be given permanently, and by grace we receive it permanently also. It is vital to understand this aspect of the gift of holy spirit. For Christians, it is the presence of holy spirit inside them that makes them a Christian. When an unbeliever today confesses Christ as Lord, he gets the gift of holy spirit at that instant. The presence of holy spirit inside that person makes him a “holy one” (often translated “saint,” cp. Rom. 1:7, etc.), is the “seed” that is in him (1 Pet. 1:23), is why he is said to be “born again” (1 Pet. 1:23), is why he is called a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17), and is why he is said to have a “guarantee” of salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14). In the Old Testament the gift of holy spirit was said to be “upon” people, but in contrast, God promised that when He gave holy spirit in the Millennial Kingdom, it would be in them (cp. Ezek. 11:19; 36:26, 27; 37:14). Jesus thoroughly knew the Old Testament and its promises, and made sure his followers knew that holy spirit would be “in” people (John 14:17). Throughout the Old Testament and Gospel periods, the gift of holy spirit was upon people conditionally, and God could therefore take it back. In contrast to the way God gave holy spirit in the Old Testament, in the Millennial Kingdom He will give holy spirit permanently to those believers who had been raised from the dead, brought into the kingdom, and settled in the
land (Ezek. 37:12, 14; Isa. 59:21). The permanence of the relationship between the Millennial Kingdom believer and God is the basis for many promises of the OT, such as when God said of resurrected Israel believers that He would “no longer” hide His face from them (Ezek. 39:29). He told them he will give them a “new heart,” taking away their heart of stone and giving them a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26), and all the people will know Him (Jer. 31:33 and 34).

4) In the Old Testament and Gospels it is never stated that holy spirit would influence a person to live a godly life. However, Scripture promises that in the Millennial Kingdom, holy spirit will influence people toward godliness. One of the most exciting things about the gift of holy spirit that God promised to give in the Millennial Kingdom was that it would help people live godly lives. There is no evidence in the Old Testament or Gospels that a purpose or characteristic of the gift of holy spirit that they had was that it produced a positive transforming influence, helping them become more godly. Certainly people such as Moses or Elijah, who walked in great spiritual power, were aware of God more acutely and thus would have worked hard to live godly lives, but there is no statement in the Old Testament or Gospels that one of the purposes of the gift of holy spirit that God gave in those times was to help transform people toward godliness. However, the gift of holy spirit in the Millennium Kingdom (and for us today) is that the promised holy spirit is specifically stated to help people live godly lives. Jesus even called it the “helper” on many occasions (cp. John 15:26; sometimes this is translated “comforter,” or “encourager”). In Ezekiel, God promised that when holy spirit is poured out on resurrected people in the Millennial Kingdom, they will be able to talk with Him directly and intimately, and not be hidden from His “face” any more (Ezek. 39:29). Having holy spirit does not remove free will or force a person to obey God, and we all know that Old Testament believers who had holy spirit, and Christians (who all have holy spirit) disobey the commandments and sin. Nevertheless, holy spirit, as it is given in the Administration of Grace to Christians, and will be given to believers in the Millennial Kingdom, does have a very powerful influence on the person.

Ezekiel 36:27 says the holy spirit will “cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.” Isaiah 44:3-5 also testifies to the godly influence of holy spirit. The Church Epistles testify to the godly influence that holy spirit has in the life of a believer, as it fights with the sin nature that lives in us (Gal. 5:17). For more on the promised holy spirit, see commentary on John 7:39. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

1:14. “deposit guaranteeing.” This is a deposit that guaranteed delivery. The presence of holy spirit in a person guarantees that he will be saved.

1:15. “Because of this.” The Greek is dia touto (#1223 διὰ τοῦτο #3778 τοῦτο), which means “because of this,” “for this reason.”


“remembering you.” We felt like “mention,” as some versions have, has come to mean an afterthought in English, which is not Paul’s point at all. Kittel pointed out that it could be idiomatic. We felt “remembering you” was the heart of the text.

1:17. “a spirit of wisdom.” This phrase has caused commentators much trouble. The word “spirit” here does not refer to the use of spirit that relates to human attitudes and emotions, nor does it refer to the gift of holy spirit, which has already been sealed inside the believer (cp. 1:13). This is the use of the word “spirit” that is the metonymy for...
something produced by the holy spirit, i.e., a manifestation of the spirit, and it most often refers to the manifestation of prophecy (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:12). Harold Hoehner gets the sense correctly when he writes, “Rather, he [Paul] is praying for a specific manifestation of the Spirit so that the believers will have insight and know something of God’s mysteries as a result of the Holy Spirit’s revelation” (Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary).

By the time that Paul wrote Ephesians, most likely in 62 AD, it was well known in Christian circles that the word “spirit” was used for a manifestation of the spirit, especially a prophecy. The Corinthians were “zealous for spirits” (1 Cor. 14:12); “the spirits [prophecies] of the prophets were subject to the prophets (1 Cor. 14:32); the Thessalonian congregation was not to be troubled by “a spirit,” a prophecy (2 Thess. 2:2); and we Christians are to test “the spirits,” the prophecies, “because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Furthermore, Jesus will destroy the wicked one by the “spirit,” the prophetic words, that come out of his mouth (2 Thess. 2:8).

Paul was praying for the people of Ephesus so that God would give them a prophetic word of wisdom to guide them, also so that they would get revelation, and that this was to be in relation to their accurate understanding of God. Thus Paul is praying both that the believers will have wisdom and revelation to guide them, but that wisdom and revelation will be related to their accurate knowledge about God, which makes sense because the more we understand God and His Word, the more God can correctly guide us. Many people who have an inaccurate knowledge of God misunderstand His spoken Word and misread His written Word. Included in the “full knowledge” is wisdom and revelation about God.

“revelation.” For what “revelation” is, see commentary on Galatians 1:12 and 1 Corinthians 12:8.
1:18. “his inheritance in the holy ones.” The commentators disagree completely. Some say that the vocabulary and context clearly indicate that God’s inheritance is distributed to the saints, while others state that the context of Ephesians clearly says that it is the saints who are God’s inheritance. Actually, both meanings clearly have merit. It is true that the saints shall receive an inheritance from God, but it is just as true that we are His inheritance, for the Lord’s portion is His people (Deut. 32:9). In this section of Ephesians the use of autos (#846 αὐτός) is generally placed after whatever Paul wants to be of God, and the flow of that pattern indicates that, although the text can be read to mean that we are His inheritance, the more probable meaning is that his inheritance is given to the believers. Translating literally from the Greek text leaves the possibility of both meanings in the text, and given the ambiguity of the passage, we felt that this was the best policy.
1:19. “to us, the believing ones.” This is very literal, but makes the point that the power of God is manifested in the lives of those who are currently believing, not just in those who at one time confessed Christ as Lord.

“(according to…all things in all).” This is the figure of speech Parembole (Bullinger, Figures), a form of parenthesis. The Parembole starts in verse 19b and goes through verse 23. It explains and gives great depth of meaning to the phrase “surpassing greatness of his power.” How great is God’s power to us? It raised Christ from the dead, seated him at God’s own right hand in heaven, and raised him far above all other powers in the universe. And it is that power that is “to us” who believe.
Dunamis (#1411 δύναμις) = power; energeia (#1753 ἐνέργεια) = energizing; kratos (#2904 κράτος) = might; ischus (#2479 ἰσχύς) = strength.

1:20. “the Christ.” The presence of the definite article and this specific context makes this reading preferable to just “Christ.”

“out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “from among the dead.” The word “dead” is a genitive plural adjective, and needs a noun to complete the sense, thus it means “dead people.” The text says that Christ was raised from the dead [people], not, “from the state of his being dead.”


“name that is named.” This refers to Jesus being above every other power and authority in the world. In the ancient world it was believed that the names of divinities had power, and there was truth in that because both God and demons respond to those who invoke their name. Modern witches still use the names of Satan and the names of demons in their spells, and Christians use the name of Jesus Christ in their prayers and when, by revelation, they command miracles and healings to come to pass. In Luke 10, the 72 men Jesus sent out to the cities of Israel returned and said, “Lord, even the demons are submit to us in your name.”

In contrast to Christians who use the name of Christ, people involved in witchcraft of all types use the names of demons in their spells and incantations. The Jewish rulers knew the Apostles were doing miracles, but could not bring themselves to believe that the miracles were done by the true God. Acts 4:7 records that they called in the Apostles and asked, “‘By what power, or in what name, have you done this [healed the crippled man]?’” The Jewish exorcists used the names of Abraham, Solomon, and other Patriarchs, and that was considered orthodox. However, witchcraft was condemned by the Sanhedrin, and this inquisition in Acts 4 was not about the miracle—no one could deny that—but about the “name” or “power” that was used to accomplish it.

Acts 19:13 records that there were Jews who were exorcists who thought they could use the name of Jesus to cast out demons even though they rejected Jesus as the Messiah. “But also some of the Jews, exorcists, who traveled from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, ‘I charge you under oath by Jesus whom Paul preaches.’” The result of this action was disastrous, because the demons had no regard for the name of Jesus being used by unbelievers, and wounded the men trying to cast them out.

The city of Ephesus was well known for magic and witchcraft, and when Paul’s ministry touched many people, “a number of those who practiced the magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all, and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver” (Acts 19:19; a drachma was a day’s wage for a laborer, so at today’s wages of perhaps $8 an hour, or $64 per day, the amount would be over 3 million dollars). Since Ephesus was so steeped in magic, it is appropriate that it was to the believers in Ephesus that the Word tells us that Jesus is “far above” every name that is named. There is no magic, spell, or witchcraft that is more powerful than Jesus. The believers in Ephesus did not have to fear that someone would try to cast a spell or curse on them using a more powerful name that Jesus, because there is no name more powerful than the name of Jesus.
“coming one.” The Greek is mellō (#3195 μελλω), and refer to the age that was close at hand, the Messianic Age. This is more than a simple future. The Greek almost certainly expresses an immanence that is very difficult to translate into the English.

1:22. “and he put all things in subjection under his feet.” This verse continues the effect of God’s energizing the Christ, which started in verse 20. This is a good example of the prophetic perfect: that something that will absolutely happen in the future is placed in the past (aorist) tense (see commentary on “seated,” in Ephesians 2:6).

“for the congregation.” There is debate as whether “to the church” or “for the church” (NIV, RSV) is more accurate. The word “appoint” is a translation of didōmi (1325 δίδωμι). Didōmi is used here as equivalent to “appoint.” We have chosen, “for the congregation” as a translation of the dative case. The dative case is generally translated either with the preposition “to” or “for,” e.g. “to the congregation” or “for the congregation.” Since didōmi is not used to mean “give” but rather “appoint,” we felt “for the congregation” was a better translation of the dative case because Christ is appointed head over “everything” for the sake of the church, which was very much God’s plan. This verse is not saying that Christ is over the head of everything in (“to”) the church, but that he is head over everything, period, for the sake of the church.

Chapter 2

2:1. “he made alive.” This phrase is pulled up from verse five to add clarity for the reader. Admittedly, while it adds some clarity, it also removes some of the emphasis of the Greek sentence, which is very long and includes all of verses 1-7. A quite literal translation of verse one is, “And you, being dead due to your trespasses and sins,”. It is not until much later in the seven-verse sentence, and even then in different verses, that we are told, “God” [verse 4] “made us alive together with Christ” [verse 5]. It is as if God tells us in 2:1 that we are dead and then lets us sit in that state and think about how horrible it is all the way to 2:5, when He affirms for us that He “made us alive.” Translators debate whether it is better to bring the phrase about “made alive” up from 2:5 into 2:1 for clarity (KJV, NKJV, RSV, REV), or to leave it out and let the reader discover it much later in the sentence (HCSB, ESV, NIV).

“Dead due to your trespasses and sins.” Although most English versions read “dead in your trespasses and sins,” there is no word “in” in the Greek text; the construction is simply the adjective nekros, “dead” followed by the nouns “trespasses” and “sins,” which are in the dative case. The effect of the dative is to make the point that it is “due to,” or “because of,” your trespasses and sins that “you” are dead. In his commentary on Ephesians, R. C. H. Lenski correctly observes: “the datives are causal: ‘due to your trespasses and sins.’” Heinrich Meyer writes, “The dative connotes the causa efficiens, ‘efficient cause’ of the death” (Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament).

We can see that the word “dead” is used in a figurative sense, because the verse itself and the next few verses make it clear that the people Paul was writing to were very much alive even before they were saved. But if “dead” is being used in a figurative sense, what is that figurative sense? Actually, it seems clear that “dead” has two figurative meanings, a primary one and a secondary one. The primary meaning is proleptic, in that it
is speaking of the future result of unforgiven sin, which is everlasting death. The secondary meaning is that the person who is not born again and sealed with the gift of holy spirit is “spiritually dead.” (There are commentators who say “spiritual death” is literal. We agree it is real, but shy away from “literal,” because “spiritual death” only makes sense because we understand actual physical “death.” The phrases “spiritually dead,” or “spiritual death,” do not occur in the Bible). We will now take the time to examine both of these meanings.

The primary meaning of “dead” is proleptic, meaning the event (the person’s death) is actually future, but it is spoken of as if it is a present reality. Meyer correctly observes:

The expression νεκρὸς [“dead”] is proleptic: ‘when ye were dead through your sins,’ i.e., when you had through your sins drawn upon you death, had become liable to eternal death, so that in this way the certo morituri, ‘those who are surely to die,’ are designated as νεκρὸς [“dead”]. (Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament).

Marcus Barth in The Anchor Bible spoke of “dead” as having a “prophetic tone.” Understanding the word “dead” as a prophecy is the same as understanding it proleptically, but it is perhaps easier for some people to understand the concept. Also, the idea of the future being spoken of as something that has already occurred is often called, “the prophetic perfect,” although the phrase “prophetic perfect” is properly applied to verbs in the past tense (see commentary on Ephesians 2:6, “seated”).

A major reason the Bible says the people are dead now (“being dead;” ovtas nekrous; present tense) is for emphasis. Saying something that will happen in the future has already happened is a biblical way of emphasizing the point, which in this case is emphatically saying that the unsaved will die in the future. Other verses in the Bible are more literal, and say that the death of the unsaved has not happened yet. 1 Corinthians 1:18 says, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,” and 2 Corinthians 4:3 says, “But even if our Good News is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.” The unsaved are in the process of perishing, because day after day they grow closer to everlasting death—a death that is certain unless they get saved.

That the word “dead” is proleptic, a future reality being spoken of as a present reality, fits with the two other concepts in the sentence that are also proleptic. To better understand the proleptic nature of the whole Greek sentence, the English reader needs to know that the sentence is very long, and includes all of verses 1-7. That is not unusual for Paul, who occasionally uses very long sentences. For example, in Ephesians 1, verses 3-14 are all one sentence, although many English versions break it up into smaller sentences so it is easier to read. The proleptic use of “dead” at the beginning of the sentence fits with the proleptic use of “made us alive together with the Christ,” and “seated us with him in the heavenly places,” which occur later in the sentence. The sentence says we are “dead,” but we are not literally “dead” yet, just as the sentence says we are made alive together with Christ, ever though we have not died yet nor been raised like Christ in our new, everlasting bodies. Furthermore, we have not yet been seated with Christ in heaven, but we will be in the future when the Rapture occurs. So the whole thrust of the sentence—the death of the unsaved, the resurrection of the saved, and the saved being seated in heaven—is future, but is grammatically placed in the past tense for emphasis.
It was common in Semitic languages, and in the language in the Bible, to express the certainty of a future event by speaking of it as having already occurred, so saying the unsaved are “dead” when they will be dead in the future is not unusual. Thus, the use of “dead” in a proleptic sense is not unusual in the New Testament. Romans 7:10 says, “and I found that the commandment that was given for life actually resulted in death.” Is Paul saying that people died when they sinned? Of course not. He is using the term “death” proleptically, that unforgiven and unatoned sin will result in everlasting death. But the result, “death,” is so certain that he speaks of the death as a present reality. Similarly, in Romans 7:24 Paul asks, “Who will rescue me out of this body of death?” Paul refers to his body as being dead even though it is alive, and he notes that being rescued from his dead body is a future event, as evidenced by the future verb “will rescue.”

A secondary meaning of the word “dead” in Ephesians 2:1 is that it refers to being spiritually dead. One of the beauties of the way the Bible expresses truth is that one word or phrase can express several different realities. In Ephesians 2:1, because the Bible uses “being dead,” the certainty of the future death of the unsaved is powerfully expressed, and also the reality of the spiritual death of the unsaved is expressed in the same phrase. The problem with the theological phrase “spiritually dead” is that it is not in the Bible. It describes a spiritual state of being, but the exact nature of that state is understood differently by different people. We assert that it refers to the state of the unsaved person who has not been born again of the holy spirit of God [see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation”], and thus is separated from God and headed for everlasting death.

In contrast to “being dead” being figurative, the theology that is broadly described as Calvinism (after John Calvin) understands “dead” and “spiritually dead” in a different way than just separated from God and headed for death. According to Calvinist theology, since the Bible says the unsaved person is “dead,” he cannot believe on his own but must be given life by the “Holy Spirit” in order to believe in Christ. That is why Calvinism teaches that it is God who picks who will be saved and who will not. According to Calvinist theology, God empowers the dead people He selects for salvation by giving them His “Holy Spirit” so that they can believe. Once empowered by the “Holy Spirit,” the person can believe and get saved. There are many problems with this interpretation of the verse and of Calvinism in general. One problem is that it denies (or significantly modifies) the meaning of “dead.” The unsaved person is not really dead, as we can see even from the sentence itself, because the “dead” people in the verse lived and acted upon their emotions and feelings (even Calvin himself freely admitted these “dead” people were physically and mentally alive). That forces the Calvinist to say that the unsaved person is alive both physically and mentally, but cannot make the choice to do anything against his “dead” and unholy nature, such as get saved, unless empowered by the “Holy Spirit.” But there is no proof for that assertion. For one thing, it is going far beyond the meaning of the verse: it imports a theology that is not part of the verse itself. More than that, however, it is part of the “nature” of mankind to survive and even to try to improve one’s circumstances. Thus, when presented with the opportunity to survive forever on the basis of faith alone, it is well within the “nature” of mankind to make that choice. Unsaved people do have the survival instinct to believe in Jesus and receive everlasting life. Calvinism denies that, of course, which is why there are thousands of pages of commentary and debate written on the subject between Calvinist and non-Calvinist
theologians (good books that assert people’s ability to believe and get saved include: What Love Is This by David Hunt and Against Calvinism by Roger Olson). To us it is evident that unsaved people can and do believe in Christ and then consequently receive the gift of holy spirit (cp. Acts 2:38; Ephesians 1:13).

A very good reason to believe that Ephesians 2:1 is primarily to be taken in a proleptic, prophetic sense, is the wording of the verse itself. The verse says that the unsaved people are dead “due to,” or because of, their sins. But dead people do not sin, so these people have to be alive enough to have original sin and to sin themselves. A quite literal translation of the verse is: “And you, being dead due to your transgressions and sins,….” Interestingly, Calvinist theology readily admits that the people of Ephesians 2:1 are “dead” due to their sin (or “in” their sin, which is still in part the sin they committed), but in doing that, they admit these “dead” people actually are alive. For Calvinist theology to work, the “dead” people in the verse can sin because they are alive, but cannot believe and be saved because they are dead. This is very fuzzy thinking.

According to Calvinist theology, the unsaved “dead” people have never been alive because they have never been given life through Christ. But if a person has never ever lived, never been alive at any time, he cannot have sin. At that point the Calvinist shifts his definition of death and says that the people are alive enough to sin, so they are in fact deserving of burning in Gehenna, but they are not “spiritually alive,” so they are incapable of having faith in Christ. We reject that reasoning, and assert that the verse is actually quite simple. It points out both that the unsaved person is separated from God, and that his sin will result in his eternal death. Beyond that, we believe other verses in the Bible say these people, who can freely sin, can also freely have faith in Christ and receive everlasting life. It is not necessarily a desire to be Christ-like or holy that lures most people to salvation, but the chance to live better on earth as well as survive forever.

The point of Ephesians 2:1 is not just to tell us about the fate of the unsaved, but to produce profound thankfulness in the believer for what God has done in saving him. The Greek phrase “being dead,” (ovtas nekrous ) refers to the believer’s state before he got saved. We can see this from the context, because 2:5 uses the same Greek as 2:1 but exchanges “you” (plural) for “we.” We can also see it from the grammar itself, because the participles show people’s state before God granted them salvation.

2:2. “you once.” This is a good translation of pote (#4218 ποτέ).

“according to the ways of this world.” The Greek is “according to the aiōn (#165 αἰῶν) of the kosmos (#2889 κόσμος).” When a person walks in accord with the aiōn of this kosmos, he walks in a way that conforms to the world in its present fallen and corrupt state. The Greek word aiōn gets translated “age,” most of the time, but it is important that we think of “age” the same way the Greeks did. Generally, when we think of “age,” we mean a period of time. Although the word did refer to a period of time, it referred to the thinking and attitudes that existed in that age. Trench writes that aiōn refers to “All that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world, which it may be impossible to cease and accurately define, but which constitutes a most real and effective power, being the moral, or immoral, atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale, again, inevitably to exhale,—all this is included in the aiōn ….” (Richard C. Trench, Synonyms).

Just as the owners of a Mexican or Chinese restaurant work hard to create an “atmosphere” that represents their home country, the Adversary works hard to make sure
that this world has an “ungodly atmosphere,” and that “atmosphere” is the aiōn of this world (kosmos). The unsaved and the ignorant Christians do not even notice that the “atmosphere” of this world is ungodly, and they follow the culture without thinking much about it.

Because the word aiōn includes the idea of time and behavior, we felt that in this verse the behavioral aspect was being emphasized because of the verb “walk,” and went with “ways.”

“of the authority of the air.” The Greek reads, “the authority (genitive singular) of the air.” The Devil is the ruler of the “authority” of the “air.” The air can be literal, because the Devil controls and to some extent lives in the air. However, the “air” can legitimately refer to the “atmosphere” of evil that exists in the world, which is part of the understanding of aiōn. This may be an excellent example of the Figure of Speech, amphibologia, double meaning. Both meanings are true, and can be textually supported by the vocabulary. The “authority” can refer to the authority he has, or that he exercises through demons, and can even include the demons themselves.

“working.” The Greek is energeō (#1754 ἐνεργέω), a verb that means “works” or “energizes.” We have used both translations in Ephesians.

“sons” is literal and cultural.

“defiance.” The Greek is apeitheia (#543 ἀπείθεια), and refers to willful disobedience.

2:3. “passions.” The Greek word is epithumia (#1939 ἐπιθυµία), and refers to an over desire. “Passion” is a good translation in this context, whereas the word “lust” connotes a sexual desire that the Greek text simply does not communicate.

“carrying out.” “Doing” would be more literal but difficult, and in slang colors the meaning. “Pursuing” is more to the point, which is following the whims of the flesh.

“Mind” is more accurately “thoughts” (plural), but it does not make good sense in English to say “the desires of the thoughts” since the thoughts are the desires.

“Wrath” is a good translation, see Bullinger. It has the idea of desire for revenge or justice. It is in the mind, not in the action, so “anger” could be a good translation, but given the scope of the NT, “wrath” is better.

2:5. “when we were” is the participle, but it makes the reading awkward and so we followed other versions, which translate it “when we were.”

“due to.” See commentary on Colossians 2:14.

“transgressions.” The Greek is paraptoma (see commentary on Eph. 1:7).

2:6. “seated.” In the Hebrew and Aramaic idiom in which the Bible was written, when something was absolutely going to happen in the future, it was sometimes spoken of as if it had already occurred in the past. This is apparently due to the fact that it is sometimes hard to express that a future event is certain to happen. Many times when we simply say that something “will” happen it does not happen. One way the Semitic languages avoided that was by idiomatically saying something already had happened even though the event was actually still future. That is the case in Ephesians 2:6 and some other verses in the New Testament—a future event is put in the past tense for emphasis.

In Ephesians 2:6 the verb “seated” is in the aorist tense, as if the seating had already occurred, even though actually we have not yet been seated in heaven. This is a figure of speech, in this case an idiom that comes under the general category that some scholars refer to as the “prophetic perfect,” and in this specific case is a “futuristic aorist”
(also sometimes called a “proleptic aorist”). We have not yet been seated in heaven, but the fact that we are born again guarantees that we will be when the Rapture occurs, so that fact is expressed by the idiom and we are said to be “seated” in heaven.

Hebrew scholars are familiar with this idiom and refer to it as “the prophetic perfect,” “the historic sense of prophecy,” the “perfective of confidence,” etc. It is also referred to by some scholars as the “here now, but not yet” or “already—not yet.” We should not be surprised that different scholars refer to the idiom by different names because idioms in languages do not have specific names—they are just the way people in that culture speak.

E. W. Bullinger recognized that a future event was sometimes referred to in the past tense as if it had already occurred, and instead of referring to it as an idiom of the language, referred to it as a figure of speech called heterosis (“The past for the future;” Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*).

The average Christian has no knowledge of the idiom because most of the time when it occurs in the Bible, the translators have not translated it literally, but instead have changed the tense of the verb so the English is easy to read and understand. Thus, the “prophetic perfect” is rarely apparent in English Bibles. In fairness to the translators, because the English language seldom uses anything like the prophetic perfect, most Christians would only be confused if the idiom was translated literally into English. For example, the Greek text of Jude 14 says that the Lord “came” with thousands of his saints (cp. NASB). Scholars of the biblical languages recognize that Jude was simply using the prophetic perfect to indicate the certainty of the Lord’s coming in the future with thousands of saints. But if they translated the verse literally, the average Christian would probably become confused and wonder, “When did the Lord come with thousands of his saints? The first and only time he came he had only a small group of apostles and disciples.”

Although the idiom of the prophetic perfect is originally a Semitic concept, it occurs in the New Testament Greek. Often the idioms of the Hebrew language and culture come over into the New Testament text. E. W. Bullinger explains that the idioms of the Hebrew language and culture are reflected in the Greek text:

The fact must ever be remembered that, while the language of the New Testament is Greek, the agents and instruments employed by the Holy Spirit were Hebrews. God spake “by the mouth of his holy prophets.” Hence, while the “mouth” and the throat and vocal chords and breath were human, the words were Divine. No one is able to understand the phenomenon; or explain how it comes to pass: for Inspiration is a fact to be believed and received, and not a matter to be reasoned about. While therefore, the words are Greek, the thoughts and idioms are Hebrew. Some, on this account, have condemned the Greek of the New Testament, because it is not classical; while others, in their anxiety to defend it, have endeavored to find parallel usages in classical Greek authors. Both might have spared their pains by recognizing that the New Testament Greek abounds with *Hebraisms*: i.e., expressions conveying Hebrew usages and thoughts in Greek words” (Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, pp. 819–20).
When the Hebrew idiom of the prophetic perfect is brought into Greek, it is expressed in several different ways, because the Greek tenses are structured differently than the Hebrew tenses. Thus, technically in Greek, under the category of the prophetic perfect idiom, there is the prophetic perfect (the perfect tense used to express a future event), and proleptic aorist (the aorist tense used to express a future event).

The prophetic perfect and proleptic aorist are vital idioms for students of the Bible to understand, because of the important meaning it brings to the text. By writing about a future event in the past tense, God is emphasizing that the event will absolutely come to pass. If God simply used the future tense to write about future events, the aspect of absolute certainty that the idiom communicates would be lost. Here in Ephesians 2:6, for example, God could tell us, “we will be seated in heaven with Christ.” However, there might then be mitigating factors that would keep us from going to heaven, which is exactly what those people who say that Christians can lose their salvation teach. By saying that Christians are already in heaven is one of the ways God says that our salvation is not in doubt; we Christians will absolutely be with God.

There are many examples of the prophetic perfect in the Bible. For instance, God told Noah to build the ark. After telling him how to build it, the Hebrew text, translated literally, reads that God said, “And you have come into the ark” (Genesis 6:18). The ark was not even built at that time. Another is when God said to Abraham, “To your descendants I have given this land” (Genesis 15:18; cp. NASB). This promise was made to Abraham before he even had any descendants to give the land to, but God states His promise in the past tense to emphasize the certainty of the event. Later, when Abraham was bargaining with God to save Sodom, God told Abraham that if fifty righteous people could be found in the city, He would spare it. To make His point clear, God used the prophetic perfect and said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous people, I have spared the whole place” (Genesis 18:26). Another example occurs when Joseph interpreted Pharaoh’s dream and foretold that there would be seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. When mentioning the years of famine, Joseph used the prophetic perfect for emphasis and said, “And there have arisen seven years of famine” (Genesis 41:30). The prophecy of the coming Messiah given by the prophet Balaam is placed in the prophetic perfect for emphasis. Although it would be more than 1,400 years before the Messiah would come, the Hebrew text has, “A star has come forth out of Jacob and a scepter has arisen out of Israel” (Num. 24:17). Although Isaiah wrote more than 700 years before the birth of Christ, the Hebrew text reads, “To us a child has been born, to us a son has been given, and the government has been on his shoulders, and he has been called Wonderful, Counselor…” (Isa. 9:6).

Wallace explains the proleptic aorist as follows: “An author sometimes uses the aorist for the future to stress the certainty of the event. It involves a ‘rhetorical transfer’ of a future event as though it were past” (Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, p. 564).

Other examples of the proleptic aorist besides Jude 1:14 that was mentioned above are John 3:31 and Hebrews 2:5.

A different idiom, but one that is very closely related to the prophetic perfect, is the prophetic present. It is very similar to the prophetic perfect, which as we have seen, was used when an event was certain to happen. However, the prophetic present also
usually indicates that the event being referred to was close at hand. For information on the prophetic present, see the note on Luke 3:9.


“in Christ Jesus.” This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in Christ.”

2:7. “that.” The Greek is ἐν (#1722 ἐν) usually has either indicates a purpose “in order that,” or a result, “so that.” Leaving the word “that” in the text gives the reader the flexibility to decide what God means. See extensive note on “by.” The Greek ἐν (#1722 ἐν) means “by” in this context; it is the instrumental sense of en.

“have been saved.” This is a periphrastic perfect. It uses a form of the verb “to be” and a perfect passive participle to represent the essence of a perfect tense, i.e., the action is in the past with effects continuing into the present.

“so that.” The Greek ἐν is expressing a result.

2:8. “saved.” This is the idiom of the prophetic perfect (see commentary on Eph. 2:6). The idiom of the prophetic perfect in large part explains why the New Testament sometimes says that “salvation,” “redemption,” “glorification,” and “adoption” are an accomplished reality in some verses, but in other verses says those things are still future. There are verses stating that we Christians have already been saved (Eph. 2:8, “You have been saved through faith”), verses that state we are in the process of being saved now (1 Cor. 1:18, “But to us who are being saved, it [the cross] is the power of God”), and verses stating that our salvation is still future (Rom. 13:11, “Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed” and 1 Thess. 5:8, which says that the “helmet” of the Christian is the “hope of salvation”). So, which is it? Are we saved now or is salvation something we have to wait and hope for? The prophetic perfect idiom gives us a window into understanding that question.

No one, Old Testament or New Testament, is saved now in the sense that he is already rescued from death and the consequences of sin in this world. We all still wrestle with sin and death. Although God is working out the process of our salvation now, our complete salvation is still future. We will have new bodies, we will be freed from sin and sickness. But right now, we Christians have God’s gift of holy spirit born inside us, and that is “a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession” (Eph. 1:13; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). The fact that our future salvation is guaranteed means that, in the idiom of biblical language, it can be spoken of as if it were already accomplished. Thus, we Christians refer to ourselves as “saved” even though we struggle with sin, sickness, and death in our day-to-day lives. When we are finally “saved,” we will have new, glorified bodies (Phil. 3:21), and will no longer struggle with sin and death. We will have been finally rescued (saved) from the afflictions of this life by the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are other things that Christians will absolutely have in the future that are spoken of in the Bible in both the past and future tense. The Bible says the believer is
already redeemed (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14), but also awaiting redemption (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14; 4:30). We are said to have been adopted into God’s family (Rom. 8:15, translated “sonship” in the NIV), and yet we are still awaiting adoption (Rom. 8:23). We are said to be glorified (Rom. 8:30), but our glorification is also said to be future (Rom. 8:17 and Col. 1:27 say we have the “hope of glory”). We are spoken of as already justified (Rom. 5:1), but Galatians 5:5 says, “we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope” (“justified” and “righteous” are from the same root word in Greek—one is a noun, the other a verb). These examples all show the interplay between the reality that our salvation, redemption, and glorification are future, with the reality that because they are guaranteed to us, they can be spoken of, in the idiomatic language of the Bible, as accomplished realities.

Christians who are not careful to rightly divide God’s Word can end up like the six blind men arguing about what an elephant was like (cp. the poem, “The Blind Men and the Elephant” by John Saxe). In the poem, each blind man had grabbed a different part of the elephant and was vigorously defending his position. The man who had the leg declared the elephant was like a tree, the one who had the ear said he was like a fan, the one who had the trunk asserted he was like a snake, and so forth. So too, Christians can grab different verses in the New Testament and begin arguing as if the Bible could contradict itself. That is not how to establish truth in the Christian world. The Bible is God-breathed and does not contradict itself. It uses words according to the language, culture, and idioms used in biblical times. Paul did not finish writing the Church Epistles and walk away saying, “Ha! They’ll never figure that out.” Certainly not. He wrote using words and phrases that reveal truth. The truth revealed by the prophetic perfect idiom is that the Christian does not need to worry about his salvation, redemption, or glorification. Although these things are not yet fully realized, the presence of the holy spirit in the Christian and the sure word of prophecy guarantees them when the Lord returns.

A great challenge and opportunity that each Christian has is to live his life in the confidence that the great things such as salvation, redemption, and glorification are an accomplished reality from God’s point of view, they just have not been fully given to us yet. It is like a child who is awaiting a birthday that has not yet come, but his new bicycle has already been bought and is in the garage. We do not have to earn or be “good enough” for any of the things that have been bought for us by Jesus Christ. We need to live in the confident reality that they are ours because God will never go back on His guarantee.

“faith.” The Greek is pistis (#4102 πίστις), a noun. In both ancient secular Greek and in the Bible pistis means “confidence, trust, assurance.” When the people of the first century got the letters of Paul, for example, they did not say, “What is pistis?” as if Paul had invented a new word. Pístis was in common use in the Greek language, and had been for centuries. It is in the writings of the Greeks, including Aristotle, Plato, Herodotus, etc. The first definition of pistis in the Liddell and Scott Greek Lexicon is “trust in others.”

When the Greek New Testament was translated into Latin, fides was the natural choice as a translation of pistis, because fides means “trust, confidence, reliance, belief.” As the English language developed, our English word “faith” came from the Latin word fides. There should be nothing mysterious about pistis, fides, or “faith.” We know what trust is. Merriam-Webster defines it as “assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something.”
It needs to be clearly understood that the ancient and biblical definition of *pistis* differs completely from the modern definition of “faith.” If both *pistis* and *fides* mean “trust,” how did “faith” come to be defined in our modern culture as “firm belief in something for which there is no proof” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11th edition*)? The actual historical process is long and tedious, but the concept is simple. The Church asked people to trust doctrines that were neither logical nor clearly backed up by Scripture. For example, the doctrine that the “host” (bread) and wine that are used in Roman Catholic Mass become the body and blood of Christ is not backed up with solid Scriptural exegesis, nor is it logical. Priests know this, and so they ask people to “Take it by faith,” meaning, “Believe this even though there is no proof.” Over time, belief in something for which there is no proof became the accepted definition of “faith.” This is harmful because people then import that made-up definition of “faith” back into the Bible, although that is not what “faith” means when used in the Bible.

There is nothing wrong with “take it by faith (trust)” if there is actually something, such as a promise of God, to trust. When Jesus told the blind man that if he washed in the Pool of Siloam he would be healed, the blind man had faith in, trusted, Jesus and his promise, washed, and was given sight by a miracle. However, if there is nothing to trust in and nothing “trustworthy” to believe, then to ask people to “take it by faith” is wrong, and contributes to the misunderstanding of God and the Bible. Biblical faith is neither magic, unreasonable, nor illogical. It is simply *trust*.

Ephesians 2:9 and 10 make it clear that “faith” is not “works.” We are saved by grace through faith, not by works. This is God’s definition of terms. Thus, by God’s definition, “faith” is not a work.

When a person has faith, i.e., trusts that Jesus is Lord and God did raise him from the dead (Rom. 10:9), then God responds to that trust by giving the person salvation. The faith does not make salvation happen, God does, but He does it when the individual trusts Him. It is because God gives the salvation, rather than the faith “takes” the salvation, that salvation is a “gift.”

When a person has faith in Jesus, he gets “born again” (1 Pet. 1:3, 23), and what is born inside him is the gift of holy spirit. That is why Galatians 3:14 says we get the promise of the spirit by faith. At the moment a person has faith in Jesus Christ, he gets born again and the guarantee of salvation, and also receives the gift of holy spirit. For more on faith, see commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:7 and Hebrews 11:1.

“this.” “This” is the Greek word *toute* (#5124 τοῦτο), and it is a nominative neuter pronoun. There is quite a bit of discussion as to exactly what it refers to, but the bottom line is that it refers to our salvation. Bratcher and Nida write: “…it seems more likely that the Greek neuter pronoun refers to the whole preceding event, that is, salvation by God’s grace through faith…” (A Translator’s Handbook to Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians). Andrew Lincoln concurs, and writes: “*Toute* is probably best taken, therefore, as referring to the preceding clause as a whole, and thus to the whole process of salvation it describes, which of course includes faith as its means” (*Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians*). In other words, our salvation is not from ourselves, it comes from God. Thus the verse could be expanded to read, “…you have been saved through faith, and this salvation is not of yourselves…. The verse is not saying that the faith does not come from us, because it does. The word “saved” is in the passive voice, for it is the Lord Jesus
who saves us when we have faith. Our part is to have faith, at which point the Lord saves us, we do not save ourselves by our faith.

Some Calvinist commentators say that “this” refers to the word *pistis* (trust, faith) in the first clause, which would make our faith come from God. Although it is true that there are cases where the gender of the pronoun *touto* does not agree with the noun, Robertson, in his *Grammar of the Greek New Testament* writes that in general it does, and there does not seem to be any reason in this context that the general rules of grammar would not be followed. Thus, because *pistis* is a feminine noun, it should not be linked with the neuter pronoun. Lenski writes: “The neuter *touto* does not refer to *pistis* [faith] or *charis* [grace], both of which are feminine, but to the divine act of saving us” (Robertson agrees, cp. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*).

Calvinists assert that a person cannot have faith unless God gives it to him, but we disagree. It is clear that unsaved people can have trust (even Calvinists agree with that statement in general), and trust is what we must have to get saved. It seems incongruous to us that a Calvinist would agree that an unsaved person can trust another person, or trust that they would fall if they jumped off a cliff, but not be able to trust Jesus Christ without God’s giving them that trust. They can trust in Jesus based on the evidence they gather from the world around them, just like they build trust for other things. Our trust does not save us, it is simply what God is looking for from us such that He moves and saves us. Bratcher and Nida write: “Faith therefore may be described technically as “contributing circumstances,” for without faith on man’s part God will not impose his grace and salvation.” We believe Robertson is correct in his *Word Pictures* in the New Testament when he writes: “‘Grace’ is God’s part, ‘faith’ ours.

2:10. “his.” The “his” is emphasized in the Greek text, but it is difficult to do in English. A more literal translation would be, “His handiwork are we.…”

“created.” The Greek verb is an aorist passive participle, which means that our creation in Christ was a one time event, not an ongoing action.

“in Christ Jesus.” This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in Christ.”

“for us to walk in.” The phrase starts with the Greek conjunction *hina*, which is most often “that,” “so that,” or “in order that,” but the purpose can be expressed as “for,” especially in this case because of the verb *peripateō* (#4043 περιπατέω), walk. The verb is subjunctive, hence most literal versions say “may walk,” “should walk,” or “could walk.” However, the conjunction *hina* is the reason the verb is subjunctive, which means we must translate it according to the context. In this case, God did not prepare good works so we “might” walk in them, He prepared them for us to walk in. “Walk” is idiomatic for something we do regularly. Since walking was an essential part of biblical life, our “walk” with God was something that was daily. It was part of life. Similarly, good works are supposed to be something that we do daily, as part of life. The Boy Scouts had the right idea when they made their motto: “Do a good turn daily,” that is, make sure you do something good for someone else every day.

2:12. “excluded.” Being alienated implies that there once was a relationship, but in fact there never was any such relationship. Hence, “excluded” is a better translation.

“citizenship.” The Greek word is *politeia* (#4174 πολιτεία), and the commentators, and versions, are divided on its meaning in this verse. Although it has several meanings, the two most likely in this context are “commonwealth” (i.e., a state) or “citizenship.”
There is truth in both meanings, which is a major reason that the commentators and versions differ. In a very real sense, the Gentiles were excluded from the state of Israel, and also excluded from citizenship in that state. So the Greeks of the first century did not have to make the tough decision that today’s English translators have to make; the word politeia carried both meanings. We felt “citizenship” fit the context better than “commonwealth” or “state” because the context is not referring to the Gentiles getting to be accepted into the theocratic state of Israel, but rather that they would be together with the citizens of Israel. Now, by the blood of Christ, the “in” Jews and the “out” Gentiles are both one group, not by virtue of the Gentiles being accepted into the state of Israel, or because the Jewish state is disbanded in Christ, but rather that the Jews and Gentiles are now both citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20) and are “one” in Christ (Eph. 2:14).

“Covenants of promise” = “The promise” is the collective promises of the OT. Thus covenants is plural when promise is singular.

“without God.” The Greek is “godless,” but the English word “godless” means ungodly, not “without God” which is what the author is trying to communicate and does communicate in the Greek language.

2:13. “in Christ Jesus.” This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in Christ.”

“far off…near.” The word “near” can be confusing to the modern reader because it was used idiomatically in the Judaism of the time of Christ. In Christ, Gentiles are not just “near” to God, they are “part” of the people of God. They are “one” with the believing Jews (Eph. 2:14), “one new man” in Christ (Eph. 2:15), and “fellow members of the Body of Christ (Eph. 3:6). So why does the Bible say they are “near” when actually they are “included?” Andrew Lincoln (The Word Biblical Commentary) points out that in the Old Testament, “near” and “far off” were words that were used to describe and contrast the Jews and the Gentiles, and at the time of Christ they were used of proselytes, Gentile converts to Judaism. Lincoln writes: “Often in the OT, the Gentile nations can be described as “far off” (rahoq…Deut. 28:49; 29:22; 1 Kings 8:41; Isa. 5:26; Jer. 5:15), while Israel is thought of as “near” (qarob) to God (cp. Ps. 148:14). These terms, ‘far’ and ‘near’ later occur frequently in discussion about proselytes.” Lincoln writes that to bring a non-Israelite “near” to God was to accept him as a proselyte, while to hold him at a distance (keep him far off) was to reject him as a proselyte. In summary, then, to be “near” was to be accepted as part of the community of God, while to be “far off” was to be rejected from the community and considered apart from it.

There were many Jews in Ephesus, and many scattered throughout the Roman world in general, so the Jewish concepts of “far off” and “near” would have been well known to the Gentiles. That is why Paul could use them in Ephesians, and the fact that Ephesians says that the Gentiles are now “near” by the blood of Christ would have had a huge impact on the Gentiles reading Ephesians. They would have immediately known they were accepted into the community of God.

Sadly, there is no way to retain the literal translation “far off” and “near” in English and completely understand the sense of the passage without knowing some background about how the words were used in the first century. If we do not translate the words literally, but translate their sense, the verse could read like this: “But now in Christ Jesus you who were formerly not part of the people of God are included in the people of God, by the blood of the Christ.”
2:14. “peace.” The Greek is eirēnē (#1515 εἰρήνη; pronounced ā-ray‘-nay), meaning “peace, tranquility,” but behind it is the Semitic concept of shalom, total wellness of being and therefore mental and physical peace.

In this context, Jesus is specifically said to be our (Christian’s) “peace” because he has put an end to the hostility (and suspicion, hatred, and enmity) between Jews and Gentiles and allowed anyone to become part of God’s people. There was hostility between the two groups before, but now, because of the work of Christ, we are at peace. This peace is not our doing, it is the work of God through Christ, and so he is our peace. Even more globally, Jesus is the peace between those who are, and those who are not, God’s people, partly because he has made it available for everyone to be part of the people of God, and, in a wider sense, partly because we are to love our enemies, at least as far as Christians can make peace work (cp. Rom. 12:18).

2:14. “the dividing wall, the fence between us.” The Greek text of Ephesians 2:14 and 15 are very difficult to bring into English, as anyone reading multiple English versions can easily see. The primary difficulty is whether or not the word “hostility” (or enmity in some versions), goes with and describes the dividing wall or the Law. The way the Greek is worded, it can go either way, and indeed, there is every reason to think that Paul wrote that way on purpose as an amphibologia, a double entendre. The hostility was due to the Law and to things that focused people’s attention, such as the wall that divided Jews and Gentiles in the sanctuary.

If the dividing wall is the hostility, then the translation is like the HCSB or ESV: “the dividing wall of hostility.” This position is supported by Greek heavy-hitters such as the Expositor’s New Testament, A. T. Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament, and Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament. If, on the other hand, the hostility is due to the Law with its commandments and regulations, the translation is like that of the ASV, New Jerusalem Bible, and NASB: “abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances…” That position is supported by commentators such as R. C. H. Lenski, Andrew Lincoln (Word Biblical Commentary), and E. K. Simpson and F. F. Bruce (The New International Commentary on the New Testament).

The fact is, that although the Greek may be a double entendre, we have to make a decision as to how we will translate the English. The hostility between Jew and Gentile was certainly epitomized by the dividing wall in the Temple between the Jew and Gentile, but it was the Law that made the wall necessary, and it was the Law that divided Jews and Gentiles most of the time. It is safe to say that the vast majority of Gentiles who came in contact with Jews all over the Roman world never went to Jerusalem and never saw the actual dividing wall. But the wall was clearly there in the following of the Law. In general, the Jews feelings toward the Gentiles ranged from dislike to absolute abhorrence. Because the Jews were “chosen” and given the Law, they considered Gentiles unrighteous before God. They considered them dogs (Matt. 15:26) and unclean, and would not even eat with them (Acts 10:28; 11:3). The Gentiles reciprocated and hated the Jews for different reasons, including their arrogance, their separatism, and the fact that they would not participate in festivals and sacrifices that brought the favor of the gods upon the Empire.
When he died on the cross, Jesus did away with the Law, and slew the hostility on the cross (Eph. 2:16). Now there is one Body of believers, the Law has been made of no effect, and there is no need for a wall of separation because there is no separation.

2:15. “in himself.” This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in Christ.”

As to the punctuation of 14 and 15 and as to the fact that it is the middle wall of partition that is the mutual enemy (“enmity”), see Expositor’s NT, and Robertson’s NT Word Pictures in the New Testament, and Word Studies in the NT by Vincent. The phrase “in his flesh” can modify either “broken down the middle wall” v. 14 or with “abolished the Law” in verse 15. The commentators are divided, and with good reason. It was by his flesh that he did both. We felt that since verse 16 pointed out that he slew the enmity, i.e., the middle wall, on the cross, the context favored the placement of “in his flesh” with breaking down the middle wall.

“law consisting of commands expressed in regulations.” This is either a genitive of apposition; i.e., “the Law, that is to say, the commandments expressed in regulations,” or a genitive of contents, i.e., “the law consisting of….” The meaning is the same, that the Law is made up of commandments that are expressed as regulations. For “regulations,” the Greek is dogma (#1378 δόγμα), see commentary on Acts 16:4.

“of no effect.” The Greek word is katargeó (#2673 καταργέω; pronounced cat-ar-geh'-ô), and it means “to render idle, unemployed, inactivate, inoperative, to disempower, deprive of force, influence, or power, to loose from someone or something, to end, terminate, abolish.” When it come to the Law, “abolish” is not the best translation because there are many parts of the Law that are still in effect and Christ spoke of not abolishing the Law but fulfilling it. It must be said, however, that when the Bible mentions the Law, sometimes it is only referring to parts of the Law, and it seems clear that in this context there are parts of the Law that are not in effect any more, and parts that are. Simpson and Bruce write: “In one or two cases in the papyri it [katargeó] appears to signify ‘to bring to a standstill’ or ‘put out of gear.’ Here it might be rendered ‘to invalidate’ or to nullify, annul, quash.’ The clumsy word ‘depotentiate’ [un-power] would nearly represent the general sense of this peculiarly Pauline verbalism” (The New International Commentary on the New Testament).

Jesus did not “abolish” the Law. In fact, Romans 7:12 says the Law is holy, righteous, and good. Furthermore, many of the commandments in the Law are in the Church Epistles: do not lie, steal, envy, commit sexual immorality, and so forth. So why is the Law, “of no effect?” Because it cannot get anyone saved. It cannot make us holy and righteous before God. Jesus does that when we get born again. All the things the Law cannot do, Jesus does in us when we trust him. The Law is now “of no effect” for our righteousness and salvation,” but it is not abolished.

2:16. “having slain the enmity by it.” Ironically, Christ used the cross, which was used to slay him, to slay the enmity. For the “it” or “him” autos, referring to the cross, see Robertson.

2:19. “foreigners.” Indicates someone who is in the land but is not a citizen.

2:20. “cornerstone.” There is no actual word for “chief” as the KJV has. The Greek text has akrogōniaios (#204 áκρογονιαῖος), which is the “far corner” or “extreme corner,” thus being the “cornerstone.”
2:21. “in whom.” This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in Christ.”

“being fitted together.” The Greek word has more to it than just the concept of “joined” together. It has overtones of the pieces being chosen so that they “fit” together, after which, of course, they are joined together. Especially in the context of a Temple, which was constructed of stone, “fitting” the pieces together was of utmost importance. The stones in the foundation wall at the Temple in Jerusalem, although thousands of years old and weighing many tons, are “fitted” so well that a knife blade will not go between them.

“sanctuary.” The Greek word is naos (#3485 ναός), which means the inner sanctuary, and then, occasionally, by association, the temple building that houses the inner sanctuary. Then, by metonymy, the Greek word naos is used of the body (Bullinger, Vine). In contrast, the Greek word hieron (#2411 ἱερὸν) means the temple building along with its porches, outer courts, and all associated out buildings. Interestingly, the hieron is never used figuratively in the Bible, it is always literal. In Jerusalem, Herod’s hieron (ἱερὸν) was a massive complex inclosing some 37 acres. The 35 page article, “Temple, Jerusalem,” in The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible has drawings and diagrams of Solomon’s Temple (hieron) as well as that of Ezekiel and Herod.

The need for the distinction between the naos and the hieron was necessitated by God’s Old Testament regulations concerning the Tabernacle, and then the Temple. God placed an important distinction between the outer courts, where all the priests could minister, and the inner sanctuary, i.e., the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place (KJV, “Holy of Holies”). This distinction became to be supported by vocabulary, and the inner rooms came to be called the naos (and, as was stated earlier, eventually by association the Temple building proper that contained it), while the naos along with the outer courts came to be referred to as the hieron.

We use the word “sanctuary” to translate the word naos, and “Temple” or “temple complex” to translate the word hieron.

2:22. “in whom.” This phrase refers to our spiritual union with Jesus Christ. See commentary on Ephesians 1:3, “in Christ.”

Chapter 3

3:2. “surely you have.” In the indicative mood, the Greek word “if,” ei (#1487 εἰ, pronounced as a long ā) does not always have the conditional meaning of our English word “if.” In certain circumstances, the Greek word ei is used even though the condition is taken as being fulfilled, and should be translated “since;” “surely you have;” or something similar. In those circumstances, translating the Greek ei as “if” can confuse the English reader who does not understand that the Greek ei is not always equivalent to our English “if.” To avoid confusion and carry the sense of the Greek in this context, we translated the ei as “surely you have.” See Dana and Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament, p. 289, for more information on ei being used in a sense that is not conditional.
That *ei* has a sense that is conditional, and one that is not conditional, depending on the context and the mood of the verb it is associated with, is one reason that it does not work to try to translate each Greek word into English in the same way.

A good example of a use of *ei* that is not conditional is in John 7:4. Jesus’ brothers knew he was doing miracles, so the verse should read (and does in versions such as the NIV), “since you are doing these things....” In his note on 1 Thessalonians 4:14, Lenski calls this “the condition of reality” (and 1 Thess. 4:14 is another good example of the sense of *ei* that is not conditional). In Ephesians 3:2, there was no doubt about the Ephesians having heard of the Administration of the Sacred Secret. Paul had been there for more than two years teaching (Acts 19:10). Other good examples of this grammatical construction are 1 Corinthians 15:12 and 15:44. If the context of the verse makes it clear that the “if” is meant as a “since,” we may leave the translation as “if” in the REV. However, if the context may confuse the reader, as here in Ephesians 3:2, we translate it “surely you have” to help the English readers understand the text. We could have gone with “since” in the verse, as we have in a couple other places, but in this case “since” implied that a reason for something would follow, and that is not the case in this context. The NIV uses the same translation as the REV.

“Administration of the Grace of God.” This is the administration in which we live, which is also called “the Administration of the Sacred Secret” (Eph. 3:9). It began on the Day of Pentecost, and will end at the Rapture of the Church.

At different times in history, God changed the rules He gave people to live by. Even a cursory study of Scripture shows that God has “administered” people differently at different times. Many theologians call the specific rules of a specific time period an “administration” or “dispensation.” The term “dispensation” refers to God “dispensing” His rules and justice to mankind. Similarly, “administration” refers to Him “administering” His rules and justice. There is a systematic theology that recognizes different administrations or dispensations and is referred to as “Dispensationalism,” and there is a huge theological battle as to whether or not it is correct.

This is not the place to expound the differences between Dispensationalism and its theological opponents, primarily the doctrine called “Covenant Theology.” Instead, it is helpful to realize that even theologians who hold to what is known as “Covenant Theology” recognize that God has changed the rules for mankind from time to time. In its entry under “Covenant Theology,” the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter Elwell, says, “...the covenant of grace includes various dispensations of history....” Then, under the entry “Dispensationalism,” we read, “Some covenant theologians...use the concept of different dispensations, but as part of the covenant of grace.”

It is to the advantage of both camps (and those of neither camp) to realize that God does in fact change the rules for mankind, and examples of that abound in Scripture. We, like those who hold to the theology of “Dispensationalism,” (and not all Dispensationalists agree on the definition of Dispensationalism, or how many dispensations there are, or exactly when they start and end) think that the word “dispensation” or “administration” is a good one to define the rules and regulations that God wants obeyed in a particular period of time.

The word “administration” (cp. REV, HCSB, NIV, Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible) and “dispensation” (cp. ERV, KJV, YLT), is from the Greek noun *oikonomia*.
(οἰκονομία), which means “the management of a household.” *Oikonomía* is from
the verb *oikonoméō* (οἰκονομεῶ), “to be the manager of a household”), which is from
*oikonomos* (οἰκονόμος; “the person who manages the household”), which is a compound
word built from *oikos*, “house,” and *nemō*, “to distribute, deal out, or apportion.” God
“manages His household” in different ways at different times, and He does so by
changing the rules He gives to people.

Examples of God changing the rules from administration to administration
abound. For example, when it comes to food, in the Garden of Eden, God told Adam and
Eve to eat plants only (Gen. 1:29). After the Flood, God changed the rules and allowed
man to eat meat also (Gen. 9:3), and He still allows us to eat meat today. Another clear
example concerns the Sabbath. Before the Mosaic Law, there was no specific law
concerning the Sabbath. When God gave the Law to Moses, He changed the rules and
established a set Sabbath, and commanded that anyone who broke the Sabbath should be
put to death (Exod. 31:14). Today, in the “Administration of the Grace of God” (Eph. 3:2),
God has changed the rules again, and it is not a sin to work on the Sabbath
(Rom. 14:5; Col. 2:16 and 17). A third example of God changing the rules involves
animal sacrifice. Before the Mosaic Law, there was animal sacrifice, but it was not tightly
controlled. When God gave the Mosaic Law, He gave lots of new rules about it, and
commanded the death penalty for breaking some of them. Today, in the “Administration
of the Grace of God” (Eph. 3:2), animal sacrifice has stopped because Jesus Christ was
the one-time sacrifice for sin.

When Christians do not recognize or understand the administrations in the Bible,
they cannot resolve its apparent contradictions, and become confused as to which
commands to obey and which to not obey. It is of the utmost importance that Christians
who want to obey God’s instructions understand the administrations in the Bible. If
they do not, they may well end up obeying a command that was not written to them.
For example, what if a Christian took more than one wife, saying that the Bible said it
was okay to do, and quoted Exodus 21:10? Can a Christian marry more than one wife
just because a verse in the Bible says it is allowable? No, because we must consider
where the Bible says that, and to whom was God addressing that regulation. In the case
of marriage, in the Old Testament, God allowed a man to have more than one wife. But
now He has changed the rules and has a one-husband-and-one-wife rule (1 Cor. 7:2)
and even says that if a person has more than one wife, he cannot be a leader in the
Church (1 Tim. 3:2).

Another example would be that if a person has psoriasis (sores and flakes on the
skin), does he have to wear torn clothes, not brush his hair, cover his mouth with cloth,
live outside of town, and cry “Unclean” when he walks down the street? That is what
the Bible says to do (Lev. 13:45 and 46). Thankfully, those commandments were part
of the rules God gave to the Jews under the Law, and God has given the Christian
Church different rules to live by. Neither do we have to wear tassels on the outside of
our garments (Num. 15:38), nor do Christian men have to go to Jerusalem three times a
year (Deut. 16:16). Jews under God’s Law were commanded to do these things, but
now God has changed the rules, and we live in a different administration, the
Administration of Grace. If we want to obey God, we must obey the rules that apply to
us. Martin Anstey wrote in his book, *How to Master the Bible*, (p. 32): “In this matter the
golden rule is, ‘Distinguish the dispensations and the difficulties will disappear.’”
Dispensationalist scholars do not agree on the number of administrations there are in the Bible, or when they begin and end, but they do agree on some basics. For example, that Paul speaks of an administration in which we now live that is different from the one before it (Col. 1:25, 26; Eph. 3:2), and that Paul also writes of a future administration (Eph. 1:10). Also, there is the time in Eden before the Fall. That makes four, and it seems clear that in the time before our administration, there were at least two, the Law, and the administration before the Law. That makes five that all dispensationalists agree on. (It is much easier to see this in versions such as the KJV, which uses the word “dispensation,” or Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible, that uses “administration,” than it is in versions such as the ESV, which do not consistently translate the word oikonomia, or translate it by words such as “stewardship”).

To us there are eight administrations in the Bible, and knowing exactly when they begin and end, and the rules distinctly associated with each, is indispensable in explaining many of the apparent contradictions in Scripture. The eight administrations are:

1) Original Paradise (Creation to the Fall),
2) Conscience (Fall to the Flood),
3) Civil Government (Flood to the Mosaic Law),
4) The Mosaic Law (the giving of the Law until Pentecost),
5) The Administration of the Grace of God (from Pentecost until the Rapture),
6) Tribulation (from the Rapture to the end of Armageddon),
7) Millennial Kingdom (lasts 1,000 years),
8) Final Paradise (will last forever).

The Administration of the Grace of God, in which we live today, began on the Jewish holiday of Pentecost (Acts 2), when the gift of holy spirit was given to everyone who believed. This new administration is called by two different names. It is called the Administration of God’s Grace (Eph. 3:2). We usually call it “the Administration of Grace”), and it is also called “the Administration of the Sacred Secret” (Eph. 3:9, Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible). God had specific reasons for using the names that He did. He calls it the Administration of “Grace” because Christians enjoy the grace of God in a manner and to an extent that was not given to people of previous administrations. God has always given grace to mankind, but He has so abounded in His grace to the Church that He calls the very time we live the “Administration of the Grace of God” (Eph. 3:2). God also calls this administration the “Administration of the Sacred Secret,” because He kept the knowledge of the blessings and grace that we have today a secret, and did not reveal it until the Epistles of Paul were written.

When we understand the administration in which we live, we can see why God called it “the Administration of Grace.” God, for His own purposes and for our benefit, gave Christians grace in a way that He had not done before. That is why He says in 2 Corinthians that the administration of the Law has “no glory” now in comparison to the glory that God has given the Church. What is this glory that God has given the Church, which is based on so much grace that God calls the very administration in which we live “the Administration of the Grace of God”? There are many aspects of the grace that God has given us, but a huge one is salvation by birth, that is permanent (see commentary on 1
It is easy to see what the text means when it says that Paul was given “the Administration of the Grace of God.” The context makes it clear that Paul was given the revelation about this new administration, which he then passed on to the Church. However, many of the modern versions do not recognize the different administrations of God, and their translations reflect their theology. For example, the ESV of Ephesians 3:2 reads, “…you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you.” What would that mean? That God had somehow given Paul the special right to steward God’s grace for the benefit of the Church? That hardly seems correct, and does not seem to fit with the context. Also, if God did give Paul special grace to steward for the benefit of the Church, and then from the rest of the Epistles we learn that this grace involves the New Birth, and new and greater glory, and “Christ in you,” and being seated in the heavens, does that not indicate that God has done something new and once again changed the rules He wants His people to live by? That puts us right back where we started: that God had a new “administration,” a new way of doing things, a new set of rules, for the Church, and it all started on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

When it comes to dispensational theology, there are a lot of “straw men” out there, and so-called arguments that are actually misrepresenting dispensationalism. For those people wanting to know more about dispensationalism, the book Dispensationalism by Charles Ryrie is excellent. Also excellent is the article in the Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, edited by Walter Elwell. That article is short and accurate, and says that “Dispensational theology grows out of a consistent use of the hermeneutical principle of normal, plain, or literal interpretation. ...dispensationalists have taught and do teach that salvation is always through God’s grace. The basis of salvation in every dispensation is the death of Christ; the requirement for salvation in every age is faith; the object of faith is the true God; but the content of faith changes in the various dispensations” (emphasis his).

3:3. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

“revelation.” For what “revelation” is, see commentary on Galatians 1:12 and 1 Corinthians 12:8.

3:4. “you are able to understand…” The Greek word noēō (#3539 νοεω) has as its first definition in Louw and Nida: “to comprehend something on the basis of careful thought and consideration.” It is the action that occurs in the nous (#3563 νοῦς), the mind. It is more than a simple perception, but not necessarily a full comprehension. We felt “understand” was an appropriate translation, as the NASB.

The Greek word sunesis (#3539 νοεω), often translated “understand” is often the result of understanding. Louw and Nida say: “that which is understood or comprehended.” Zodhiates says: “the word denotes the ability to understand concepts and see relationships between them.” We have gone with the English word “insight” (again, as the NASB) because when a person sees the relationship between the facts and concepts in the world around him we say he has “insight.”
“sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

3:5. “as it has now been revealed.” The essence of the word “as” in this verse means, “as clearly as,” or “as fully as.” The “as” makes the point that, although there were things in the Old Testament that have turned out to be similar to things in the Sacred Secret, the actuality of what people have in the Sacred Secret was never revealed. So, for example, the Old Testament said the Gentiles would be blessed in the Messiah (cp. Gen. 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Ps. 72:17; Isa. 11:10; 49:6; 60:3; Amos 9:11, 12), but it never even hinted that the Gentiles would be joined together with Israel as the people of God, and be joint-heirs, joint members of one Body, and joint partakers of the promise (Eph. 3:6). The “as” does not mean, “in the way that,” or “in the manner that,” because the Word of God in both the Old Testament and the New Testament was given to people by revelation.

3:6. “in Christ Jesus, through the Good News.” These two prepositional phrases appear at the end of the sentence in the Greek text. However, if we translate the phrases into English the way they appear in Greek, the sentence becomes somewhat confusing. That is due to the fact that in English, when a prepositional phrase is added at the end of a list, our natural tendency is to think that the added phrase only refers to the last item in the list. Thus, when we read a version such as the NASB, for example, “that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,” most people do not think of “in Christ Jesus” as going with “fellow heirs” and “fellow members.” Instead, they tend to read the phrase “partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus” as a unit, and wonder what “the promise in Christ Jesus” is. The problem could be remedied by putting “in Christ Jesus” with each blessing, and have: “that the Gentiles are fellow heirs in Christ Jesus, and fellow members of the body in Christ Jesus, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus, all by way of the gospel,” but while that translation is very clear, it is not best to add that much to the text when there is no need for it.

The phrase, “in Christ Jesus,” refers to our being in union with him, or being associated with him (see commentary on Ephesians 1:3). We do not have the blessings of God on our own, but only by virtue of being “in Christ.” Furthermore, the phrase “in Christ” applies to each of the blessings in the verse. It is only because we are in union with Jesus Christ that we are “fellow-heirs,” “fellow-members of the body,” and “fellow-partakers of the promise.”

While the first prepositional phrase, “in Christ” refers to locale (“in Christ”) the second, “through the Good News,” is shows the means by which we gain the blessings. We get them “in Christ,” and we get to be “in Christ” “through the Good News,” i.e., by believing the Good News that we heard.

3:9. “administration.” This verse refers to “the Administration of the Sacred Secret,” which is the administration of God’s grace that is the time period of the Christian Church, which started on the Day of Pentecost when the gift of holy spirit was poured out (Acts 2), and will end with the Rapture of the Church. For a more complete understanding of the Administration of the Sacred Secret, and an explanation of administrations in the Bible, see commentary on Ephesians 3:2, and Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, The Gift of
There are some Greek texts that read “fellowship” of the Sacred Secret instead of “administration” of the Sacred Secret. However, the evidence shows that reading to be a later change to the Greek text. Metzger (Textual Commentary) writes: “The Textus Receptus, in company with a scattering of late minuscules, replaces οἰκονομία [administration] with the interpretative gloss κοινωνία (hence AV “fellowship”). The true reading is supported by p 46, all known uncials, almost all minuscules, all known versions and patristic quotations.” It can be easily understood that as the understanding of the administrations in scripture declined, that “administration” was replaced in some texts with the more easily understood, “fellowship.”

“Sacred Secret.” In this verse, the administration of the Sacred Secret refers to the Administration of Grace, which began on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), and will end with the Rapture of the Church (1 Thess. 4:15-17). [For more information on the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Ephesians 3:2].

God rightly calls the Administration of Grace the Administration of the Sacred Secret, because the fullness of what Christians have today in Christ was indeed a secret, hidden in God and unknown in the Old Testament. Besides calling it what it is, a “sacred secret.” God says over and over that it was hidden and people did not know about it until God revealed it after Pentecost (Rom. 16:25, 26; 1 Cor. 2:7-10; Eph. 3:4, 5, Col. 1:26).

We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible also translates musterion as “sacred secret.”

Although many English versions translate musterion as “mystery,” we do not think that is a good translation. Actually, “mystery” is not a translation of musterion, but a transliteration of it—simply bringing the Greek letters into English and not translating the word at all. In fact, we believe that the English word “mystery” is a mistranslation of musterion because a “mystery” is something that is incomprehensible, beyond understanding, unknowable. Things such as the Trinity or transubstantiation are called “mysteries” because they cannot be understood. In contrast, a “secret” is something that is known by someone but unknown by others. The password on a computer is a “secret,” not a “mystery,” because the owner of the computer knows it. Similarly, God has revealed his “sacred secrets” to the Church via the Bible, and Christians are expected to know them. They are not “mysteries.”

Translating musterion as “mystery” in English Bibles has caused many problems in the Church. The biggest problem is that many false and illogical doctrines have been foisted upon Christians, who are told not to try to understand them because they are “mysteries.” Another problem is that people who are convinced that the things of God are mysterious quit trying understand them and so remain ignorant of many truths that God wants every Christian to know.

That musterion refers to a “secret” that is known by some people but not others, and that it does not mean “mystery,” is well documented by Greek scholars, as the following selection of sources show.

- James Strong writes: “Musterion: In the NT it denotes, not the mysterious (as with the English word), but that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be make known only by divine revelation, and is make

- The *New Bible Dictionary* says: “But whereas “mystery” may mean, and in contemporary usage often does mean, a secret for which no answer can be found, this is not the connotation of the term *mysterion* in classical and biblical Gk. In the NT, *mysterion* signifies a secret which is being, or even has been, revealed, which is also divine in scope, and needs to be made known by God to men through his Spirit” (Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1997, p. 795. Marshal uses a “Y” to translate the Greek letter upsilon, usually translated by a “u”).

- William Smith writes: “But while the *musterion* thus implies something hidden, and inaccessible to the unaided reason, and usually also of weighty import, it by no means necessarily denotes anything strictly mysterious and incomprehensible. The fact or truth, though requiring to be revealed, may, when revealed, be of a very elementary character” (Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, reprinted 1981, vol. 3, p. 2047).


- The *Holman Bible Dictionary* says, “The mystery of the New Testament has been described as an ‘open secret’; matters previously kept secret in God’s eternal purposes have now been or are being revealed (Eph. 3:3-5; 1 Cor. 2:7-8)” (Trent Butler, editor, *Holman Bible Dictionary*, Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1991, p. 998).

- Robert Thayer writes: “In the New Testament, God's plan of providing salvation for men through Christ, which was once hidden but now is revealed (*Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*).

Numerous other sources could be cited, but the point is that the Greek word *mysterion* does not mean “mystery” and should not be translated that way. Although God kept His sacred secrets as secrets for years, He has now made many of them known, as the following verses show.

- Matthew 13:11 (KJV): “it is given unto you to know the mysteries [mysterion] of the kingdom of heaven.”
- 1 Corinthians 2:7, 8, 10 (KJV): But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery [mysterion], even the hidden wisdom,…Which none of the princes of this world knew…But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.”
- Romans 16: 25, 26 (NIV84): “the mystery [mysterion] hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known.”
- Ephesians 1:9 (NIV84): And he made known to us the mystery [mysterion]
- Colossians 1:26 (NIV84): the mystery [mysterion] that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.

Now that we have seen that *musterion* does not mean “mystery,” and that a *musterion* can understood once God reveals it, it is important to better understand why we translate *musterion* as “sacred secret.” The Greek language uses *musterion* for secrets in the
“sacred” or religious sphere, but has another word, kruptos, for secrets that are in the secular realm. The word kruptos appears in many places in the New Testament, including when Jesus said to give alms in secret (Matt. 6:4-KJV); Jesus teaching that every secret thing will be brought to light (Mark 4:22-KJV); Jesus’ going to Jerusalem in secret (John 7:10-KJV); Scripture saying that God will judge men’s secrets (Rom. 2:16); and that prophecy reveals the secrets of the heart (1 Cor. 14:24 and 25). The feminine form of the word kruptos is found in Luke 11:33, where some translations have “cellar.” It refers to a “hidden place” or crypt. The adjective is krupton, and the verb is kruptō, “to hide.”

Not only does the noun kruptos appear in the New Testament, the verb kruptō appears many times as well, often translated as “hid” or “hidden.” Examples include: a city on a hill cannot be hidden (Matt. 5:14); the wicked servant hid his talent in the ground (Matt. 25:25); a Christian’s new life is hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3); and, Moses’ parents hid him after he was born (Heb. 11:23).

From the above information we see that kruptos is a “secret,” and so also translating mysterion as “secret,” which some versions do in some places, clouds what the Greek text is saying. Anyone reading the Greek New Testament immediately understands whether God is speaking of a secular secret (kruptos) or a sacred secret (mysterion), and a good English translation will bring out that difference also. Thus, versions such as the REV and Rotherham use “secret” for kruptos, and “sacred secret” for mysterion.

A study of mysterion shows that it is used to refer to the “Administration of the Sacred Secret,” as it is here in Ephesians 3:9, but God has other “sacred secrets” as well, and in fact, the Devil has secrets in the religious sphere as well (2 Thess. 2:7).

3:10. “many sided.” The Greek reads, polupoikilos (#4182 πολυποίκιλος). “Pertaining to that which is different in a number of ways—‘many and diverse, manifold, many-sided” (Louw-Nida). “This is the only occurrence in the NT and it has the idea of ‘most varied,’ or ‘(very) many sided.’ It alludes to the variegated facets of God’s wisdom…” (Hoehner, Ephesians, p. 461). “God’s wisdom is one, yet it can be termed ‘multifarious’ because it weaves a thousand apparently tangled threads into one glorious pattern. So out of the most diverse elements, where the strongest opposites clashed, where men saw only impossibilities, God, coming with means which looked hopelessly inadequate to men, worked out results which no man would have dreamed, and no angel could have foreseen” (Lenski, p. 483).

Chapter 4

4:3. “unity of the spirit.” This is the genitive of production, meaning the unity produced by the spirit (Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, p. 105). This is picked up in Kistemaker’s translation: “unity imparted by the Spirit,” although Kistemaker is thinking in terms of “Spirit” being the third Person in the Trinity rather than God and Christ working to produce unity in the Body of Christ via the gift of holy spirit that is born and sealed in each Christian (Eph. 1:13, 14). The genitive of production is very similar to the genitive of origin, except the word in the genitive (in this case “spirit”) is more active in a genitive of production; rather than simply being the source of the unity, the spirit is both the source and producer of that unity. It is of note that we are called only to “maintain”
this unity, not to produce it. The unity we are supposed to maintain is the natural result of holy spirit being inside each believer. It makes us all brothers and fellow-members of the same Body, and works in us to conform us to the image of Christ (Gal. 5:17), and it is the primary vehicle through which God and Christ can give us revelation and move us towards both wanting to do, and doing, God’s will (Phil. 2:13).

4:4. “God sent his Son.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

4:8. Quoted from Psalm 68:18.

4:11. “apostles, prophets, evangelists.” Ephesians 4:11 mentions five specific ministries in the Church that are especially given by the Lord Jesus to prepare and equip Christians for service to God. Scripture does not refer to these ministries collectively by a particular name, so different Christian groups have referred to them in different ways. Some call these five ministries (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers) “gift ministries,” but that is misleading because every Christian has a “gift ministry,” that is, a ministry he or she is specifically enabled to carry out in the Body of Christ. The word “ministry” simply means “service,” and every Christian has been specifically enabled and empowered to serve. These five ministries have also been called “ascension gift ministries,” but again, after his ascension Jesus gave each Christian a ministry (Eph. 4:8), so in fact every Christian has an “ascension gift ministry.”

The Word of God says that the purpose for these five ministries is “for the equipping” of the believers (Eph. 4:12; NASB), and many other versions besides the REV recognize that “equip” or “equipping” is an excellent translation in this verse. It is good practice for Christians to use the vocabulary of the Bible whenever possible to describe spiritual realities, and thus a good way to refer to the five ministries in Ephesians 4:11 is to call them, “equipping ministries.”

“pastors and teachers.” The term “pastor” is the Greek noun poimēn (ποιμήν) and means “shepherd,” and it is translated as “shepherd” almost every other time it appears in the Bible. It is unfortunate that in the development of the English language, people who preside over congregations are referred to as “pastors” when the Greek word means “shepherd,” because when we correctly refer to Jesus as the “good shepherd” and the “Chief Shepherd,” but call the ones he appoints over others as “pastors” instead of “shepherds,” we lose the wonderful connection between the two offices.

Anyone who works with sheep knows that it is impossible to look after a large flock without help. A large flock always had a “chief shepherd” and other “shepherds” who helped with the work. Understanding that fact helps us understand the parable of the lost sheep (Matt. 18:12ff; Luke 15:4ff). The chief shepherd did not leave the 99 sheep vulnerable to save one, he left the 99 with his help—and the people of that time would have clearly understood that. The Body of Christ has millions of individual “sheep,” and Jesus is the Chief Shepherd and he works closely with his “help,” the shepherds (the “pastors”) he has placed in his Body. That Jesus is called the “Chief Shepherd” should be a great encouragement to anyone who is called to leadership in the Body of Christ, because it is clear that any shepherd can and should look to the Chief Shepherd for help, guidance, support, information, and whatever else is needed to shepherd the flock. [For
more on the relationship between the Chief Shepherd and his flock, see commentary on 1 Peter 5:4].

The term “teachers” is the only ministry mentioned after the first term in the list without the separator particle de in front of it; instead there is a kai (“and”). This has made the verse very difficult to interpret exactly. Many commentators have concluded that there are only four ministries in the verse, the fourth being that of the pastor/teacher. However, people intimately acquainted with the workings of the Church become keenly aware of the unique callings of the pastor and the teacher, and the differences between them. There are other reasons for the grammatical construction of Ephesians 4:11 besides saying that the pastor and teacher are one combined ministry. Meyer correctly points out that generally, the apostle, prophet, and evangelist, are more ministries to the entire Body of Christ, while the pastor and teacher are more generally tied to one congregation (Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament). Besides that, there is a closer association between the pastor and teacher than often exists between the other ministries, and a closer connection between the function of their ministries. To be truly effective, the pastor must always bring people back to God’s perspective and to the Word of God. Pastoral care is not just sympathy, it is helping people find God, so the pastor is always teaching. Similarly, the teacher cannot be divorced from the pastoral needs of the congregation. Every teacher knows what it is like to “hit the mark” in a teaching, when the subject matter was biblical and informative, and the teaching also reached into the hearts of the people who heard it. No teacher teaches simply to impart information. The information must bring the people closer to God, so there is an element of pastoral care in all good teachings. In spite of the pastor’s need to teach, and the teachers need to pastor the people, there is a huge difference between the pastor and teacher, but the “and” rather than the de brings attention to their special connection.

4:12. “for the equipping.” The Greek phrase is pros ton katartismon (πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν), which is literally, “for the equipping.” The Greek word katartismos (#2677 καταρτισμός) means “a process of adjustment that results in a complete preparedness” (Friberg Lexicon), and can be translated as “equipping, preparing, training, perfecting.” There are some versions that read, “to equip” instead of “for the equipping,” however, in this case, “for the equipping” is better, because it is more literal to the Greek text and because it more clearly implies that the process of equipping is an ongoing one. The work that the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers do in the Body of Christ is an ongoing one, both in the individual lives of the believers, and in the entire Body as new believers are saved while others fall asleep in the Lord.

“for the work of ministry.” This is not, “for the work of the ministry,” as if the believers were being equipped to do formal church work. Rather it is for the work of “ministry,” i.e., the act of ministering to each other in such a way that the Body of Christ is built up. Every believer is involved in “ministry,” serving and ministering to people both spiritually and physically in such a way that the Body of Christ is built up and strengthened. One of the sad facts of Christian history is that the true meaning of this verse has been mostly lost in the Church, especially in previous centuries, but even now in many denominations. This verse makes it plain that every believer is to “minister” to others, and through that ministry build up the Body of Christ. Every Christian is a witness for Christ, an ambassador of Christ, a “holy one,” a fellow-builder with God, a soldier of the Lord, etc. We are all to spur each other on to love and good works (Heb. 10:24).
Sadly, the way this verse has been translated in some versions, and acted out in the Church, is that the clergy does all the work while the average Christian sits in a pew and gives money to support the clergy and church work.

4:14. “doctrine.” The Greek word is didaskalia (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse we felt “doctrine” was better than “teaching.” [For more on didaskalia see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13].

“trickery.” The Greek is kubeia (#2940 κυβεία). Literally it means “dice playing,” but because the people who played dice often cheated, just as they do today, the word became used for the deceptions brought about by men, or trickery.

4:17. “implore.” This verb, martureō (#3140 μαρτυρέω), almost always means “to testify, bear witness,” however, here it has the meaning of “urging or insisting upon something” (BDAG).

4:21. “and were taught about him, (seeing that truth is about Jesus).” The Greek reads more literally, “and were taught in him, seeing that the truth is in Jesus.” Both uses of “in” are the Greek en (#1722 ἐν), the “static en,” which describes a relationship and is better understood as “in connection with,” or “in union with” (see commentary on Romans 6:3). Thus a very literal, but not easily understood, way to translate the phrase would be: “and were taught in connection with him, (seeing the truth is in connection with him).” However, in these situations, we more easily understand if we are taught “about” Jesus, and realize the truth is “about” him.

4:24. “true righteousness and holiness.” This is the figure of speech, antimereia (see Bullinger, Figures). The Greek uses the phrase “holiness of truth,” using true as a noun instead of an adjective to put the emphasis on “true.” We have been born again and taken on the divine nature of God (2 Pet. 1:4). We literally are “new” and now have to put that new man on, which we do by living by the spirit. Because we have been created in TRUE righteousness and holiness, we now must speak truth (v. 25), and live righteous and holy lives, and the next verses direct us in holy living.

4:25. Quoted from Zechariah 8:16.

4:26. “Be angry....” This quotation is from the Septuagint of Psalm 4:4. The Hebrew reads, “Tremble, and do not sin.”

“angry.” The Greek verb translated angry is orgizō (#3710 ὀργίζω). Orgizō is more of a long term, burning anger often associated with revenge, while thumos (another Greek word often translated “anger”) is the “boiling agitation of the feelings.” Thumos is more passionate but temporary compared with orgē (cp. Trench, Synonyms).

4:27. “a place or an opportunity.” The Greek word is topos (#5117 τόπος), and it has two important meanings that affect our understanding of this verse. The most basic meaning of topos is a place, a space, room, any portion or space marked off or differentiated in some way from surrounding space. It has many nuances, and occurs over ninety times in the New Testament. It was used for the “room” or “space” in the guestroom of the house where Mary gave birth to Jesus (cp. commentary on Luke 2:7). The Jews used it idiomatically of the “space” occupied by their Temple (see commentary on Matthew 24:15 and John 11:48).

The other distinct meaning of topos that is important in this verse derives from the first meaning, and is an “opportunity” or “occasion for acting.” We can easily see how
these two meanings are important in this verse. The Devil wants to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), but sometimes he cannot just move in and do that. He is patient, and will be content for a while if we will just give him a “space” in our lives, a place where he can sit and wait for us to make a mistake. Many people allow themselves to be in “dangerous positions,” where they are not in sin, but could fall into sinful behavior very easily. That is giving the Devil a place, a base of operations. Then in the moment of weakness or inattention, they give the Devil the opportunity to act, and he will. This word topos warns us not to give the Devil a place or an opportunity.

“the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

4:29. “Let no corrupting talk proceed out of your mouth.” The verb, “let proceed,” is imperative present, and ties this phrase into the one that begins verse 30, “grieve” which is also imperative present. Verses 29-32 are closely tied together, having a lot to do with communication. We are not to let proceed any corrupting communication come from our mouths, as this would grieve God, the Holy Spirit. Instead, we are to put away those things that are the source (root) of corrupt communication, bitterness, anger, wrath, etc.

“corrupting.” The Greek is sapros (#4550 σαπρός), and it means to be rotten or putrefied, like rotten fruit. In this context it means “unwholesome to the extent of being harmful, bad, evil, unwholesome,” (BDAG).

4:30. “grieve.” How do we grieve God? The context tells us. We allow bitterness, anger, wrath, to live in us (verse 32), and these produce the fruit of communication that corrupts (verse 29).

“the Holy Spirit of God.” This refers to God. The Greek reads, “the Spirit the Holy of God.” This is the genitive of apposition, and could be translated “the Holy Spirit, namely, God.” It was “the Spirit of God” that hovered over the waters in Genesis 1:2 for example. But why refer to God as “the Holy Spirit” in this verse? The context is the key. We have been created in true holiness (v. 24), and God wants us to reflect His holy nature. When we do not take advantage of the holy nature which has been created in us and live in an unholy manner, we grieve the “Holy” Spirit, namely God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

4:31. “defaming speech.” The Greek noun is blasphêmia (#988 βλασφημία; pronounced blas-fay-me'-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphêmia, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

4:32. “you, the ones in Christ.” The phrase “in Christ” means “in union with Christ” (see commentary on Ephesians 1:3), and it modifies “you,” not “God.” Lenski correctly states: “The phrase does not modify ‘God.’” God is not “in Christ,” we are. It is by virtue of being in union with Christ that we are forgiven. The wages of sin is death, and we died “in Christ” (Rom. 6:8). If we were going to expand the verse, we could say: “and be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also forgave you, because you are in union with Christ.”
Chapter 5

5:2. “gave himself up for us.” Much more strongly supported than “gave himself up for you.” (Metzger, Textual Commentary). “Love is best gauged by sacrifice” (The Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians; E. K. Simpson and F. F. Bruce, p. 74).

“sweet-smelling fragrance.” This phrase is literally a genitive, “fragrance of a sweet smell,” but this may be an instance of an adjectival genitive, see Lenski.

5:5. “has any inheritance.” The Greek word translated “inheritance” is klēronomia (#2817 κληρονομία), and it is a noun that refers to an inheritance; property that will be received by inheritance; or it can refer to property that is given by one person to another. To understand Ephesians 5:5, we must understand the difference between our “salvation,” which means we will be a part of the everlasting future Kingdom, and “rewards,” which are the rewards we receive (or do not receive) in the future Kingdom of Christ.

As it is used in the NT, the word klēronomia (inheritance) can refer to the Christian’s everlasting life (Eph. 1:14), or it can refer to the rewards the Christian will receive in the Kingdom for any work he has done (Col. 3:24). In this verse, the word klēronomia has to be referring to the rewards a Christian will receive, and not to everlasting life. Christians are saved by faith in Christ, and can be saved even if they have sin in their lives. Once a person is saved, he will be in the Kingdom of Christ. However, not everyone in the Kingdom will have the same inheritance. There will be different jobs to do and different levels of authority and responsibility.

Ephesians 2:8 makes it very clear that Christian salvation is not by works, but by faith, something that is very clear in the rest of the Church Epistles as well. Romans 10:9 says if a person confesses Christ as Lord and believes in his heart that Jesus has been raised from the dead, that person will be saved. There are many verses like Romans 10:9 that tell us salvation is by faith, such as Romans 3:22, 26, 28, 30; 4:13; 24; 5:1; Galatians 2:16; 3:8, 24, etc. There is nothing in those verses that says salvation is by faith as long as we do not sin. The Good News of salvation is that we are saved by faith in Christ, not that we are saved by faith if we do not participate in sexual sin of any kind, or are “unclean” (immoral; particularly sexually immoral) or are greedy and are thus idolaters.

Ephesians 5:5 is teaching us the same lesson as 1 Corinthians 3:10-17. In those verses, a man who builds a bad work on the foundation of Christ will suffer loss, “but he himself will be saved” (1 Cor. 3:15). The person who builds his life badly will suffer loss, and enter the Kingdom like a person who had gone through a fire—with nothing. He will be saved and be in the Kingdom, but will have nothing there—no rewards; no inheritance. Similarly, in Ephesians 2:8 we were told we were saved by faith, “not by works.” Also, in Ephesians 1:14 we were told that salvation was guaranteed. What kind of guarantee of salvation would it be if it was not really guaranteed? That would make no sense. Our salvation is guaranteed, but our inheritance, our rewards in the Kingdom, are not guaranteed, they are earned. Christians dare never be smug about the fact that our salvation was paid for by Christ and guaranteed after we accepted him as Lord. It would be terrible to be a part of the future Kingdom of Christ and not have any rewards there. We must obey God and watch our lifestyle closely to get rewarded in the Kingdom. [For
more on the permanence of Christian salvation, see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation”. For more on salvation vs. rewards, and rewards in the Kingdom, see 2 Cor. 5:10, “good and worthless].

5:16. “making the best use of.” The Greek is exagorazō (#1805 ἐξαγοράζω), and it means, 1) to redeem by payment of a price, to recover from the power of another, to ransom, buy off; 2) metaphorically, of Christ freeing the elect from the dominion of the Mosaic Law at the price of his vicarious death 3) to buy up, to buy up for one’s self, for one’s use 4) to make wise and sacred use of every opportunity for doing good. Definition 4 fits here, and the concept is that God asks us to “buy back” the time we have from day to day and use it for His purposes.

5:18. “drunk.” The Greek word is methuskō (#3182 μεθύσκω), and it refers to being drunk, intoxicated, impaired. This verse specifically refers to being drunk on wine, but that actually shows us that the principle is a general one. One way we know this is that God says, “drunk on wine” when from reading the scope of Scripture it is clear that He also forbids being drunk at all, be it on whiskey, wine, rum, gin, beer, or whatever. It is the effect in the mind that alters people’s thinking that God forbids. When God says not to get drunk, He is not just forbidding what we refer to as being “drunk” on alcohol, but being “mentally affected,” mentally altered.

The word “drunk” refers to the mental state or being drunk, intoxicated, or mentally impaired. For example, both the Greek word metuskō and our English word “drunk” refer to being mentally impaired by things other than alcohol, for example both we and the Greeks had spoken of people being “drunk with power.”

There are many times that, for medicinal purposes, people take drugs that alter their mind. The reason that is acceptable with God is that the drug, while altering the mind, allows the person to function and serve God better in other ways. For example, if great pain is keeping a person from serving God, God would rather have the person be able to serve Him even if the person is a little unclear in his thinking.

However, to get drunk or “high” for pleasure is wrong, and it is wrong for a number of reasons. One is that is makes the person less mentally sharp for God. God expects us to be ministers for Him, and we are not generally mentally sharp or in prayer when we are drunk or high. Another reason getting drunk or high is wrong is that it can open up the mind to demons. Apparitions are quite common to people who get “high,” and in fact a study of anthropology shows that in many cultures, the reason people got high was to have a spiritual experience. Many times if you open yourself up to a demon by your use of alcohol or drugs, it does not go away when you become sober. Another reason not to get high is that, at least right now, it promotes an industry that is very harmful to society. Much innocent blood has been shed over control and concealment of drugs that people consume illegally for pleasure. Buying the product is a contribution to the sins of the industry.


5:19. “singing and making music in your heart to the Lord.” Believers are to honor both God and Christ in many ways, and singing to them out of the joy and thanksgiving of our hearts is one of those ways. Jesus told us that we were to honor him just as we honor the Father (John 5:23), and one way to honor Christ is to sing to him, and we should sing many different genres of music, including “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”
We can tell that the word “Lord” in this verse refers to Jesus by reading the end of the sentence, which is in the next verse, because it makes a distinction between God, “the Father” and “our Lord Jesus Christ,” clearly referring to the Father as “God” and Jesus as “Lord.” We again see believers singing to Jesus in Revelation 5:9. It is also possible that the “speaking” praises in Revelation 5:12 and 13 is actually singing, as per the NIV, NET, and NRSV, because much early music was more “spoken” than “sang,” but there is no way to confirm that.

There is also evidence from the early Church that Christians honored Jesus with songs and praise. About 112 AD, the Roman Pliny wrote to the Emperor Trajan regarding Christians, and said, “…it was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before the daylight and sing antiphonally a hymn to Christ as [to] a god” (Quoted in D. G. Dunn; Did the First Christians Worship Christ? ebook, chapter 2.2 “Hymns.”) Similarly, Ignatius the Bishop of Antioch, (born between 35-50 AD, and died between 98-117 AD) speaks of Christians singing in praise of Jesus Christ (also in in Dunn). Singing to Christ also fits the tenor of Hebrews 1:6, which says that when the Son came into the world, God said, “And let all the angels of God worship Him” (Heb. 1:6 NASB). Hebrews 1:4-7 is about angels, but it does not seem logical that God would tell the angels to worship the Son but forbid humans from doing so, in fact, it seems that if God wanted angels to worship the Son then He would want humans to worship him too, and singing to him would certainly be part of that. [For more on our relationship with Jesus and praying to him, see Appendix 15, “Can We Pray To Jesus?”].

5:20. “in the name of Jesus Christ.” This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority. [For more on the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6].

5:21. “Submit yourselves one to another.” As to the word “submit,” “hupotassō (#5293 ὑποτάσσω), Robertson says, “The construction here is rather loose, coordinate with the preceding participles of praise and prayer. It is possible to start a new paragraph here and regard hupotassomenoi as an independent participle like an imperative.” We agree with Robertson and see “submit” as starting a new subject and being a command of God. Although much has been made of verse 22, that wives should submit to their husbands, simply reading the text shows that we Christians are to submit to one another (in fact, the word “submit” does not even appear in verse 22, even though most English versions include it in the verse).

If we are to submit to one another, then we have to ask, how is that to be done correctly? The answer to that question is to determine the spheres of authority that we each have and submit according to that authority structure. A common mistake it to see submission in a completely vertical paradigm, where one person, the “leader,” has everyone submit to him in everything, and that structure is followed from the top down, until the lowest person in rank, so to speak, the “low man on the totem pole,” has no one submit to him in anything. The proper way to see submission is like a circles of authority in which leadership is “by area” or “by category,” and a person who submits in one area will have authority in another.
A pastor in a church will have authority under his roof in certain areas, but if he visits another church he will be under the authority of that pastor. If he visits the home of members of the church, they will have authority in their own home. Also, if the church has a finance committee, he will be under the authority of that committee when it comes to spending money.

5:22. “the wives to their own husbands, as to the Lord.” To properly understand this verse, we must pay attention to the fact that it is the last half of the sentence that started in verse 21. Although most versions translate it as a new sentence, even the modern Greek text is punctuated such that it is the last part of verse 21. That is why the word “submit” is missing from the Greek text in verse 22—because it is in the first part of the sentence, which is in verse 21. Most English versions have to add “submit” in verse 22 because they have made verse 22 into a new sentence. If we read a proper translation, however, we see that the sentence reads, “Submit yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ, the wives to their own husbands, as to the Lord....” When we read the verse that way, we can see that wives submitting to their husbands as they would to the Lord is just one example of the mutual submission being referred to in verse 21.

Two points need to be made about the submission of the wife. One is that since the wife submits as she would to the Lord, we can see the subject of the verse is submission to godly and loving requests. The wife submits to the husband as she would submit to the Lord Jesus, not as if she were being told to submit to the Devil and ungodly requests. The submission of the wife is not “absolute submission,” but “proper submission.” The second point that needs to be made is that just because this verse points out that wives are to submit to their husbands does not mean that there are no areas where the husband submits to the wife. Again, we must keep in mind that the sentence started with us submitting one to another. 1 Timothy 5:14 says the women are to “rule the household,” and the single Greek word that is translated into that phrase is oikodespoteō (#3616 οἰκοδεσποτέω), a compound word built from oikos, house, and despoteōs, a ruler or master (in Scripture, home owners, slave owners, and Jesus Christ are referred to as despoteēs). Thus, in many household affairs, the Lord has given the woman primary responsibility, and the husband should submit to her in those areas. For more on submission, see the commentary note on Colossians 3:18.


“be glued to.” The Greek word is proskollaō (#4347 προσκολλάω), and Thayer’s Lexicon says, “properly, to glue, glue to, glue together, cement, fasten together; hence universally, to join or fasten firmly together; in the N. T. only the passive is found....”

5:32. We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

Chapter 6

6:2, 3. Quoted from Deuteronomy 5:16.
6:5. “sincerity.” The Greek is haplotēs (#572 ἡπλότης), and BDAG says, “In our lit. esp. of personal integrity expressed in word or action...simplicity, sincerity, uprightness, frankness... Of simple goodness, which gives itself without reserve, ‘without strings attached’, ‘without hidden agendas.’”

6:6. “to win their approval when their eye is on you.” The Greek is ophthalmodouleia (#3787 ὀφθαλμοδουλεία), which is “service that is performed only to make an impression in the owner’s presence” (BDAG). Occasionally it happens that the only way to make a Greek word clear is by translating it as a phrase, and that is the case here. The word “eye-service” does not communicate the meaning of the Greek.

“soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here “soul” is inclusive of the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the person himself, so many versions have “heart” instead of “soul.” We are not to only work hard when people are watching, but are to work from our very soul, all that we are mentally and emotionally.

6:10. “be empowered.” The Greek verb is endunamoo (#1743 ἐνδυναμώ), and it is an imperative present 2nd person plural. The voice of the verb can be either passive or middle, but the passive voice fits better here. Donald Hagner correctly notes, “The power does not come from the believer, but from an external source,” which would be God or the Lord Jesus (Hagner, Ephesians, p. 820). The believer is commanded to do what it takes to be filled with the power of God.

“that is.” The Greek word kai can be conjunctive, as “and,” or it can be “and in addition,” as “also,” or it can be explanatory as “even.” In this case, a more literal, but less easily understood way to translate the phrase would be, “be strong in the Lord, even in his mighty strength.” The kai here is not conjunctive or “in addition” as if being strong in the Lord and in his strength were two separate things. We are to be strong in the Lord, by being strong in his mighty strength.

“in the might of his strength.” This is an attributed genitive: “mighty strength.” It could also be genitive of origin: “might that originates from his strength”; or genitive of production: “might produced by his strength.” To allow for multiple understandings we left the “of” formulation intact in the translation, rather than translate the genitive to its primary meaning. The Greek reads, “in the might [kratos] of his strength [ischus].” This one verse places an amazing amount of emphasis on the power that we have in Christ, and the power that we need if we are going to stand for God throughout our lives. This verse contains the word “power” (dunamis), which refers to inherent power or ability. It also has “might” (kratos), the ability to express or exhibit resident strength, (usually spoken of as the resident strength of a nation, for example); and also the exercising of that strength. Thus we speak of “mighty nations” as those that have a lot of strength they can bring to bear on a situation militarily, economically, or politically. It also has “strength” (ischus), which is translated well as “strength.” It is the capability or capacity to exert force or power.

6:11. “the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the
Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

6:12. “wrestle.” The Greek is palē (παλή), The primary meaning of the Greek word is “to wrestle.” The word “wrestle” is a very good translation, even in this context of a soldier’s armor. While it is true that over time the usage of palē broadened to include various struggles, which is why quite a few versions say “struggle” instead of “wrestle,” palē always retained its undertone of the wrestling contest. Furthermore, hand-to-hand combat was common enough among professional soldiers that being a good wrestler helped a lot on the battlefield (cp. Harold Hoehner, Ephesians, p. 825).

Another reason that “wrestle” is such a good translation is that it subtly communicates that we are in a serious struggle, but there is nothing we can do in this life to “end the fight.” Athletes do not kill each other, they continue to fight over and over. A champion wrestler will have fellow athletes that he competes against match after match, year after year. That is why anyone who is going to be victorious over and over has to be mentally prepared and physically conditioned for the “long haul.” Anyone who lives godly in Christ will find himself wrestling against spiritual wickedness his whole life.

6:14. “having belted around your waist with truth” is the way the text reads literally. This can be an awkward sentence, so a couple versions have, “having fastened the belt of truth around your waist.” The force of the aorist participle, “having fastened,” is important. It could be less literally translated, stand…after you have belted around your waist with truth. Also, “having belted” is in the middle voice, as is “having put on” of the breastplate and the shoes, emphasizing the fact that we have to put these things on. They are not “automatic armor” that comes with the New Birth.

“breastplate of righteousness.” The Roman soldier wore a breastplate that covered his vital organs. The Christian is to put on the breastplate of righteousness. To fully understand the breastplate of righteousness, we must remember that “righteousness” has two meanings in the Administration of Grace in which we live (John Schoenheit, Righteousness—Every Christian’s Gift From God, Christian Educational Services, 2002). Righteousness is the God-given righteousness, or right standing, that we have before God because Jesus died for our sins, and it is also the right standing we have before God because of right living before God. When Romans 5:17 mentions the free gift of righteousness that Christians have, that is our righteousness due to the work of Christ. When 1 Timothy 6:11 instructs us to follow after righteousness, or 2 Timothy 3:16 says that the Bible provides instruction in righteousness, that is “right living” before God.

The “breastplate of righteousness” in Ephesians 6:14 includes both meanings. First, no matter how hard we try to live obediently before God, we will sin. If we do not understand that our sins are forgiven, and that due to the work of Christ we stand righteous before God, the weight of that sin on our conscience can be unbearable. Many people have been made ineffective in their lives and ministries, and some have abandoned the Christian faith altogether, due to the guilt that they feel from not being able to obey God. They have not put on the breastplate of righteousness, and guilt and shame have penetrated their vital organs. The knowledgeable Christian is aware that his sins are forgiven in Christ, and does not hold on to the guilt produced by his mistakes. Freed from that weight, he can stand effectively for the Lord.

The breastplate of righteousness is also the breastplate of our righteous life. Living righteously before God protects the Christian in many ways. There is physical
protection, such as from the ravages of alcohol, drugs, sexually transmitted disease, and so forth. Also, the mind is protected from the consequences of willful sin, such as shame and guilt. The Bible says that those who practice sin become slaves to sin, and that is true. The savvy Christian puts on the breastplate of righteousness by living righteousness from day to day so he can readily stand against the wiles of the Devil.

6:15. “shod your feet with the preparation of the Good News of peace.” In this case, the footwear of God is the readiness, or preparation, one has for the evil day that is given by the Good News of peace. The reference to the gospel of peace in this context is not referring to evangelism, that is not the context here. Rather it is referring to the peace that Christians must have in their mind and heart to stand firm day after day under the onslaughts of the Adversary. The Christian who has not prepared himself to be peaceful will have a difficult life, for every day brings new challenges to worry about. In contrast, people who love the Law of God and follow it have great peace, and can stand in the battle of life.

   One of the great pieces of irony in the Word of God is that the Christian prepares for spiritual war by putting on his feet the preparation of the Good News of peace. If we are not at peace within ourselves and feel at peace with God, we are not prepared for the spiritual battle.

6:16. “the shield of faith.” The “shield of faith” is a genitive of apposition, and means, “the shield, that is to say, our faith.” In other words, the shield is our faith. “Faith,” which is “trust” in God, does not keep the blows of the Adversary from coming, and having a shield does not mean we will not feel the blows. But our trust in God keeps us from being “killed” by the Adversary; we withstand attack after attack with our love for God and commitment to Him intact.

   Shields have long been used in individual combat to protect a fighter from the attack of his adversary, and usually we think of a shield only protecting the one who holds it. While that individual protection is certainly a large part of the “shield of faith,” the shield also protected other people as well. It would not be lost on the people of Ephesus, and indeed, on Romans in general, that the shield not only protected the one who held it, but comrades as well.

   Long before Alexander the Great (356-323 BC), Greek infantrymen were armed with body armor, a round shield, and a thrusting spear, and attacked an enemy by closing in and jabbing the opponent head-on, rather than throwing a javelin from a distance as was done by many of their opponents. On the left arm of these Greek warriors was a round wooden shield about three feet in diameter, the hoplon, and it was from this vital piece of equipment that the infantryman got his name, “hoplite.” When the Greek hoplites were in the phalanx (the line of interlinked soldiers), the hoplon protected the soldier’s left side, but also provided protection for the otherwise unprotected right side of the man to his left in the phalanx. The round shape, however, had disadvantages, and left open upper and lower parts of the body. By Roman times, the round hoplon shield was replaced by a rectangular shield. In Roman battle tactics, the legionnaires in the front line linked shields, the soldiers on the sides linked shields to protect from flanking attacks, and the soldiers who formed the middle ranks of this fighting rectangle raised their shields overhead to protect from arrows, spears, and sling balls (or sometimes they put their shields on the back of the soldier in front and pushed, adding force to the forward motion of this “battle rectangle,” and more easily breaking through enemy lines).
The shield of faith not only protects us as individuals, but it can be used to protect the family of God as well, and especially when linked with the faith-shields of others believers can be a very effective protection against the attacks of the Adversary.

“arrows.” The Greek word is generic, and can refer to any thrown projectile such as an arrow or spear. However, since it was the arrows that were generally set on fire, “flaming arrows” makes more sense from a customs point of view. Today’s dart would not generally be of much danger.

“Wicked One.” The Greek is poneros (#4190 πονηρός), which the BDAG Greek-English Lexicon describes as, “pertaining to being morally or socially worthless; therefore, ‘wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, and degenerate.’” Poneros is an adjective, but it is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun; for more on substantives, see the commentary on Matthew 5:37).

The Slanderer is the fount and foundation of wickedness. It was in him that wickedness was first found, when he was lifted up with pride and decided to rebel against God. Ever since that time he has been true to his name, “the Wicked One,” and has been doing and causing wickedness wherever he can, which, since he is “the god of this age,” is a considerable amount of wickedness. [For more names of the Slanderer (the Devil) and their meanings, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

6:17. “helmet of salvation.” The “helmet of salvation” of Ephesians 6:17 is more accurately called the helmet of “the hope of salvation” in 1 Thessalonians 5:8. The word “salvation” is used in its general sense in this verse, and is not restricted to only Christian salvation to everlasting life, although that is included. Neither the world nor the Christian are saved at this time. The Bible refers to us as “saved,” and we refer to ourselves that way, due to an idiom in the original languages of the Bible known as the “prophetic perfect” (see commentary on “seated,” in Ephesians 2:6). The essence of the prophetic perfect idiom is that if something is absolutely guaranteed to happen in the future, it is often spoken of as if it had already occurred. Because our salvation is guaranteed, we speak as if we have it now, and the salvation of the world from its present distress is guaranteed also.

The entire creation is in bondage and is groaning in pain (Rom. 8:21, 22), and Christians are groaning in pain also (Rom. 8:23) and everything in creation needs to be “saved,” “rescued” from the power of sin. Nothing any of us can do will change that now, but God will rescue His creation in the future. The Lord Jesus will descend from heaven and conquer the earth, and the earth will once again become a paradise. God promises that in the future we will live on a beautiful earth in new, energetic bodies, and our lives will be free of sickness, hunger, war, and injustice. God has given us that wonderful Hope for the future, and it can sustain us through our lives, especially in hard times. No matter how difficult our lives get on earth, our hope for a wonderful future shines through the darkness and points to better things to come. Because of this the Bible refers to the Hope as “the anchor of our soul” (Heb. 6:19). As the anchor of our soul, it is fitting that our hope of salvation for ourselves and creation is referred to as our helmet. Life can be so difficult and discouraging that it is hard to think straight. Each year vast numbers of people get caught up in the difficulties of life and make unwise decisions. Many people completely lose sight of any value or purpose in their life and commit suicide. The hope of salvation says, “Hang in there, your troubles will not last long, and then things will be better.” The hope of salvation helps protect our minds, and helps keep us calm and
rational in troubled times, allowing us to keep standing for God. When properly understood, the hope of salvation is a very effective helmet, protecting the thoughts of the Christian and helping him to stand for the Lord year after year.

“the sword of the spirit.” The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God, and is the only offensive weapon the believer has as he wrestles with evil. It is important to remember that the sword is the “sword of the Spirit.” The genitive in this verse is probably the figure of speech Amphibologia, encompassing two meanings at once. Thus the genitive has both the force of a genitive of possession, i.e., that it is “the Spirit’s sword” not our sword, and also the force of a genitive of origin, “the sword given to us by the Spirit,” to use in our earthly lives.

In the Greek text, the verb telling us to take the helmet and sword is in the imperative mood. That means that God is not just stating that we should take these pieces of armor, or asking us if we would like to, He is commanding us to take them and put them on. If we do not put on the helmet and take up and use the sword, we are in effect telling God that we are quite content to not enter into His service in our fullest capacity. One important reason why God would command us to take the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, is that if we do not really understand it, we can unknowingly be used by the Devil against the purposes of God to hurt other people. That has happened many times in history. The Christians that tortured other Christians during the Inquisition, for example, thought they were doing Christ’s work. Although that is an extreme example, the same kind of thing, people working against God when they think they are working for him, happens on a much smaller scale every day. Christians are called to stand for God, and the sword of the spirit is an essential part of our armor if we are going to be successful at doing that throughout our lifetime.

6:19. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]
Philippians

Chapter 1

1:1. “holy ones.” The Greek text only has the adjective *hagios* (#40 ἅγιος), “holy,” but it is a substantive, an adjective that is used as a noun and therefore is best translated “holy ones.” A good example of substantives in English are the adjectives in the well-known Clint Eastwood movie, “The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly.” The adjectives “good,” “bad,” and “ugly” refer to people (“good people,” “bad people,” “ugly people”), and thus they function as nouns even though they are adjectives. Another example in English would be, “We need to feed the hungry.” The word “hungry” is an adjective, but in that sentence it is being used as a noun, meaning “hungry people.”

The Bible is full of substantives, but we often cannot see them because the word “one” or another appropriate noun is supplied by the translators. For example, “the wicked” in Matthew 5:37 means, “the Wicked One,” which is the way the English reads in most modern versions. In 1 John 5:19 “the evil” means “the evil one;” in Revelation 1:19 “the Living” means “the Living One;” in Matthew 10:41 “a righteous” means “a righteous one;” in Matthew 12:41 “a greater” means “a greater one” [For more on substantives, see the commentary on Matthew 5:37].

People who have confessed Christ as Lord and become born again are referred to as “holy ones.” This makes perfect sense because God is holy, and when a person gets born again and becomes a child of God by birth he gets the nature of his parent (all children have the nature of their parents). God is holy, so every child of God is a partaker of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4) and thus is holy too.

Sadly the connection between the holy Father and the holy child has been obscured because for hundreds of years the word *hagios* (holy) has been translated “saint.” So, for example, in the King James Version, Philippians 1:1 reads: “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi.” The average Christian does not know that the word “holy” when used of God (Rev. 4:8), the word “holy” in the phrase “holy spirit” (Acts 1:5), and the Greek word translated “saints,” are all the same Greek word, *hagios*. The connection is actually simple: God is holy and spirit, and like any parent, when He gives birth, His children get his nature, so they are holy too. The way it works is that when a person gets “born again,” he or she receives the gift of God’s nature, which the Bible calls “holy spirit” (1 Thess. 4:8), and because God’s children have God’s holy nature, they are holy and are called “holy ones.”

Making matters worse for the beginning Bible reader, through the ages the English word “saint” has changed meaning. Biblically, a “saint” is a Christian; someone who is born again. However, the English word “saint” has acquired a meaning that is not biblical. Thus today a “saint” is someone who is a good and religious person, or someone who does good deeds. Thus the word “saint” in the Bible can be confusing, especially to new Christians. Every Christian is a “holy one,” a “saint,” because each Christian has God’s gift of holy spirit sealed inside him. Many Christians do not do good deeds, but they are still “saints” because they have God’s holy nature. In contrast, many people who
do good deeds have never given their heart to Jesus Christ and are not born again and thus are not “holy ones” or “saints.”

The fact that Christians are “holy ones” by nature can be confusing because we are also commanded to be holy (cp. 1 Pet. 1:15, 16). The confusion is caused because each Christian has two natures: “flesh” and “spirit.” Worse, those two natures are at war in us (Gal. 5:17). So while we are “holy ones” by nature, we have to work hard to act that way and be “holy” in the flesh.

The Church Epistles consistently refer to Christians as “holy ones” (cp. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:2).

“along with overseers and deacons.” Cp. Meyer’s translation, “along with overseers and deacons.” The Greek of this clause is very revealing. The words “along with” come from the preposition sun (#4862 σύν), here used in its associative sense. It could be translated “in association with” or “together with.” This little word paints a picture of all the saints in Philippi standing in association with the overseers and deacons among them. What is the association that connects them? It is precisely not that of one class to another. The scripture here has no sense of a separation between clergy and laity—it was already affirmed that the letter was to “all the saints.” Interestingly, the two nouns for “overseers” and “deacons” lack the definite article, which highlights the fact that they are not a separate group. They are not the overseers and deacons, but simply particular saints who are described as fulfilling such a role. As Lenski explains, “The absence of the articles makes the two nouns qualitative, lends them the force of ‘such as are overseers and deacons,’ and thereby avoids the idea of a particular class.”

1:5. “from the first day until now.” This phrase does not refer to a specific day that the Philippians came to the Lord, because obviously the church grew over time. Rather, it refers to the fact that the church did not waffle in an out of the Faith, sometimes believing and sometimes not. The phrase means that from the time they got saved they stayed faithful to the Lord.

1:6. “will continue to complete it.” The Greek word is epiteleō (#2005 ἐπιτελέω) in the future tense. This is the linear or progressive future which indicates that “the action will continue throughout a future time” (MacDonald, Greek Enchiridion, p. 32; cp. Burton, Moods and Tenses, §60). There is an important message buried in the Greek of this verse that it is difficult to bring into English. As well as “complete,” the Greek word epiteleō can mean “pay in full” (See Liddell & Scott Greek English Lexicon). Jesus Christ will indeed complete his work in believers. He will, and is, also paying them back for their efforts.

“right up to.” The Greek is achri (#891 ἅχρι), and it is a marker of a continuous extent of time up to a point, Thus, “until, as far as, right up to,” etc. See Nyland, The Source NT.

1:7. “defending and confirming.” The Greek text has these words as nouns, “the defense and confirmation,” but they are verbal in nature and express action, and thus it seems clearer to express them as verbs, and some modern versions are doing exactly that (cp. NIV, NJB, NLT, God’s New Covenant; C. William’s, The New Testament).

“and because.” The “because” comes from the participle from of the “to be” verb at the end of the sentence, which seems clearly to be causal. Paul is giving reasons why he thinks so fondly of the Philippians, and he says it is because they are in his heart and because they are joint-partakers in grace.
1:8. “Indeed.” A “confirmatory gar.” It is not giving a reason, but confirming the last sentence. Some versions simply leave out the “For” altogether (cp. NEB; NIV; NLT, The Source). In The Kingdom New Testament, N. T. Wright translates it “Yes.”

1:9. “will abound.” The verb “abound” is perisseuō (#4052 περισσεύω), and it is in the subjunctive mood, which is why almost all English versions have “may abound.” However, in this case the subjunctive mood of the verb comes from the word hina (“that”) which is conditional. Thus the subjunctive comes from the Greek grammar, not the context or the intent of Paul’s prayer. Paul is not praying that their love “may” abound, as if there might be some circumstance in which it would be better if it did not abound, rather Paul is praying that their love “will” abound. For more on the subjunctive mood being the result of grammar and not context, and how that can be confusing, see commentary on “will not perish” at John 3:16.

1:10. “determine.” The Greek is dokimazo (#1381 δοκιµάζω), and it was used in testing metals, where a metal would be tested, then either approved or rejected based on the test results. The meaning here is similar to 1 Thessalonians 5:21, which says, “Test everything; hold fast to that which is good.” We are not to just “approve” excellent things, as if to give them a stamp of approval. We are to test things and then approve them based on the test. Thus “determine” is a good translation here, as would be “test and approve,” it shows that you examine and arrive at a judgment. Robertson (Word Pictures in the New Testament) says, “… the first step is to distinguish between good and evil and that is not always easy in our complex civilization.” (See also note on Romans 2:18).

“the things that are best.” See commentary on Romans 2:18.

1:12. “that the things that happened to me.” Why do people stay in bad situations? Psychologists tell us that the fear we know is less fearful than the fear we do not know, so people stay in bad marriages, dead-end jobs, etc. In the first century, the Church was afraid of the evil government, and this slowed down the move of the Word. When Paul was put in prison people were actually emboldened by it and spoke the Word with more boldness (v. 14).

1:13. 1:13. “As a result of those things.” The Greek word that starts verse 13 is hōste (#5620 ὥστε), which usually gives a reason (thus, “so that, therefore, so then”) but can also be used as a result clause, as it is here (cp. NIV). As a result clause, it can be confusing if not coupled with the “things” of verse 12, and because of that many modern versions, especially those that are less literal to the Greek text, leave it off completely, and just say that the whole guard knows about Paul (cp. CJB, CEV, NCV, TLB, The Message).

There is a great lesson in what Paul is writing. God can make a lemonade out of a lemon. God did not want Paul in prison, but that is where he was, so God worked in the situation to embolden the other Christians Paul was working with, and also to use Paul as a witness to those around him. We should always be looking for how we can redeem any situation for God, no matter how bad it seems.

“everyone else.” “Everyone else” refers to the common Roman citizen. To understand this phrase we need to have some cultural background. For one thing, Rome, like most major cities, was a hotbed of gossip. Paul’s case would have been especially juicy because the Romans did not generally like the Jews, and had had nothing but trouble with them ever since Pompey conquered Jerusalem in 63 BC, around 120 years before Philippians was written. We see the animosity the Romans held for the Jews periodically in Acts. A good example is when Paul came to Philippi, which was a Roman colony, and taught about Jesus. The Romans became upset at some of the events that
occurred, and brought Paul and Silas to the magistrates and said, “These men, being Jews, are seriously disturbing our city, and are setting forth customs that are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or to observe.” Then, without even a pretense of a trial, the magistrates had them stripped, beaten with rods, and then thrown into the stocks in the prison (Acts 16:20-24).

Also, around 60 AD, very close to when Paul was in jail and Philippians was written, there was still a lot of confusion about any difference between Jews and Christians. The majority of Christians were still of Jewish background (although the number of Gentile converts was growing dramatically). The Jews were well known for arguing among themselves about almost every aspect of their religion, so when “another group of Jews” started propounding that the Messiah had come, the Romans did not generally see this as a new religion, as the Jews and Christians did, but just another Jewish sect. Some Romans saw the difference and understood what was happening, but at this time most did not. In fact, it is quite possible that it was this very trial of “Paul versus the Jews,” that really clarified the difference between a Jew and a Christian for the emperor, the Roman officials, and even the common Roman. We can assume it had a big impact, after all, a trial in front of the emperor himself, in which Paul was being tried for breaking various Jewish laws, would have been the object of a lot of attention. We do know that by the great fire of Rome in July of 64, only a few years later, the difference between a Jew and Christian was much better understood by the Romans—and by the Christians too, because it was around 60-62 that Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians were written, and those three epistles greatly clarified the difference between a Jew and a Christian.

In conclusion, Paul’s imprisonment, the imprisonment of a Rabbi with some new ideas, due to supposedly breaking Jewish laws, got a lot of attention among the Praetorian guard, and “everyone else” in Rome.

1:15. “rivalry.” The Greek word is eris (#2054 ἐρὶς), and it means strife, fighting, rivalry. We need to remember that there were churches in Rome before Paul arrived. After Paul arrived in Rome, his fame among the believers, no doubt bolstered by his understanding of the things of God in general and possibly by healings or miracles, caused some of the already established ministers, who were used to being the big wheels in town, to be very uncomfortable. Thus they preached with renewed vigor, no doubt maximizing any difference between their understanding of the Scripture and what Paul was teaching, to elevate their prestige in the Church. They started preaching out of envy and rivalry.

1:17. “selfish ambition.” The Greek is eritheia (#2052 ἐριθεία). See commentary on “selfish ambition,” Romans 2:8. Some versions have “rivalry” here. Although rivalry definitely existed, we do not feel it is the true core of the issue. Selfish ambition is the root of the rivalry, and in this case the selfish ambition, which manifested itself in rivalry, also would manifest itself in dishonest and underhanded actions that were designed to achieve honor, position, and perhaps even money.

1:18. “What really matters?” The Greek phrase, ti gar, is an idiom. “What about it?” “What really matters?” Even “How do I feel?” The phrase is translated by the context. Here, Paul has been talking about two groups of people: one who preaches Christ out of envy, the other out of love. What really matters? Although it would be wonderful if everyone was loving, we have to recognize free will and realize God will handle sin at
the Judgment, and in the meantime we can be thankful, especially in the pagan culture of Rome, that Christ is being preached.

1:19. “Spirit of Jesus Christ.” The “Spirit of Jesus Christ” is Jesus Christ in action, as the “Spirit of God” is God in action (Gen. 1:2; Job 33:4). The gift of holy spirit does not really supply “help” the way Paul needs it to get out of prison. However, the greater truth is that there is (or certainly should be) in the mature believer a seamless connection between Jesus, who gives revelation and supplies power, and holy spirit via which it comes.

“this.” All this that has happened to Paul. He says the final result of all “this that has happened” will be his “salvation.”

“result.” The Greek word is ἀποβαίνω (#576 ἀποβαίνω), and in this context it means “to result in a state or condition, turn out, lead to” (BDAG Greek English Lexicon). Some versions that have “result”

1:21. “to die is gain.” Not for Paul, because death is an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26), but for the Church. His being put into prison had resulted in “gain,” (see v. 12), and he foresaw that even if he died, the Word would move.

1:22. “But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me.” If Paul stays alive, he will have fruitful labor.

1:23. “Now I am hard pressed from the two directions.” The two directions Paul could go are clearly articulated in 1:21: living or dying. If we are going to properly understand Philippians 1:23 it is very important that we see that Paul was “hard pressed” between those two possibilities, and there was a third possibility that was “better by far.” The reason Paul was torn between living and dying was that either one would benefit the church. He knew the church would benefit if he continued to live because he would be able to teach and support the believers. However, he also knew the church had benefited from his imprisonment (1:12), and it would also benefit from his death because believers would be emboldened to take a firm stand on the Good News about Christ (as it turned out, Paul’s execution was likely only 5 years after his writing Philippians, but we do not have any information on how the Philippians did after his death).

Paul was genuinely wondering which would be better for the church: his life, or his death. He wrote, “I feel torn between the two” (NET). The last part of the verse, that Paul wanted something that was better by far, fits together with his being torn about living or dying, but the traditional orthodox explanation of the last part of the verse ignores what Paul has just said and teaches that Paul has an intense desire for his death so he could be with Christ.

That traditional explanation makes no sense. If Paul had an intense desire to die so he could be with Christ, then he would not have been “torn” between living and dying. After all, he had just written that both living or dying would benefit the Church—and that was the very reason he was torn between them. If Paul knew that his death would benefit both the Church and himself too, then there was nothing for him to be “hard pressed,” or “torn” about. To properly understand the verse we need to see that the last phrase in the verse is introducing a third option that is much better than either living or dying: the return of Christ.

The reason most Christians overlook the contradiction that their interpretation forces upon Philippians 1:23 is that they believe the Bible teaches that when a saved person dies he immediately goes to heaven, and they think the verse is saying Paul wants to die and go be with the Lord. But the Bible does not teach that people go to heaven (or Gehenna)
when they die, it teaches that people are genuinely dead, without life, and are awaiting the resurrection. [For more information on the dead being actually dead, lifeless, until the resurrection, see Appendix 4, “The Dead Are Dead”].

This explains why the choice between living and dying was so difficult for Paul. If death brings us immediately into the presence of God and Christ, and either living or dying would benefit the Church, then Paul had an easy decision: die. Then the Church would benefit and he would be with Christ. The reason Paul was torn between life and death was that there was no benefit to him in being dead, lifeless, even though the Church would benefit.

“intense desire.” The Greek word is epithumia (#1939 ἐπιθυμία), and it refers to an intense desire, a lust, or a craving. Paul was torn between living and dying, but he was not torn about a third option; he had an “intense desire,” a longing, for the return and to be with Christ.

“for the return.” The Greek word translated “return” is analuō (#360 ἀναλύω). In the Greek literature it generally referred to either a departure or a return, and it was used metaphorically for death, but significantly, analuō occurs only one other place in the New Testament (Luke 12:36), and there it refers to the Return of Christ in the metaphorical example of a Lord returning from a wedding. That fact, along with the logical evidence below, is strong support for the meaning “return” here in Philippians. Louw and Nida’s Greek-English lexicon defines analuō as: “to move back to a point or area from which one has previously departed, but with more explicit emphasis upon the return.”

After expressing that he is pressed between living and dying, Paul inserts a parenthetical wish for something that he intensely desires—for the Lord to return, which is “better by far” than living or dying. “Better by far” is a very emphatic phrase in the Greek. Nevertheless, most Christians only see two possibilities in this verse and think that “dying” is what is “better by far” than living, because the dead person gets to be with Christ. But if dying is far better than living, why does Paul say he is “hard pressed” between living and dying? He would not have been. Paul was hard pressed between living and dying because the Church would gain from either event, just as he had said: “for to me is Christ, and to die is gain.” The Church would gain by Paul’s life or his death, but what Paul really wanted was the return of Christ, which was “better by far” than either his living or dying. After expressing that wish, he returns to his thought and in 1:24 states that remaining alive will help the Philippians more.

It does not fit Paul’s life to say he had an intense desire to die and be with Christ. The Jews constantly sought to kill him, and he did everything he could to stay alive. In fact, he either died or was close to death when he was stoned at Lystra (Acts 14:19), but he was prayed for and healed, and went right back to spreading the Gospel. At no point in Paul’s writings is there a sign of disappointment at not being dead.

It has been argued that if Paul had the return of Christ in mind as a third option in Philippians 1:23, he would have used the word parousia (#3952 παρουσία) referring to the personal presence of the Lord (it is used in 1:26 of Paul’s presence among the Philippians), rather than analuō. But in fact Paul used many different words to refer to the return of Christ. A common one is erchomai (#2064 ἔρχομαι; cp. 1 Cor. 4:5, 11:26; 2 Thess. 1:10). Another is apokalupsis (#602 ἀποκάλυψις; cp. 1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Thess. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:7; and the verb apokaluptō (#601 ἀποκαλύπτω) occurs in 2 Thess. 2:6). Another is
phaneroō (#5319 φανερόω; cp. Col. 3:4; 1 Pet. 5:4; 1 John 2:28), and another is epiphaneia (#2015 ἐπίφανεια; cp. 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 1:10; 4:1, 8). Another word used in the New Testament, but not by Paul, for the coming of Christ is hekō (#2240 ἥκω; cp. Heb. 10:37; 2 Pet. 3:10), and another is optanomai (#370 ὀπτανομαί; cp. Heb. 9:28).

Given the many words Paul could have chosen to refer to the return of Christ, why choose analuō? Of course we cannot be sure, but a logical reason would be that analuō refers to a departure as well as a return, so it is a word that could “kill two birds with one stone,” so to speak. It could refer to the Rapture and the Church departing from the earth as well as referring to Jesus returning for the believers. If it were understood in a way that referred to the Rapture, the phrase τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἔχον εἰς τὸ ἀνάλυσαι (τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἔχον εἰς τὸ ἀνάλυσαι) could be perhaps be translated as “having the intense desire for the departure” and to be with Christ.

It seems much more likely that Paul would have used analuō to refer to the return of Christ rather than to his death. Paul never used analuō of dying, and its only other use in the New Testament refers to returning. In contrast, Paul spoke of dying many times. He used the word apothneskō (#599 ἀποθνῄσκω) for “die” in Philippians 1:21 and about 40 other times in the New Testament. He also used the metaphor of “sleep” for death quite often; a dozen times. Also, when he spoke of his death in 2 Timothy 4:6, he used the word analusis (#359 ἀνάλυσις), a word with the same root as analuō, but the Greeks used analusis only for a departure or death, never a return, whereas they used analuō both for a departure and a return. It seems logical that if Paul meant “death,” he would have used a word that people knew meant “death” and that he had used elsewhere for death. In contrast, the most logical reason that Paul used a word whose only other use in the New Testament meant “return,” was that Paul had a “return” in mind.

It has been suggested that analuō could be used here to refer to Paul’s death if the reader kept in mind that, as Paul experienced it, the moment of his death was the moment he was united with Christ, even though many actual years may have passed (there is no recognition of the passage of time in death). It is possible that is an undertone of the meaning here in Philippians, but it does not seem likely that Paul meant it to be a primary meaning of analuō, however, because of the first part of the verse which says that Paul was torn between the two possibilities of living and dying. Paul was certainly aware that the moment he died would be, to him, the moment he was united with Christ, but that did not mean he had an intense desire to die so he could experience being with Christ. He did, however, have an intense desire for the Rapture or return of Christ, which meant that every Christian would simultaneously get to be with the Lord.

1:26. “reason for boasting.” The Greek text reads kauchēma (#2745 καύχημα) the thing in which one boasts or, in the older English, “glories.” This refers to the object of our boasting, not the boasting or confidence itself, which would be kauchēsis (#2746).

“because of me.” This is the instrumental dative, or dative of means. It is by means of Paul’s deliverance from prison and coming to them again that their boasting in Christ will increase. Paul’s release from prison would be a blessing and the fact that Jesus Christ was working behind the scenes to get Paul released would have been clearly seen. For it was through their prayers for him that he was delivered (1:7; 19). Paul was eventually released from house arrest after 2 years (Acts 28:30), but there is no record that he did, or did not, visit Philippi after his release.

“will abound.” See commentary on “will abound” on 1:9.
1:27. “soul.” See commentary on Ephesians 6:6. In this verse, “spirit” and “soul” are used in a very similar fashion; with spirit perhaps putting more emphasis on attitude, while “soul” refers more to everything within you, mentally and emotionally.

1:28. “clear sign for them.” The Greek word translated “clear sign” is endeixis (ένδειξις), which often means “proof,” but “clear sign” seems better here, in part because this sign is prophetic, it points to the future destruction of the wicked but salvation of the believers. We thought that “sign for them” was better than “sign to them,” because the fact that the believers stand together without fear is not just “to” the adversaries, but it is “for” them i.e., for their benefit, although the believers do it to honor God. The difficult part about the verse is that we might be tempted to read it as if the adversaries “saw,” i.e., understood, the sign. It is “for” them, but most of them never see it. We, however, see it clearly. Believers know (or should know) they will not be held by death, but will live forever, and in that confidence be able to stand firm against all adversaries. This is prophetic, and speaks of our salvation, and the future destruction of the enemy. Thankfully, history shows that some unbelievers do see the strength and courage in the way believers fight evil, and suffer, and die, and some are thereby led to Christ.

1:29. “graciously given.” The Greek word is charizomai (χαρίζωμαι), which means to give or grant something freely as a favor. The word is related to charis, “grace.” Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon says the word means: “to do something pleasant or agreeable (to one), to do a favor to, gratify; a. universally, to show oneself gracious, kind, benevolent.” The BDAG Greek-English Lexicon translates this phrase in Philippians as: “you have (graciously) been granted the privilege of suffering for Christ.” Although the word is sometimes used in the New Testament with more overtones of “give” than necessarily “graciously give,” the dominant use is to “graciously give” or “give as an act of grace.” Thus, Jesus “graciously gave” sight to the blind (Luke 7:21). The lender “graciously gave” (graciously forgave) the debts he was owed (Luke 7:42). God graciously gave life to the people on the boat in the storm (Acts 27:24). The spirit helps us know what God has graciously given to us (1 Cor. 2:12). God graciously gave the inheritance to Abraham (Gal. 3:18).

Here in Philippians 1:29, it has been “graciously given” to us to suffer for Christ. This may not seem like a gift, but we have to see things from God’s perspective. The world needs help. It needs people who will give of themselves to help bring it to Christ. The act of living like Christ, and being an ambassador for Christ, take a lot of energy and often involves suffering. That God would choose us, rather than pass us over and ignore us, to suffer for Christ’s sake and point people to Christ, is a great privilege. To the extent that we respond to the call of God and give ourselves to His service, He will reward us. [For suffering, see commentary on Col. 1:24.]

Chapter 2

2:1. This verse can be taken in two totally different ways. The first, and most common, is similar to the NIV84, “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion.” In this case, the verse is saying if you have these things, then fulfill my cup of joy by thinking the same things. However, it seems that the other way the verse can be
understood, and the one that we prefer, with Robertson (Word Pictures in the New Testament) and Williams, is that paraklesis (“encouragement”) and paramuthion (“persuasive power”) be understood in a persuasive sense. Williams translation is, “So, if there is any appeal in our union with Christ, if there is any persuasive power in love….” The Greek word, paramuthia, often “comfort,” can also refer to “persuasion;” Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon. The two translations differ in the sense that the first is about what we have in Christ (cp. NIV84), and the second is about what Christ, or love, or the spirit, moves us to do.

2:2. “fully fill my cup of joy.” The verb “fully fill” was used commonly of vessels, and so that is clearly implied in the Greek.

“thinking.” The Greek is phroneo (#5426 φρονέω), and means to have an opinion with regard to something, think, form/hold an opinion, judge; to give careful consideration to something, set one’s mind on, be intent on; to develop an attitude based on careful thought, be minded/disposed (BDAG). Because phroneo is an active verb in the present tense, it could be understood as “keep on thinking.”

“thinking the same thing.” Note that the verse does not tell us what we are to think, only that we should be likeminded about it. This is important, because we must look for what to think from the context. After all, a group of robbers can all think the same about something, but they are not thereby credited with good.

“united in soul.” The Greek is sumpsuchos (#4861 σύµψυχος), from sun, with, and pseuche, soul; “with [one] soul.” Harmonious. “Souls that beat together, in tune with Christ and with each other” (Robertson). This word is united with the last phrase of the verse as one concept, not as many have, two distinct concepts (Lenski; Meyer).

“thinking this one thing.” Although many versions have “mind,” the Greek is phroneo, the same verb that occurred earlier in the verse, but this time the verb is a present active participle. Just as the first phrase of the verse told us to think the same thing but did not tell us what that thing is, so here, we have an amplification, and we are to think “this one thing,” but again, without direction in this verse as to what that thing is. Lenski has the idea here: “‘This one thing,’ however, still holds us in suspense, we wonder what it really is.” What the one thing is that we are all supposed to think is in the next two verses. It is important to realize that this verse, and the thought being conveyed in this verse, is not finished, but is concluded in the next two verses. This is important to understand, and usually missed, because almost every version puts a period at the end of the verse as if the thought was concluded and the next verse was a new thought. That is not the case. We Christians are to be thinking the same thing, even be thinking this one thing, which is the one thing (actually in a couple parts) in the next two verses.


“empty conceit.” The Greek is a compound word, kenodoxia (#2754 κενοδοξία), from kenos (empty), and doxa (glory, magnificence, spender). It is self glory, or conceit, that is not based in reality. We translated it “empty conceit” (cp. NASB) and not just “conceit” because often conceited people are good at what they are conceited about, and thus might be thought of as having a good reason for their conceit. This verse is specifically referring to “empty” conceit, conceit based on nothing.
“not out of selfishness or out of empty conceit.” This phrase is inserted because of the fact that some did preach Christ out of selfish ambition (1:17) and there was division that existed in Philippi (4:2, etc.).

2:4. “things.” This is the essence of “the one thing” (verse 2) that we should all be thinking, and it is, in essence, a restatement of the second great commandment, to love your neighbor as yourself.

2:6. “existing in the form of God, did not regard being equal with God a thing to be grasped.” This entry really concerns the entire passage of verses 6-8. One of the great purposes of Philippians is to encourage the Church to unity and humility, and in fact, unity can only be achieved through humility. (We see Paul’s plea for unity very clearly in 1:27 and 2:2, and see his plea for humility very clearly in 2:3). After telling people to be humble and to look out for other people’s interests, he gives the example of Jesus, saying, “Have this mind in you that was also in Christ Jesus” (2:5). Jesus was in the form of God, that is, as God’s Son he had divine position and authority, but he humbled himself and became a servant to others. Similarly, no matter what your position is in the Church, whether you are an apostle or have a leadership ministry, you are called to humble yourself and serve, not be served.

These verses have been used to support the Trinity, but they do not. Actually, they have caused division among Trinitarians. There are several arguments wrapped into these two verses, and we will deal with them point by point.

First, many Trinitarians assert that the word “form,” which is the Greek word *morphē*, refers to Christ’s inner nature as God. This is so strongly asserted that in verse 6 the NIV has, “being in very nature God.” We do not believe that *morphē* refers to an “inner essential nature,” and we will give evidence that it refers to an outer form. Different lexicons have opposing viewpoints about the definition of *morphē*, to such a degree that we can think of no other word defined by the lexicons in such contradictory ways. We will give definitions from lexicons that take both positions, to show the differences between them.

*Vine’s Lexicon* has under “form:” “properly the nature or essence, not in the abstract, but as actually subsisting in the individual...it does not include in itself anything ‘accidental’ or separable, such as particular modes of manifestation.” Using lexicons like *Vine’s*, Trinitarians boldly make the case that the “nature” underlying Jesus’ human body was God. Trinitarian scholars like Vine contrast *morphē*, which they assert refers to an “inner, essential nature,” with *schema*, (in verse 8, and translated “fashion”) which they assert refers to the outward appearance. We admit that there are a many Trinitarian scholars who have written lexical entries or articles on the Greek word *morphē* and concluded that Christ must be God. A Trinitarian wanting to prove his point can quote from a number of them. However, we assert that these definitions are biased and erroneous. In addition, we could not find any non-Trinitarian scholars who agreed with the conclusion of the Trinitarian scholars, while many Trinitarian sources agree that *morphē* refers to the outward appearance and not an inner nature.

A study of other lexicons (many of them Trinitarian) give a totally different picture than does *Vine’s Lexicon*. In Bullinger’s *Critical Lexicon*, *morphē* is given a one-word definition, “form.” The scholarly lexicon by Walter Bauer, translated and revised by Arndt and Gingrich, has under *morphē*, “form, outward appearance, shape.” The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel, has “form.
external appearance.” Kittel also notes that morphē and schema are often interchangeable. Robert Thayer, in his well-respected lexicon, has under morphē, “the form by which a person or thing strikes the vision; the external appearance.” Thayer says that the Greeks said that children reflect the appearance (morphē) of their parents, something easily noticed in every culture. Thayer also notes that some scholars try to make morphē refer to that which is intrinsic and essential, in contrast to that which is outward and accidental, but says, “the distinction is rejected by many.”

The above evidence shows that scholars disagree about the use of the word morphē in Philippians. When scholars disagree, and especially when it is believed that the reason for the disagreement is due to bias over a doctrinal issue, it is absolutely essential to do as much original research as possible. The real definition of morphē should become apparent as we check the sources available at the time of the New Testament. After all, the word was a common one in the Greek world. We assert that a study of the actual evidence clearly reveals that morphē does not refer to Christ’s inner essential being, but rather to an outward appearance.

From secular writings we learn that the Greeks used morphē to describe when the gods changed their appearance. Kittel points out that in pagan mythology, the gods change their forms (morphē), and especially notes Aphrodite, Demeter and Dionysus as three who did. This is clearly a change of appearance, not nature. Josephus, a contemporary of the Apostles, used morphē to describe the shape of statues (Bauer’s Lexicon).

Other uses of morphē in the Bible support the position that morphē refers to outward appearance. The Gospel of Mark has a short reference to the well-known story in Luke 24:13-33 about Jesus appearing to the two men on the road to Emmaus. Mark tells us that Jesus appeared “in a different form (morphē)” to these two men so that they did not recognize him (16:12). This is very clear. Jesus did not have a different “essential nature” when he appeared to the two disciples. He simply had a different outward appearance.

More evidence for the word morphē referring to the outward appearance can be gleaned from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament from about 250 BC. It was written because of the large number of Greek-speaking Jews in Israel and the surrounding countries (a result of Alexander the Great’s conquest of Egypt in 332 BC and his gaining control over the territory of Israel). By around 250 BC, so many Jews spoke Greek that a Greek translation of the Old Testament was made, which today is called the Septuagint. The Septuagint greatly influenced the Jews during the New Testament times. Some of the quotations from the Old Testament that appear in the New Testament are actually from the Septuagint, not the Hebrew text. Furthermore, there were many Greek-speaking Jews in the first-century Church. In fact, the first recorded congregational conflict occurred when Hebrew-speaking Jews showed prejudice against the Greek-speaking Jews (Acts 6:1).

The Jews translating the Septuagint used morphē several times, and it always referred to the outward appearance. Job says, “A spirit glided past my face, and the hair on my body stood on end. It stopped, but I could not tell what it was. A form (morphē) stood before my eyes, and I heard a hushed voice” (Job 4:15, 16). There is no question here that morphē refers to the outward appearance. Isaiah has the word morphē in reference to man-made idols: “The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline
with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form \((\text{morphē})\) of man, of man in all his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine\)” (Isa. 44:13). It would be absurd to assert that \textit{morphē} referred to “the essential nature” in this verse, as if a wooden carving could have the “essential nature” of man. The verse is clear: the idol has the “outward appearance” of a man. According to Daniel 3:19, after Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar’s image, he became enraged and “the form \((\text{morphē})\) of his countenance” changed. The \textit{NASB} says, “his facial expression” changed. Nothing in his nature changed, but the people watching could see that his outward appearance changed.

For still more documentation that the Jews used \textit{morphē} to refer to the outward appearance, we turn to what is known as the “\textit{Apocrypha},” books written between the time of Malachi and Matthew. “\textit{Apocrypha}” literally means “obscure” or “hidden away,” and these books are rightly not accepted by most Protestants as being part of the true canon, but are accepted by Roman Catholics and printed in Catholic Bibles. Our interest in them is due to the fact that they were written near the time of the writing of the New Testament, were known to the Jews at that time and contain the word \textit{morphē}. In the \textit{Apocrypha}, \textit{morphē} is used in the same way that the \textit{Septuagint} translators use it, \textit{i.e.}, as outward appearance. For example, in “The Wisdom of Solomon” is the following: “Their enemies heard their voices, but did not see their forms” (18:1). A study of \textit{morphē} in the \textit{Apocrypha} will show that it always referred to the outer form.

There is still more evidence. \textit{Morphē} is the root word of some other New Testament words and is also used in compound words. These add further support to the idea that \textit{morphē} refers to an appearance or outward manifestation. The Bible speaks of evil men who have a “form” \((\text{morphosis})\) of godliness (2 Tim. 3:5). Their inner nature was evil, but they had an outward appearance of being godly. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Christ was “transformed” \((\text{metamorphoomai})\) before the apostles (Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2). They did not see Christ get a new nature, rather they saw his outward form profoundly change. Similarly, we Christians are to be “transformed” \((\text{metamorphoomai})\) by renewing our minds to Scripture. We do not get a new nature as we renew our minds, because we are already “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4), but there will be a change in us that we, and others, can tangibly experience. Christians who transform from carnal Christians, with all the visible activities of the flesh that lifestyle entails, to being Christ-like Christians, change in such a way that other people can “see” the difference. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says the same thing when it says that Christians will be “changed” \((\text{metamorphoomai})\) into the image of Christ. That we will be changed into an “image” shows us that the change is something visible on the outside.

We would like to make one more point before we draw a conclusion about “\textit{morphē}.” If the point of the verse is to say that Jesus is God, then why not just say that? Of course \textit{God} has the “essential nature” of God, so why would anyone make \textit{that} point? This verse does not say, “Jesus, being God,” but rather, “being in the form of God.” Paul is reminding the Philippians that Jesus represented the Father in every possible way.

So what can we conclude about \textit{morphē}? The Philippian church consisted of Jews and converted Greeks. From the \textit{Septuagint} and their other writings, the Jews were familiar with \textit{morphē} referring to the outward appearance, including the form of men and idols. To the Greeks, it also referred to the outward appearance, including the changing outward appearance of their gods and the form of statues. The only other New Testament
use of morphē outside Philippians is in Mark, and there it refers to the outward appearance. Also, the words related to morphē clearly refer to an outward manifestation or appearance. We assert the actual evidence is clear: the word morphē refers to an outward appearance or manifestation. Jesus Christ was in the outward appearance of God, so much that so he said, “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” Christ always did the Father’s will, and perfectly represented his Father in every way. 

Schema, as Kittel points out, can be synonymous with morphē, but it has more of an emphasis on outward trappings rather than outward appearance, and often points to that which is more transitory in nature, like the clothing we wear or an appearance we have for just a short time. As human beings, we always have the outward form (morphē) of human beings. Yet there is a sense in which our schema, our appearance, is always changing. We start as babies, and grow and develop, then we mature and age. This is so much the case that a person’s outward appearance is one of the most common topics of conversation between people when they meet. We say, “Wow, you’ve lost weight,” or “You have changed your hair style,” and point out even minor changes in appearance.

Like the rest of us, Christ was fully human and had the outward form (morphē), of a human. However, because he always did the Fathers will and demonstrated godly behavior and obedience, he therefore had the outward “appearance” (morphē) of God also. Also like the rest of us, his appearance (schema) regularly changed. Thus, in Philippians 2:8, schema can be synonymous with morphē, or it can place an emphasis on the fact that the appearance Christ had as a human being was transitory in nature. The wording of Philippians 2:6-8 does not present us with a God-man, with whom none of us can identify. Rather, it presents us with a man just like we are, who grew and aged, yet who was so focused on God in every thought and deed that he perfectly represented the Father.

After saying that Christ was in the form of God, Philippians 2:6 goes on to say that Christ “did not regard being equal with God a thing to be grasped.” This phrase is a powerful argument against the Trinity. If Jesus were God, then it would make no sense at all to say that he did not “grasp” at equality with God because no one grasps at equality with himself. It only makes sense to compliment someone for not seeking equality when he is not equal. Some Trinitarians say, “Well, he was not grasping for equality with the Father.” That is not what the verse says. It says Christ did not grasp at equality with God, which makes the verse nonsense if he were God.

The opening of verse 7 contains a phrase that has caused serious division among Trinitarians. It says, “But made himself of no reputation” (KJV), “but made himself nothing” (NIV), “but emptied himself” (NASB, RSV, NRSV, New American Bible). The Greek word that is in question is kenos, which literally means, “to empty.” For more than a thousand years, from the church councils in the fourth century until the nineteenth century, the orthodox position of the Church was that Christ was fully God and fully man at the same time in one body. This doctrine is known as the “dual nature of Christ,” and has to be supported with non-biblical words like communicatio idiomatum, literally, “the communication of the idiom.” This refers to the way that the “God” nature of Christ is united to the “man” nature of Christ in such a way that the actions and conditions of the man can be God and the actions and conditions of God can be man. Dr. Justo Gonzalez, an authority on the history of the Christian Church, notes, “The divine and human natures exist in a single being, although how that can be is the greatest mystery of the faith” (A
We differ with Dr. Gonzalez, and assert that biblical truth is not an “incomprehensible mystery.” In fact, God longs for us to know Him and His truth (see the notes on Luke 1:35).

The doctrine of the dual nature of Christ has been the standard explanation for the miracles of Christ, such as multiplying food, knowing the thoughts of others, raising the dead, etc. This explanation is maintained in spite of the fact that the prophets in the Old Testament were also able to do these things. The doctrine of Christ’s dual nature has caused a serious problem that is stated well by John Wren-Lewis: “Certainly up to the Second World War, the commonest vision of Jesus was not as a man at all. He was a God in human form, full of supernatural knowledge and miraculous power, very much like the Olympian gods were supposed to be when they visited the earth in disguise” (Wren-Lewis quoted in John A. T. Robinson, Honest to God, p. 66).

Our experience in speaking to Christians all over the world confirms what Wren-Lewis said about common Christians not considering Jesus human. In our experience, the average Christian does not feel that Christ “was made like his brothers in every way” (Heb. 2:17), but instead feels that Christ was able to do what he did because he was fundamentally different. We believe that the teaching of the dual nature is non-biblical and robs power from people who might otherwise seek to think and act like Christ. This artificially separates people from the Lord Jesus.

In Germany in the mid-1800’s, a Lutheran theologian named Gottfried Thomasius began what has now developed into “Kenotic Theology.” This thinking arose out of some very real concerns that some Trinitarians had about dual nature theology. First, dual nature theology did not allow Christ’s full humanity to be expressed. Second, it seemed to turn Christ into an aberration: very God and very man at the same time. Third, if Jesus were both omniscient God and limited man, then he had two centers, and thus was fundamentally not one of us. Kenotic Theology (which has since splintered into a number of variants) provided a “solution” to these problems. According to Kenotic theologians, since Philippians 2:7 says Christ “emptied himself,” what he must have “emptied” was his God-nature, which would mean that sometime before his incarnation, Christ agreed to “self-limitation” and came down to earth as a man only.

Trinitarian theologians have vehemently disagreed among themselves about Kenotic Theology, and some orthodox theologians have even called its adherents “heretics.”

The central criticisms of Kenotic Theology are: First, it is only a little more than a hundred years old, it is simply not the historic position of the Church. Second, orthodox theologians say that it is not biblical, and that Philippians 2:7 does not mean what kenotic theologians say it means. And third, Kenotic Theology forces God to change—God becomes a man—which causes two problems for orthodox Trinitarians: God cannot change, and God is not a man.

We agree with the Kenotic theologians who say that dual nature theology does not allow Christ’s humanity to be expressed, and that it creates a “being” who is really an aberration and “fundamentally not one of us” (Walter Elwell, Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, pp. 600, 601).

However, we also agree with the orthodox Trinitarians who take the biblical stance that God is not a man, and that God cannot change his nature to become fully human. But we assert that it not the simple meaning of the Bible that has caused these
problems, it is Trinitarian doctrine that has caused these problems, and there is no solution to them as long as one holds a Trinitarian position. We assert that the real solution is to realize that there is only one True God, the Father, and that Jesus Christ is the “man accredited by God” who has now been made “both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:22, 36). Then Christ is fully man and is “one of us,” and God is God and has never changed or been a man.

While Trinitarians have argued among themselves about the meaning of Philippians 2:6-8, an unfortunate thing has occurred—the loss of the actual meaning of the verse. The verse is not speaking either of Christ’s giving up his God-hood at his incarnation or of his God-nature being willing to “hide” so that his man-nature can show itself clearly. Rather, it is saying something else. Scripture says Christ was the “image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4), and Jesus himself testified that if one had seen him, he had seen the Father. Saying that Christ was in the “form” (outward appearance) of God is simply stating that truth in another way. Unlike Adam, who grasped at being like God (Gen. 3:5), Christ, the Last Adam, “emptied himself” of all his reputation and the things due him as the true child of the King. He lived in the same fashion as other men. He humbled himself to the will of God. He lived by “It is written” and the commands of his Father. He did not “toot his own horn,” but instead called himself “the son of man,” which, in the Aramaic language he spoke, meant “a man.” He trusted God and became obedient, even to a horrible and shameful death on a cross.

The Philippian Church was doing well and was supportive of Paul, but they had problems as well. There was “selfish ambition” (1:15; 2:3) and “vain conceit” (2:3), arguing and lack of consideration for others (2:4, 14) and a need for humility, purity and blamelessness (2:3, 15). So, Paul wrote an exhortation to the believers that, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (2:5). He then went on to show how Christ did not grasp at equality with God, but was completely humble, and as a result God “highly exalted him.” The example of Jesus Christ is a powerful one. We do not need to make sure people notice us or know who we are. We should simply serve in obedience and humility, assured that God will one day reward us for our deeds. [For more discussion on these verses, see Frederick Farley, The Scripture Doctrine of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, 1873, reprinted by Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, pp. 76-78; Andrews Norton, A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians, pp. 135, 136; The Racovian Catechism, written in Polish in 1605; translated into Latin in 1609; into English in 1818; reprinted by Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, pp. 119-121].

It has been suggested that since the phrase morphē theou (μορφή θεοῦ), traditionally “form of God,” is parallel with the phrase in verse 7, morphē doulov (μορφήν δούλου), “form of a slave,” that the translation “form of a god” is better than “form of God.” However, it seems more likely that “form of God” is correct since that phrase is governed by the preposition en (“in”) which means the noun Theos does not need to have a definite article before it to be “God,” and that is especially true in light of the fact that the second Theos in verse 6 clearly refers to God and not “a god.” We would say “a servant” because the noun is singular, but “God” is singular by nature whereas saying “a God” or “a god” actually confuses the translation. Also, saying “the form of a god” would miss the point of the verse, because it is not saying that Jesus was “a god” so he did not grasp at equality with God, rather it is saying that he was in outward form God
(his actions, his authority, as explained above), yet he did not grasp at equality with God, his Father.

2:12. “So then.” This is a key to understanding this verse. The preceding verses have been about Jesus. As the Son of God, he was in the form of God, and as such could have demanded to be served, but he emptied himself and took on the form of a servant. He humbled himself and served, and for that reason God exalted him. Christians, too, are children of God by birth by virtue of being “saved,” and as such have an inherent “status.” Yet God would have us follow the example of Christ and empty ourselves and serve. Rather than exalt ourselves due to our future exalted position, we should be like Christ and let our salvation show in the world, then God will exalt us in time.

“continue to work out your own salvation.” The phrase does not mean continue to work for your own salvation, but continue to work it out. Paul is clear that salvation is a free gift (e.g. Rom 3:4) and a “gift” is not worked for, which is why he writes in Romans that the “the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness” (Rom. 4:4-5; ESV). It is clear that, in Paul’s own words, a person does not need to “work” to be counted righteous and justified before God. Nor must a person “continue to work” to keep it or finish the job of salvation, as Paul says in Galatians: “I only want to learn this from you: did you receive the spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so unthinking? Having begun in the spirit, are you now being perfected in the flesh?” (Gal. 3:2-3).

This verse flows with the scope of Scripture about salvation, and is not about continuing to work in order to be perfected by the flesh; it is not about working towards salvation, but working out from salvation. The Greek word for “work out” is katergazomai (#2716 κατεργάζοµαι). The prefix kata in katergazomai makes the word “work” emphatic, which is also emphasized by the fact that katergazomai is in the imperative mood (indicating a command). Thus the verse is saying, “be outworking your salvation!” This word has a range of meanings, including “accomplish” and “bring about.” But the Christian is saved, so there is no need to “accomplish” salvation. The need is to let the salvation, which is internal and unseen, show outwardly in our lives. There are many verses in the Epistles that say as much, that the Christian needs to take his internal salvation and live it outwardly in the flesh (cp. Rom. 13:14; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). As Jac Müller has written in his commentary, The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians and to Philemon:

To “work out” one’s own eternal welfare or salvation does not mean that man can or must work and accomplish it himself, for God does that (v. 13); but that the believer must finish, must carry to conclusion, must apply to its fullest consequences what is already given by God in principle. The believer is called to self-activity, to the active pursuit of the will of God, to the promotion of the spiritual life in himself, to the realization of the virtues of the Christian life, and to a personal application of salvation. He must “work out” what God in His grace has “worked in” (NICNT, p. 91).

Many commentators believe that good works are in some way an essential part of salvation, either earning it (Roman Catholic) or keeping our salvation by doing good works (then, if you get drunk, commit adultery or murder, etc., you lose your salvation). For that reason, many commentators use this verse to say that we “work out,” i.e.,
“accomplish” or “produce,” our own salvation. Although *katergazomai* can mean “produce,” that is not its meaning here, because as such Paul would be contradicting what he himself has taught elsewhere. Rather, the word’s meaning here is more akin to its usage in Ephesians 6:13. There it is used with the sense of “having done all,” or as the NJB translates it, “exert yourself to the full.” Notice that the reason we can effectively “out-work” our salvation is that God works in us. This is clearly stated: “…out-work your own salvation…for it is God who works (ἐνέργεια; present participle active; “is working”) in you…. So we OUT-work as God works IN us. This is more evidence that the verse is not saying that we are to “accomplish” salvation. We are saved, which is why God can work in us. It is in large part due to the presence of the gift of holy spirit that we received when we were saved (Eph. 1:13, 14) that God is able to work in us.

**2:13. “both to want to do, and to work for, his good pleasure.”** God, via the gift of holy spirit, works in us not just to do (“work”) his good pleasure, but even to want to do it. God saves us, but that is not all He wants from us. He created us to do good works (Eph. 2:10). God wants us to take our internal holiness and “out-work” it into our daily lives. God can be seen to be the ultimate giver. First, when we are born again, He gives us his gift of holy spirit, which infuses our entire body and gives us a new, divine, and holy nature. Then He works inside us via that nature to produce in us the desire to do His good pleasure, and to do work those things that are pleasing to Him. He does not want us to simply work for Him whether we want to or not, He wants us to enjoy doing His work, so He works in us to produce both the desire to do His will, and then goes even further and empowers us to do His work. Actually, that God and Jesus Christ are at work within us to do their will is a concept that is woven through the Church Epistles. Philippians 1:6 says that the one who began a good work in us will complete it, meaning that God will continue to work in us throughout our lives. Galatians 5:17 speaks of the battle between the flesh and the spirit, a battle that would not exist if God were not working through His gift of holy spirit to conform us into the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29).

Yet people constantly resist the inner working of the spirit, and persist in hardheartedness and sin. We need to be sensitive to the workings of God in us, and then we will both want to do, and be empowered to do, His will. As to the grammar of the phrase, Lenski writes: “the last phrase introduced with *huper* is not “of his good pleasure,” …but… “in behalf of, or, for his good pleasure.” Furthermore, as Lenski points out, even though the Greek text has the definite article before “good pleasure,” and not the preposition “his,” the context makes it clear that “his,” God’s, good pleasure is meant. Lenski is correct when he says, “in hundreds of instances the article has the force of “his.”

**2:15. “pure.”** The Greek word is *akeraios* (#185 ἀκέραιός), and it literally means “unmixed,” “pure.” The believer is to be “pure” inside and out, and thus unmixed with evil or evil thoughts or actions. Thus, *akeraios* can mean “innocent” (cp. ESV, NASB), but we see that as more of the result of being pure inside and out. The pure person will be innocent before God and man, but the innocence is due to the fact that he kept himself pure. We are to do all things without grumbling and disputing, but if we do grumble and fight, it is due to problems inside us, and we are not “pure.” The believer must strive to keep himself pure, and complaining and fighting are signs we are not pure on the inside.

“*without blemish.*” See commentary on Ephesians 1:4.
“Shine.” The Greek verb phainō (#5316 φαίνω), to shine,” is usually treated like it is in the indicative mood, and thus means, “you are shining.” However, the same form can be an imperative mood, and that seems to be the best meaning here, encouraging the Philippians to “shine,” thus the rendering, “Shine among them.” It is not like the Philippians were not shining, they were, but as all Christians know, encouragement is a good thing. Actually since the verb can mean “shine,” as an encouragement, and also “you are shining,” as a statement of fact and recognition, the verb could have the sense of an amphibologia (double entendre), with Paul both recognizing that they were shining and also encouraging them to shine out even more

2:16. “hold fast and hold out.” The Greek verb is epechō (#1907 ἐπέχω), and as Hawthorne and Martin (Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians) point out, it “means either ‘to hold forth’ or ‘to hold fast.’” The commentators and versions are clearly divided as to which meaning is here in Philippians. For example, the HCSB, ESV, NAB, NASB, NET, NIV2011, NLT, NRSV, and REV, and commentators such as Bengal and Kennedy (Expositor’s Greek Testament), think “hold fast” or an equivalent is the correct meaning. On the other hand, Goodspeed, KJV, NEB, NIV84, Rotherham, Weymouth, Wuest, and YLT, and commentators such as Alford, Vincent (International Critical Commentary), Scott (The Interpreter’s Bible), and Hendriksen (New Testament Commentary) think that “hold forth” is best.

The context does not offer much help, because we “shine” to others when we hold on to the truth, and we shine to others when we hold forth the truth. We think that God gave the word epechō to Paul on purpose, knowing that it had both meanings and also knowing that both meanings were vital to the Christian walk, and thus the word is an amphibologia, a double entendre (for more on amphibologia, see Bullinger: Figures of Speech Used in the Bible). If we are to shine in the world, we must “hold fast” to the Word of Life. If we vacillate back and forth in our lives about God and the things of God, we do not shine to anyone. Also, however, to shine forth brightly we must hold the Word of Life that we have forth to other people so they too have a chance to really understand it and believe. In many cases when a Greek word has two meanings that apply in the verse, we pick the one we feel is the most prominent and put that in the REV translation. However, in cases like this we felt it important to conflate the English text with the italics and thus include both meanings in the text.

2:17. “yes.” An example of when the Greek alla is not adversative, but climactic. It adds another thing. The KJV is correct in this. Reading verses 16 and 17 shows that there is no “but” here, verse 17 is a continuation of the thought.

“if I pour myself out.” Lenski makes a convincing case that the verb is in the middle voice, not the passive voice, which would be, “if I am poured out.”

“sacrificial service.” The Greek reads, “sacrifice and service.” This is the figure of speech hendiadys, “two for one,” where two words are used, often connected by “and” to describe one thing (Bullinger, Figures of Speech). The reason for the two being separate is that in the phrase “sacrifice and service,” each part is stressed equally, whereas in the phrase “sacrificial service,” technically the word “service” get more emphasis. Paul is making a reference to the fact that both pagans and Jews had liquid offerings that were poured out along with the sacrifices. Exactly how the Jews poured their drink offering is unclear. No verse says it was poured “on” the sacrifice. However, it was poured out in the
sanctuary (Num. 28:7), and the fact that it became a pleasing aroma to Yahweh (Num. 15:7), indicates it was at least poured onto the altar fire. The pagan sacrifices the people of Philippi were used to included pouring the liquid onto the sacrifice itself. We should not push this illustration too far (Paul did not), we should see that Paul is saying that he, like the Philippians, are both a sacrifice to God, and they should rejoice together. Paul is saying that if he pours himself out, even as the Philippians have sacrificed themselves, he rejoices, and rejoices along with them. The joy is mutual when the sacrifice is mutual.


Chapter 3

3:1. “Furthermore,” not “finally” (Cp. Lenski; Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament). The problem with “finally” is that to loipon (Τὸ λοιπόν) does not mean “finally” in this context, as we are just at the halfway point in the Epistle. “The formula is common with Paul in cases where he attaches, in a somewhat loose way, even in the midst of an epistle, a new subject to that which he has been discussing” (Vincent, International Critical Commentary: Philippians, Philemon). Since this is the beginning of a new subject, “furthermore” is appropriate, and a more workable translation than something like Wuest, “as for the rest [of which I wish to say to you]” (Wuest-Expanded Translation). Another problem with “finally” is that it makes the last chapter of Philippians an afterthought (see many commentators), which, since all Scripture is God-breathed, is simply not the case. In the New Testament, to loipon has many different shades of meaning and is translated in several different ways: “Sleep on now” (Matt. 26:45); “Moreover, it is required in stewards” (1 Cor. 4:2); “Finally, brethren, rejoice.” (2 Cor. 13:11).

“Tiresome.” (as per YLT). When used of people, okneros is “lazy, slothful (Matt. 25:26).” When used of work it makes one slothful or tired, it is “tiresome.” Paul is a true servant, and the work of the Lord is not “tiresome” to him, contrasting the priests in Malachi 1:13.

“a safe course to follow.” The Greek can just be translated “safe,” but with some lack of clarity. The meaning, “a safe course” is suggested in BDAG Greek-English Lexicon, and catches the sense well. Parents and teachers know that it is a safe course to follow to repeat things that have already been said once. Too many times people just do not grasp what we only say once.

3:2. For punctuation on “Beware...” see Lenski.

“dogs.” The Jews traditionally called the Gentiles “dogs,” claiming they made the Jews unclean, but now Paul turns that analogy back on the Jews who insist on circumcision, claiming they are the ones who defile the Church.


3:3. “spirit.” This is the gift of holy spirit born inside each Christian. There is no definite article in the Greek, but one is supplied in italics in English for ease of reading. The “the” is not needed in the Greek text before the words “holy spirit” because the preposition en can make the pneuma (spirit) definite without the article. In this case, the Greek text does not have a definite article before “holy spirit.” The preposition en is before the phrase
which means it can be understood as if the “the” was actually present. In Greek, if a preposition governs a noun, it is the context that determines whether the noun is definite or not, and therefore whether there should be a “the” or not in the English translation. Daniel Wallace writes in Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics (p. 247): “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.” A. T. Robertson writes: “...the article is not the only means of showing that a word is definite. ...The context and history of the phrase in question must decide. ...[As for prepositional phrases], these were also considered definite enough without the article.” Robertson then cites some examples that use ek, as does this verse in Matthew (Grammar of the Greek New Testament, pp. 790-792).

We can worship (pray and praise) “by spirit” by speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:14-18).

“boasting.” We are the true circumcision, we who boast in Christ Jesus. There are people who say their religion is “personal,” but the NT knows of no such religion. The Christian is saved! He has everlasting life! And all because of the work of Christ. We should boast about Christ all day long. If we do, Christ will boast about us at the Judgment, but if we do not, neither will he (Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26).

3:8. “indeed.” The Greek alla is climacteric (Lenski; A. T. Robertson; Word Pictures in the New Testament) and means, “yes; indeed,” etc.). However, due to the strong implication of “yes” in English, it is best to avoid it if it is not clearly in the text. Actually, it is close to impossible to bring the Greek construction in this verse into English because we do not speak the way the Greek communicates. As Robertson points out there are five “particles” introducing Paul’s point and giving it a strong emphasis. These are: alla, men, oon, ge, and kai (the word “particles” is often used as a grammatical “catch-word” for words of connection or emphasis including prepositions, conjunctions, interjections, adverbs, etc.). Robertson states: “[There are] Five particles before Paul proceeds [with his point] (yea, indeed, therefore, at least, even), showing the force and passion of his conviction” (Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament).

“the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” This verse, combined with verse 10, “This is so I really know him,” is certainly one of the great goals that each Christian should aspire to. These verses are not speaking of “knowing about” Christ, but “knowing” him, that is, having a personal and powerful relationship with Jesus that involves personal interaction with him.

The word “know” in verse 8 is gnosis (#1108 γνῶσις), while in verse 10 it is ginōskō (#1097 γινώσκω). Although the words differ somewhat in meaning, both relate to knowledge, and both have a range of meaning that includes both general knowledge (that is, “knowing about,” or what we might term “head knowledge”) as well as an intimate and personal knowledge that comes from experience and interaction. That “know” was used for intimate and personal knowledge gained from experience explains why “to know” a woman was idiomatic for having sexual intercourse with her (cp. Gen. 4:1, 17, 25; Judg. 11:39; 19:25; 1 Sam. 1:19; Matt. 1:25; Luke 1:34).

Philippians 3:8 is one of the many places where a more literal translation of the Greek text obscures what the Bible is actually saying. It would be a more literal translation of the Greek to have “the knowledge of Christ Jesus” (ASV, KJV), than “knowing Christ Jesus,” as the REV and many other versions have, but in English, to “have a knowledge of” usually applies to head knowledge, and that is not what the verse
is talking about; something that is much clearer in Greek than in English. That fact explains why so many modern versions translate the Greek as “knowing Christ Jesus” (cp. CEB; CJB; ESV; HCSB; NASB; NET; NIV; NJB; NRSV; RSV; etc.). In their translation in the *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians*, Gerald Hawthorne and Ralph Martin clarify the Greek by adding the word “personal” and saying “a personal knowledge of Christ Jesus,” and that is a good alternative translation to get the meaning of the verse across to English readers.

The context of Philippians and the scope of Scripture shows us that the use of “know” here in Philippians is not just “know about” but intimate and personal knowledge that comes from experience. Paul does not just want to “know about” Jesus, he wants a personal, interactive relationship with him.

The use of “know” that refers to personal and interactive experience is well founded in the Bible. A good example is the Pharaoh of Egypt that did not “know” Joseph and who enslaved the Israelites (Exod. 1:8). The Pharaoh certainly “knew about” Joseph. He would have been told about all that Joseph had done and personally profited by the wealth and strength of Egypt that Joseph was in large part responsible for. He likely even visited Joseph’s tomb. But he never had a personal interactive relationship with Joseph that influenced his behavior, so he is said not to “know” Joseph.

A similar use of “know” is found in Judges 2:10. After Joshua and the elders of his generation died out, the next generation did not “know” their God, Yahweh. Certainly they “knew about” Him. Even the pagans knew about Yahweh and all the great works He had done in Egypt and Canaan. Also the Israelites knew about Yahweh insofar as His laws affected their lives: they kept the Sabbath and the Feasts, participated in the sacrifices and cleansing rituals, honored the priests, and to a significant degree governed their lives by the rules set forth in the Torah. But they did not personally and intimately know Yahweh to the end that their knowledge of Him changed their hearts. Thus the Israelites were like a Christian who goes to church but who only knows about Jesus superficially. He likely learned about Jesus from Mom and Dad while growing up, and heard about him in church, and recognized that Christmas is about his birth and Easter is about his death, but all that “knowledge” never changed his heart. He never had a life-changing personal experience with Jesus. Thus, Jesus’ admonitions to seek heaven first, or store up treasure in heaven, or be loving and forgiving, or to not be angry, anxious or bitter, or to not lie or gossip, never changed him. He knew about those things, but never really “knew” them.

Paul does not want to “know about” Christ, he wants to “know” him, that is, to have a personal, interactive, intimate, life changing relationship with him, and that should be the goal of every Christian. We should thank Jesus for what he has done for us, ask him for help, praise him, ask him what he wants us to do, and expect to hear from him. That was certainly what Paul wanted, and we should want that too!

Although it is sometimes taught that we cannot pray to Jesus, this verse, and verse 10, are strong contributing evidence that we can indeed pray to him as well as to God. The only way to really “know” Jesus is to have a personal and powerful relationship with him, and that includes hearing from him and in turn asking him for help, which is the essence of prayer. [For more explanation on us praying to Jesus Christ, see commentary on John 14:14].
An interesting fact about the Greek construction of the phrase “the knowledge of Jesus Christ” is that the genitive (translated “of”) can grammatically be either an objective or subjective genitive. Although the context certainly favors an objective genitive, which we understand is our knowing Christ, the grammar also can be understood as a subjective genitive. It is likely that the sentence was written the way it was on purpose, so that while the most obvious point is that Paul wants to know Christ, it is also true that the verse is saying that there is surpassing worth in being known by Christ. Jesus promised: “Whoever has my commandments, and is keeping them, that is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and will reveal myself to him.” As we dedicate our lives to Christ, we can be sure that he “knows” us and will show himself to us in many different ways.

“Dung.” The word “dung” is translated from the Greek word skubalon (σκύβαλον). A. T. Robertson says it is a “Late word of uncertain etymology, either connected with skôr (dung) or from es kunas ballô, (to fling to the dogs and so refuse of any kind). It occurs in the papyri. Here only in the N.T” (Word Pictures in the New Testament). Like most words, skubalon was used in several ways, including both “dung” and “table scraps” that were thrown to dogs, as well as refuse in general. Thus it is difficult to make a choice, and the commentators are split. The Expositor’s Greek Testament goes with “dung.” However, J. B. Lightfoot has an interesting explanation: the Jews believed and taught that they sat at God’s banquet and tossed their scraps to the “dogs,” i.e., the Gentiles. Paul could be turning that around by saying that he counts his Jewish accomplishments and pedigree as the scraps to be thrown away in comparison to Christ (Lightfoot, St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians). However, Paul is not comparing his accomplishments to skubalon.

Paul is comparing all that he has “lost” to skubalon, and he is saying that he counts all he has lost as but skubalon compared to his “gain” in Christ. In that sense, “dung” makes good sense. However, since “dung” and “table scraps” that were thrown to the dogs were both horrible in Jewish culture, and since the Greek word may refer to either word, either “dung” or “table scraps” could be the meaning.

In the end, we felt “dung” is the better translation. It has the advantage of being totally worthless, in fact, potentially harmful. Paul is comparing what he has lost, to skubalon. But what has he really lost? Can being a Pharisee or from the tribe of Benjamin save a person? It cannot. Worse, those things that can mean so much in the world can tempt people to hang on to their human merits and not fully give themselves to the merits and righteousness we have from Christ. Our fleshly human righteousness is not just “table scraps,” which we throw away if we get around to it or have a dog around, it is “dung,” and is wretched and even dangerous and we must get it away from ourselves as soon as possible. Based on that logic, we felt that for one thing, “table scraps” or “rubbish” really does not communicate in our culture the same as the word skubala communicated in the first century, and also that “dung” was likely the better choice anyway, given what Paul was trying to say.

3:13. “letting go.” The Greek word epilanthanomai (ἐπιλανθάνομαι) means to forget or neglect. In this verse neglect (thus “overlook,” or “let go of,”) is better, because many things in the past cannot just be “forgotten,” but they can be let go of.

“straining forward.” The Greek word is epekteinomai (ἐπεκτείνομαι) “to reach out or stretch out toward some goal…In Philip 3.13 ἐπεκτείνομαι is used
figuratively to suggest intense effort as well as firm purpose.” (Louw Nida). It is “to exert oneself to the uttermost, stretch out, strain” (BDAG). It is to stretch forward, but with such intensity and purpose that “straining forward” (RSV, NRSV) is a better translation.

3:15. “must think.” The Greek text reads phronōmen (φρονῶμεν) a hortatory subjunctive of phroneō (#5426 φρόνεω), to think, understand, have an opinion (cp. Word Biblical Commentary; H. Cassirer: God’s New Covenant). If the subjunctive is translated “let us think” then we must understand it as a command, not just a suggestion. God’s people have an obligation to God to think in certain ways that glorify Him and further His purposes. When we agreed to make Jesus our Lord, we agreed to follow his ways and his directives.

3:19. “god is their belly.” In the context of this chapter, including the next phrase in the verse, this a primarily a reference to the Jews, who were stuck on food laws and who bragged about how they kept the laws of Moses regarding food, even though it often separated them from the rest of the Body of Christ. A secondary meaning is that it concerns people whose life is consumed in satisfying their own appetites.

“whose glory is in their shame.” In the context of this chapter, this a primarily a reference to the Jews, who focused so much attention on circumcision. They circumcise people and then “glory in their flesh” (Gal. 6:13), that is, they boast about how they have gotten everyone to keep the Law. That makes this verse a strong irony. What the Jews brag about, from God’s perspective, is really their shame, that they work so hard to keep the Law but reject the Christ who fulfilled the Law and could give them everlasting life. As a secondary meaning, the verse can be generalized to apply to everyone who feels so good about something that is, in fact, ungodly. They brag about what really is, to God, their shame.

3:20. “citizenship in heaven.” If scripture does not teach heaven as our eternal home, but that Christians will inherit the earth and reign here with Christ, then why does Paul write here that our citizenship is in heaven? The Bible says our citizenship is in heaven now because that is where God’s kingdom is centered at this time. The Bible could not say “our citizenship is on earth,” because that would give the totally wrong idea, for it is Satan who now has control of the earth (Luke 4:6; 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 John 5:19). It is not until the future reality of Revelation 11:15-18 that Jesus takes his power and begins to reign, that the kingdoms of the world become his. If Paul had said, “our citizenship will be on earth” we would not know if we were citizens now, all we would know is that we would be citizens at some time in the future. Saying our citizenship is in heaven is the perfect way to say that we are citizens now, in God’s kingdom.

We must also remember the cultural context in which the book of Philippians was written; the cultural background behind this verse brings out its full meaning. The concept of citizenship for the Philippians did not mean that they were to go off to the mother city, but exactly the opposite, that they were to stay in Philippi and expect the emperor to come to them. As N.T. Wright explains:

Philippi was a Roman colony. Augustus had settled his veterans there after the battles of Philippi (42 B.C.) and Actium (31 B.C.). Not all residents of Philippi were Roman citizens, but all knew what citizenship meant. The point of creating colonies was twofold. First, it was aimed at extending Roman influence around the Mediterranean world, creating cells and networks of people loyal to Caesar in the wider culture. Second, it was one way of avoiding the problems of
overcrowding in the capital itself. The emperor certainly did not want retired soldiers, with time (and blood) on their hands, hanging around Rome ready to cause trouble. Much better for them to be establishing farms and businesses elsewhere.

So when Paul says, “We are citizens of heaven,” he doesn’t at all mean that when we’re done with this life we’ll be going off to live in heaven. What he means is that the savior, the Lord, Jesus the King—all of those were of course imperial titles—will come from heaven to earth, to change the present situation and state of his people. (Surprised by Hope, p. 100).

When we understand the cultural backdrop of Philippians’ situation we can see that Paul did not mean we are supposed to live in heaven, rather, he meant the opposite: that the emperor wants us to live on the earth. Furthermore, when we understand the custom of imperial visits to colonies this becomes even clearer. When the emperor came to visit a colony the subjects would all go out to meet him and escort him back to the town, to the place they had just come from. This was called an apantasis; Paul used this word to describe the Lord’s coming in 1 Thessalonians 4. He said we will “meet [apantasis] the Lord in the air,” that is to say, we will go out from the earth to greet the Lord and then escort him back to the earth, and “so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17).

So our citizenship is indeed in heaven, but this does not mean we will live there forever. There is one last thing we must realize about having our citizenship in heaven. In scripture God speaks of a “heavenly city” called the New Jerusalem, which we are looking forward to and longing for (Gal. 4:25-26; Heb. 11:16; 13:14; Rev. 3:12; 21:1-27). Since the Jerusalem that is above is our mother (Gal. 4:26), we have citizenship in this heavenly city. But as we can see from Revelation, this does not mean we will live in heaven forever, because the city of New Jerusalem will come “down out of heaven” to the earth and God’s dwelling will be with men (Rev. 3:12; 21:1-27). So even the city in heaven will come to the earth, along with the Lord, and eventually the Father himself. In light of this we can be very thankful the scriptures say we will be on earth too (Rev. 5:9-10).

Chapter 4

4:3. “Clement.” There is no way to connect this Clement with the Church Father known as “Saint Clement of Rome,” who was a leading figure in the church at Rome and the first Apostolic Father of the Church.

4:5. “Reasonableness.” See commentary on 1 Timothy 3:3.

4:7. “And.” The “and” has consecutive force here: “and as a result.” If we do what verse 6 says, then the peace of God will guard our heart.

4:8. “Honorable.” “Honorable” here is from the adjective semnos (#4586 σεµνός). Semnos denotes that which is worthy of respect and honor. It can refer to people or things, ideas, characteristics. The word semnos occurs four times in scripture, once of things (Phil. 4:8), and three times of people (1 Tim. 3:8, 11; Tit. 2:2). When used of people we translated it to speak of a “dignified” person, but we referred to impersonal objects as “honorable” things.
4:12. “Learned the secret.” Mueo (#3453 μειώ) is literally to be initiated into a “mystery religion” of the Greco-Roman world (Thayer, Lexicon).

4:13. “I am strong in all situations in union with him who empowers me.” Because of the way it is usually translated, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” this verse gets thrown around by Christians as if it were a war cry; as if it were making the claim that Christians could conquer everything on this earth no matter what the situation or the odds. That use of the verse results in arrogance and false bravado, and it is not at all what the verse is saying. For one thing, even with Christ’s help, Christians cannot do “all things.” In fact, there are millions of things we cannot do—our human bodies are very limited, which is why the Bible tells us that “Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding” (Prov. 4:7 NIV84). What would be the need of wisdom if no matter what we faced we could just “tough it out” and win through Jesus?

Furthermore, and importantly, verses in the Bible get a lot of their meaning from the context and remote context, or “scope” of Scripture, and that is certainly the case with Philippians 4:13. The context of Philippians 4:13 was Paul’s situation—he was a prisoner in Rome (Phil. 1:13, 14), and possibly was going to be executed (Phil. 1:19-21). The epistle of Philippians was written during Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome, which is recorded in Acts 28:16ff. During this time, Paul was chained to a guard at least part of the time—an ignominious situation at best—and was not free to travel (cp. Acts 28:20). Before Paul was even arrested, he had plenty of trouble (cp. 1 Cor. 4:11ff; 2 Cor. 4:7-12; 11:22ff; 12:10), and he had more “affliction” after his arrest and imprisonment in Rome (Phil. 4:14). He did not want to be in prison, he wanted to be free (Phil. 1:19, 26; 2:24).

Both the verse before Philippians 4:13, and the verse after it, mention Paul’s troubles, so verse 13 is surely not a war cry. Rather, it is a declaration of how Christians are going to get through life in spite of our troubles, which is by being in union with Christ, the one who empowers us. Our final goal is the resurrection and new bodies (Phil. 1:28; 3:11, 21).

Although Philippians 4:13 is not an arrogant war cry, it is a victory cry. But it is not a cry of victory and deliverance from earthy troubles—Paul certainly had his share—it is a cry of victory from hopelessness and despair. Sadness, discouragement, and hopelessness are our real enemies. If we understand our situation and security in Christ and look to the future like Paul did, and allow Christ to empower us via things like revelation, the manifestations of holy spirit, and the encouragement of others, then we can say, like Paul did, that even our death would be gain to the Church (Phil. 1:21). We can indeed be strong in every situation due to our union with Christ, because even if our lives are full of troubles, we have peace with Christ, joy in Christ, and hope in the future.

It is helpful to analyze the verse phrase by phrase to properly understand it. The word “strong” is translated from the Greek ischuō (#2480 ἴσχυο), which refers to strength, but can also be translated as ability or “can do.” In this context “strength” refers more to our mental strength and that we are firm in our minds than to what we “can do” in the flesh.

The phrase “in all situations” is from the single Greek word pas (#3956 πᾶς), which means “all.” In this verse, pas is in the accusative case, which would make it more literally, “for all,” which could be expressed as, “I am strong for all,” or, as we would more commonly express it in English, “I am strong in all.” We add the word “situations”
from the context, which is about all the different situations Paul encountered. Loh and Nida (A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Philippians), add “conditions” instead of “situations,” and translate the verse: “I have the strength to face all conditions…,” and that also is a good translation from the context. Although most translations add the word “things,” and read “I can do all things…” we do not believe that “all things” is as clear as “all situations.”

The phrase “in union with” is the translation of the Greek word en (#1722 ἐν). We agree with Lenski (The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians), that the en in this verse is used in its “static” sense, indicating a relationship: a union with, or a connection with, and that it is not an “instrumental use of en,” meaning “through” or “by way of” (see also W. Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary and Hawthorne and Martin, Word Biblical Commentary). We are “in Christ,” that is, “in union with Christ,” or “connected to” Christ, by virtue of being a member of his Body and identified with him. We feel that the verse is saying that we are strong by virtue of being in union with Christ rather than we are strong “through” Christ.

The static sense of en (“in”) is important in the New Testament but not well understood by most English readers. We understand the normal sense of “in,” and know what it is to be “in” a boat, “in” a house, or even “in the night” (Matt. 4:21; 5:15; John 11:10). But what does it mean to be “in Christ,” “in the Lord,” or “in him?” It means to be in connection with, in relationship with, or in union with. We feel “in union with” is the best English translation in this context because of its other uses in the New Testament. [For more information on the static use of en, and being in union with Christ, see commentary on Ephesians 1:3].

Another reason we believe that the en in this verse has the static sense and not the instrumental sense of “through” is that it seems that if the verse was trying to tell us that we were strong “through” Christ, the Greek would have used the most standard way of expressing that, which would have been by using the preposition dia, “through.” Dia is used in Philippians with the sense of “through” in 1:11, 19, 20, 26; and 3:9 (although it is sometimes translated “by,” “comes through,” “from,” etc).

We are weak in our flesh, and in fact, even in our minds. Our flesh constantly fails us, and so does our will, as Paul so eloquently writes in Romans 7:14-24. To us, the verse is not about how strong Christ makes us (“I” am strong through Christ), but rather it is saying that I am strong due to being in union with Christ. The difference is subtle but important. The verse is not so much about “me” being strong as if Christ strengthened me and then let me do the heavy lifting, but rather it is about me being able to be strong in the situations I am in because of the relationship I have with Christ, as he said at the Last Supper, “apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

The phrase “who empowers me” is from the Greek verb endunamoō (#1743 ἐνδύναμομαι), which is to “empower.” This verb is a participle in the active voice, present tense, which describes in Greek that Jesus is constantly empowering. It is not a one-time act, but something we can rely on constantly. Lenski writes: “Being connected with the Lord who keeps empowering him, Paul always has the strength for everything in his life and work.” Hawthorne and Martin translate the verse: “I have the power to face all such situations in union with the One who continually infuses me with strength.”

Philippians 4:13 is not a call to arrogance and our ability—what “we” can do through Christ—rather, it is a call to humility and the realization that because we are in
union with Christ and being empowered by Christ, we can deal with life’s situations no matter how difficult they may be. Paul’s situation was not “good,” or “nice,” but because of his attitude he affected the lives of many. In fact, even the Emperor’s personal army, the Praetorian Guard, had all heard about Paul and his stand for Christ (Phil. 1:13). The fact that Paul was in prison and possibly about to be executed did not deter those guards from respecting Paul and the Christian Faith, after all, everyone has problems, but Paul was set apart from the other criminals they dealt with because he was strengthened by his union with Christ and had a positive outlook on life and the future.

4:18. “have received full payment.” The Greek verb is apechō (#568 ἄπέχω). The verb apechō can mean simply to be enough or to be sufficient. But the context here is the gift the Philippians sent to Paul, giving and receiving, and profits being added to their account with God, and business transactions apechō was used to designate when there had been payment in full. In that context this line from Paul was a wonderful blessing and a great comfort written to the Philippians. When someone is in need and we give help, we often second-guess ourselves and wonder, “Have I given enough?” (Also, there can be occasions when we wonder if we have given too much, but this would not be one of those). Paul writes and removes that burden from the Philippians. He has received full payment; they did what they could, and it was “full payment” from God’s and Paul’s point of view.

There is a great lesson we can learn from this verse, because sometimes we are so caught up in our own stuff that we do not take the time to think about others and comfort them. Paul was in prison in less than desirable circumstances with an uncertain future, and yet he penned these wonderful comforting words to the Philippians.

4:19. “will supply.” The earliest and strongest support in the Greek manuscripts is for the reading, plērōsei (πληρώσει), which is the future tense, indicative mood, of the verb pleroō (#4137 πληροω; pronounced play-roh'-ō), “to fill, or fulfill,” and thus it means, “will supply” as most English versions read. However, a number of manuscripts read plērōsai, which is the aorist optative and thus would read, “may meet,” i.e., that God may meet all your need. This would make the verse into a supplication so that Paul was praying that God may meet all the need of the Philippian church. It seems clear that this latter reading is a scribal change to the text, a very understandable change given life’s circumstances. Most Christians ask at one time or another, “If God promises to meet all my needs, why aren’t they being met?” We would like to give a couple answers to that important question.

First, we must understand that all of God’s promises are given in light of the entire Word of God; very few stand alone on their own. Just like God promised to bless Israel, but in the context of them keeping the covenant, so too we, in order to see all of God’s blessings in our life, must live and be living in a godly environment. For example, God cannot contradict Himself, and when He says that we reap what we sow (2 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 6:8), that is much a promise of God as that He will meet our needs. So if a person sows unwisely by unwisely spending his money, he may need money one day that God will not be able to provide without breaking His law of sowing and reaping. Or, if a person sows unwisely into their body by eating unhealthily year after year and not exercising, he may reap sicknesses that God may not be able to reverse. Sure, there is always God’s mercy, but the spiritual war raging around us and God’s righteousness may preclude God from acting when we think He should be able to. We understand this
principle in many things, for example, death. Adam and Eve sowed death into the human race, and although God has sometimes extended a person’s life by mercy, such as Hezekiah (Isa. 38:1-5), His righteousness precludes Him from keeping people from dying. That same righteousness, and the spiritual war, keep Him from simply giving people what they feel they need.

Certainly another thing that influences God’s ability to meet our need is our prayer life. God admonishes us to pray constantly, and prayer opens pathways for God and allows Him to work. Yet many people have weak prayer lives. Like the persistent widow in Luke 11, sometimes we do not get what we need from God unless we pray diligently about it. So in summary of the above, there may be things we need that God simply cannot give us due to the circumstances involved.

There is a second thing we must understand about God meeting our needs, one that is certainly secondary to this context in Philippians but real nonetheless: God sees life from an eternal perspective, one that we do not have. Many times we think we need things that we do not need, and that may apply to our physical lives as well. God sees us in the resurrection as well as today, and there may be things we think we need now that He will supply in the future in the Kingdom.

Given how life for Christians became difficult and deadly for almost 250 years after Nero made Christianity illegal in 64 AD (Constantine made it legal again in 312 AD), it is easy to see how scribes would think that “will meet all your need,” should really be, “may meet all your need.” However, that is a dead-end road. We have to trust God and rely on His promises. He will meet our need, even if we do not think so or see it in our lifetime on earth.
Colossians

Chapter 1

1:1. “the brother Timothy.” In this context the word “brother” does not so much indicate a fellow Christian, because Timothy was obviously a Christian, as it does a “helper” or “co-worker” (cp. Peter O’Brien, Word Biblical Commentary).

1:2. “holy ones and faithful brothers.” These are not two different groups—one group of saints and another group of faithful brothers. Rather this salutation is directed at the one and same group of Christians at Colossi. This is an example of when the Greek kai (and), can act like “even,” making the construction read something such as, “holy ones, even faithful brothers.”

1:3. “we give thanks...when we pray for you.” Although there is no corresponding word for “when” in this verse, its sense comes from the present participle “praying,” proseuchomai (#4336 προσεύχομαι). This is the temporal use of the participle, answering the question, when? The main action of this sentence is “we give thanks” and the present participle elaborates both the time when and manner by which thanks is given—“we give thanks when we pray.” This is because “the present participle is normally contemporaneous in time to the action of the main verb. This is especially so when it is related to a present tense main verb,” as it is here, since the verb for “we give thanks” is also in the present tense (Wallace, Greek Grammar, p. 625). In other words, the action of giving thanks occurs simultaneous to the action of praying. This fact is missed in translations that do not read “when we pray,” (e.g., KJV, ASV, NASB). The reading, “we give thanks to God...praying always for you,” does not necessarily communicate that the actions of giving thanks and praying are contemporaneous. Better are translations such as the REV, ESV, NIV, NET, and HCSB, which accurately translate the participle in its temporal sense by employing the word “when.”

1:4. “for.” This is coming from the causal sense of the participle (Cp. Wallace, Greek Grammar, p. 631). Although there is no actual word for “since” in the Greek text, it is implied in the use of the participle. Other translations read, “because,” or “for.” The hearing of the Colossians’ faith and love marks the causal grounds for Paul’s giving thanks in verse three.

“of your faith... of your love.” In the Greek these are not genitive phrases, even though they are translated with the “of” formula. Rather, the words “faith” and “love” are simply the direct objects (in the accusative case) of the verb “heard.” The Greeks were comfortable saying “We heard your faith and love,” but in English we say, “We heard of your faith and love.”

1:5. “hope.” The Greek noun is elpis (#1680 ἔλπις), and it means “hope,” “that which is expected.” In Greek, the noun “hope” (elpis) is easily distinguishable from the verb “hope” (elpizō), but since English uses “hope” for both the noun and verb it is important to be aware of which it is. The verb “hope” refers to our expectation, while the noun “hope” usually refers to the content of the hope—the things we will receive in the future. Thus, new bodies and everlasting life with Christ on a new earth are part of our “hope” (noun), and what we hope (verb) for in the future. (See commentary on 2 Cor. 1:10).
“is being stored up.” This is the present participle of *apokeimai* (#606 ἀπόκειμαι), thus the “is being.” Our hope is presently in the process of being “stored up,” “put away as safekeeping,” “reserve[d] as reward or recompense” (BDAG). This corresponds to the Lord’s teaching in Matthew 6:20, “store up [θησαυρίζω (#2343 θησαυρίζω)] for yourselves treasures in heaven.” Because we are continuously earning rewards, our hope is continually being stored up. The theology of most translators is that, once we die, going to heaven is our reward, and since that hope is the same for all Christians, it makes no sense to speak of storing up more hope. This is perhaps why a majority of versions read, “the hope laid up for you in heaven,” expressing a onetime action, rather than acknowledging the continual process of the storing up. But salvation is not a same-hope-for-everyone-ticket-to-heaven; rather, some are storing up for themselves a greater hope by the actions of obedience in this life, a hope to be delivered when the Lord pays back what is due for the things done in the body (2 Cor. 5:10). If Christianity were without the concept of rewards, with the equal payment of simply eternal life for all regardless of who strove to put off the flesh and who just “got in,” then we should expect this verse to have the aorist participle, reflecting a onetime salvation-only hope. But it is present, not aorist, meaning we are still continuously in the process of storing up our hope now. This fact is in contrast to the unrepentant, whose deeds are “storing up wrath” for themselves (Rom. 2:5).

“in the heavens.” A powerful truth, added for comfort. The good that we do is recorded by God and no human can take it away from us. It is safely in good hands. Jesus told us not to store up treasures on earth where it can be taken from us, but to store up treasure in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21). It is important to realize that the treasure is only said to be stored up in heaven because we have no way to access it now. It is in God’s keeping. This verse is not saying that when we die, we will be in heaven, but just that the treasure is in the hands of God now (see commentary on Matt. 5:12).

“word of truth, which is the Good News.” The Greek reads, “the word of the truth of the gospel.” The phrase “of the gospel” is the genitive of apposition, which is when the word in the genitive is equated with the same thing to which it stands in relation to (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 95). In this case the gospel is related to the word of truth, and the word of truth is the gospel.

1:6. “in truth.” Paul says the Colossians understood the grace of God “in truth.” The meaning of this phrase is not that they “truly, really did understand” but that their knowledge was true knowledge (cp. Meyer; Lange). In other words, it is describing the qualitative character of their knowledge. The other interpretive option is to understand this phrase to mean, You know the grace of God in its genuine character, that is, you know it as it truly is (Kistemaker; NJB). The difference between the two is slight, one primarily of focus. “True knowledge” emphasizes the knowledge of the grace, while knowing the grace as it truly is emphasizes the character of the grace that is known.

1:7. “Epaphras.” This is a shortened form of Epaphroditus, a very common Greek name of the time (O’Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary*). It is related to the goddess Aphrodite. Epaphras is mentioned here, in 4:12, and in Philemon 23. He may be the same person as in Philippians 2:25 and 4:18, but due to the commonness of the name, there is no way to conclude that with certainty.

“your.” On whose behalf was Epaphras a minister? Our text reads, “On your behalf,” that is, Epaphras serves as a minister on the behalf of the Colossians (cp. ESV; NRSV;
HCSB; NAB). There is a variant, however, that reads “our” behalf, as though he were sent from Paul and company as a minister on Paul’s behalf (cp. NIV; NASB; NET; ASV). But the reading “your” is more likely. The translation “on behalf of” comes from huper (#5228 ὑπέρ), which means “for your sake,” “for your advantage.” Paul is saying Epaphras was a minister for the Colossians’ advantage, his ministry was for their sake.

1:8. “in the spirit.” The “the” is not needed in the Greek text before the noun “spirit” because the preposition en can make the pneuma (spirit) definite without the article. The preposition en is before the phrase, which means it can be understood as if the “the” was actually present. In Greek, if a preposition governs a noun, it is the context that determines whether the noun is definite or not, and therefore whether there should be a “the” or not in the English translation. Daniel Wallace writes in Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics (p. 247): “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.” A. T. Robertson writes: “...the article is not the only means of showing that a word is definite. ...The context and history of the phrase in question must decide. ...[As for prepositional phrases], these were also considered definite enough without the article.” Robertson then cites some examples that use ek, as does this verse in Matthew (Grammar of the Greek New Testament, pp. 790-792).

The Greek has the phrase en pneuma (#4151 πνεῦμα), and the preposition en only takes the dative case. The most likely meaning of the dative is to show the association between love and spirit: love “in connection with” the spirit. God’s gift of holy spirit works within us in many ways to the end that we are loving. For one thing, God can energize our love via the spirit. God is always working in us so that we want to do, and do, His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). Also, there is the fruit of the spirit that is love (Gal. 5:22), which is different from our “natural” or “human” love and flows out of the new spiritual nature that is born within us (Gal. 5:17). And there is love and joy that we have because we know that due to the New Birth and being permanently sealed with the gift of holy spirit, we are guaranteed everlasting life. So the phrase “love in the spirit” needs to be understood as “love that comes from our connection with the spirit.”

1:9. “through.” The Greek is en (#1722 ἐν), which is to be understood here in the sense of “means” or “instrument” (cp. BDAG, def. 5). Spiritual wisdom and understanding are the means through which the Colossians are filled with the knowledge of the will of God.

1:10. “clear knowledge.” The Greek is epignosis (#1922 ἐπίγνωσις), which is composed of the Greek word for “knowledge” with the prefix epi as an intensifier—full and clear knowledge. Cp. Hendriksen’s translation, “clear knowledge.” Louw-Nida define the term as, “To possess more or less definite information about, possibly with a degree of thoroughness or competence—‘to know about, to know definitely about.’” The Colossians already have knowledge of God, Paul only prays that such knowledge would be ever increasing in its fullness and clarity, that they would know “definitely” about Him.

1:11. “by means of.” The Greek preposition is kata (#2596 κατά). Thayer’s Greek-English lexicon correctly notes that in this context, it indicates that the power we have proceeds from His glorious might. Thus, our power comes “by means of” His might, we do not have it in and of ourselves.

“glorious might.” The Greek reads, “might of his glory.” It is the attributive genitive, which is when the word in the genitive case (“glory”) acts as an adjective describing the head noun (“might”). So “might of his glory” becomes “his glorious might.” It is
beneficial to translate the genitive phrase as what it means rather than to retain the reading “might of his glory” because the English reader can easily misunderstand the literal reading. Can glory have might? The phrase as it stands literally puts glory as the thing which we are strengthened by, rather than by God’s strength, i.e., His might.

“To attain.” The Greek preposition εἰς (#1519 εἰς) includes both purpose (thus, “to” or “for”) and the fact that the power goes to and touches (thus “attains”) its object. This is expressed in versions in different ways: “for the attaining of” (NAB); “to meet whatever comes” (NEB); “so that you may have” (NIV); “so that you may be prepared” (NRSV); “This will lead you to” (The Source NT).

God empowers us with His power, by way of the gift of holy spirit (cp. Eph. 3:16), so that we are able to endure whatever circumstances we are in, and have longsuffering toward others. Nevertheless, the power of God is not automatic to us, but we must make an effort to utilize it and allow it to work in our lives. Every Christian has holy spirit and thus the empowerment of God, but not every Christian endures trials and is longsuffering toward others. We have to do our part in order for God to do His part.

“Endurance.” This Greek word ἰπομονὴ (#5281 ἰπομονὴ) is usually translated “patience.” However, the word can also have the meaning of endurance, which best fits the context here. ἰπομονὴ is patience with things, while μακροθυμία is longsuffering with people. See commentary on Galatians 5:22.

1:12. “Giving thanks with joy.” The phrase “with joy” goes with “giving thanks” rather than with “patience” in verse 11. Grammatically, it could go with either, so why then is our rendering to be preferred? The answer lies in considering the parallel structure of participles beginning in verse 10. In the Greek the words “bearing fruit,” “growing,” and “being strengthened” are all participles that have their modifiers preceding them in the text: “in every good deed, bearing fruit and growing; “in all power, being strengthened,” and likewise here in verse 12, “with joy, giving thanks.” (Cp. Lenski).

“Qualified.” The word for “qualified” is ἰκανοῦ (#2427 ἰκανόω), which the versions translate as either “qualified” or “enabled, made fit.” The word really means both. It points to a making sufficient and fitting out so that one is hence qualified.

“You.” There is a textual variant that reads “us” rather than “you” (cp. KJV; ASV; NASB). The word “you” is the best reading, however. It is much more likely the reading “us” arose as a scribal assimilation to match the “us” in verse 13, than for a change from “us” to “you” (Metzger, Textual Commentary).

“Part.” The Greek word is μέρις (#3310 μέρις), which can mean a “part” or a “share.” While either translation is quite good, the word “share” usually indicates ownership in part, such as when children have to “share” a toy. In the Millennial Kingdom that is coming in the future, the earth will be divided up to those who deserve an inheritance, and each person will get a “part,” according to what they deserve. Thus, for example, “Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree” (Micah 4:4).

“Allotment.” The Greek is κλῆρος (#2819 κλῆρος; pronounced clay-ros). Originally the word κλῆρος was used of an object that was used in casting or drawing lots; usually a pebble, a potsherd (broken piece of pottery), or a piece of wood. Then it came to be used for what was won or obtained by lot, i.e., an allotted portion. The Messianic Kingdom will cover the earth (Dan. 2:35, 44), and there will be portions allotted to different tribes and people (Ezek. 45:1-8; 47:13-48:29). Meyer (Colossians) writes, “This κλῆρος, of
which the Christians are possessors ideally before the Parousia and thereafter really, is 
the theocratic designation of the property of the Messianic kingdom, and the meris tou 
klērou [“part of the allotment”] is the share of individuals in the same.”

“the kingdom of light.” This phrase goes with the preceding phrase about the part of 
the allotment, and points to the realm of light, i.e., the Age to Come, the Millennial 
Kingdom of Christ. O’Brien (Word Biblical Commentary) writes, “...the inheritance for 
which the all powerful Father had fitted them was in the realm of the light of the age to 
come.” Lightfoot (Colossians) writes: “The portion of the saints is situated in the 
kingdom of light.” Some commentators refer to the light being what we have now, 
inclusive of the blessings and knowledge of God, but that does not seem to make sense in 
this context. The blessings we have from God right now are not an allotted portion, we all 
have access fully to the knowledge and blessings of God. The only true “allotment” of the 
Christians will occur in the future Messianic Kingdom on earth, and although we are all 
qualified to receive a share, different people will receive different allotments based on 
what they have done for Christ in their lives. Some people who have faithfully served 
Christ will receive a rich welcome (2 Pet. 1:11), while others will be ashamed (1 John 
2:28).

1:13. “authority.” The Greek word is exousia (#1849 ἐξουσία), and means “authority,” 
not “power” which would be dunamis (#1411 δύναμις) or perhaps kratos (#2904 κράτος). 
Each Christian has been bought by the blood of Jesus Christ, and now legally belongs to 
God. We are not our own (1 Cor. 6:19), and we have been redeemed (bought back) from 
sin and death, and transferred to the Kingdom of the Son. Since we are not under the 
authority of darkness (the Devil), he cannot legally afflict us. Nevertheless, Christians are 
regularly mistreated and even killed by the “power” of darkness that controls this world. 
The Devil is a liar and murderer, and he does not recognize God’s legal authority. 
However, even though we are not under the legal “authority” of darkness, because we 
live on earth, we are still greatly affected by the powers of evil.

1:14. “redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” This verse in the KJV and YLT go along 
with a textual variant, which adds the words “through his blood.” This phrase was most 
likely an interpolation from Ephesians 1:7. We believe it probably originated as a 
marginal note added for clarification by a scribe, which subsequently got copied into the 
text. If the reading with “through his blood” were original, there would be no reason for 
scribes to omit the phrase (Metzger, Textual Commentary).

“redemption.” This is the figure of speech prophetic perfect—speaking of a future 
event as past to emphasize the certainty of its occurrence. Although through Christ’s 
atoning work we have been presently redeemed, the fullness of our redemption is yet 
future, as there are other verses that speak of our redemption as a future act (Rom. 8:23; 
Eph. 1:14; 4:30). See also, The Christian’s Hope, Spirit and Truth Fellowship 
International, pg. 239; and commentary on Ephesians 2:6 for more on the prophetic 
perfect.

1:15. “image.” The Greek word is eikōn (#1504 εἰκόν), and it means “image.” Jesus was 
the image of God in the sense in which he said that if we had seen him, we had seen the 
Father. Trinitarians claim that this verse shows that Jesus is God, but that cannot be the 
case, because it speaks of Christ being “the image [eikon] of the invisible God.” If Christ 
were “God,” then the verse would simply say so, rather than that he was the “image” of 
God. The Father is plainly called “God” in dozens of places, and this would have been a
good place to say that Jesus was God. Instead, we are told that Christ is the *image* of God. If one thing is the “image” of another thing, then the “image” and the “original” are not the same thing. The Father *is* God, and that is why there is no verse that calls the Father the image of God. Calling Jesus the image of God is very good evidence he is not God. There are Trinitarian theologians who assert that the word *eikon* (from which we get the English word “icon,” meaning “image,” or “representation”) means “manifestation” here in Colossians, and that Christ is the manifestation of God. We believe that conclusion is unwarranted. The word *eikon* occurs 23 times in the New Testament, and it is clearly used as “image” in the common sense of the word. It is used of the image of Caesar on a coin, of idols that are manmade images of gods, of Old Testament things that were only an image of the reality we have today. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says that Christians are changed into the “image” of the Lord as we reflect his glory. All these verses use “image” in the common sense of the word, *i.e.*, a representation separate from the original. 1 Corinthians 11:7 says, “A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the *image* and glory of God.” Just as Christ is called the image of God, so men are called the image of God. We are not as exact an image as Christ is because we are marred by sin, but nevertheless the Bible does call us the “image” of God. Thus, the wording about being the image of God is the same for us as it is for Christ. The words in the Word must be read and understood in their common and ordinary meaning unless good reason can be given to alter that meaning. In this case, the common meaning of “image” is “likeness” or “resemblance,” and it is used that way every time in the New Testament. Surely if the word “image” took on a new meaning when it referred to Christ, the Bible would let us know that. Since it does not, we assert that the use of “image” is the same whether it refers to an image on a coin, an image of a god, or for both Christ and Christians as the image of God. Jesus is not God, but he so closely resembled God in how he lived and acted that he is called the image of God.

**“The firstborn of all creation.”** This phrase refers to Christ being the firstfruits of those raised from the dead (cp. 1 Cor. 15:20). The Greek is “the firstborn of all creation” (or, “the firstborn of every creature,” since there is no article before “creation”), but the exact significance of the genitive is debated. It could be partitive, *i.e.*, the firstborn out of the creation, which is true and makes sense, since Jesus was indeed the first person ever to be raised in a new, everlasting body. However this interpretation is rejected by Trinitarians on the basis of their claim that Jesus was not in fact part of the creation at all, but is actually the eternal God. The genitive can be a genitive of relation, that is, the firstborn in relation to other creations, but we must be clear about what that would mean. It could easily mean just firstborn in time, but that explanation is usually rejected by Trinitarians because it does not inherently give godhood to Jesus. Some Trinitarians prefer the genitive of comparison (cp. Lenski), because that would make Christ inherently better than the others who were raised from the dead. While Christ is no doubt better than the other saved people who will be raised from the dead, the genitive in the verse certainly does not have to be supportive of the doctrine of the Trinity. Nevertheless, the idea of the comparative genitive combined with the doctrine of the Trinity is why some versions translate the verse into English as “the firstborn over all creation,” which is actually an interpretation of what the Greek means, rather than a translation of the Greek. God likely used the genitive because it is indicative of many things, which is the beauty of the genitive case: it can emphasize several things at one time. As a partitive genitive it
shows Jesus is part of God’s creation, which he is, and as a comparative genitive it, combined with the elevated status of any “firstborn” male in the biblical culture, shows that God has given rank and privileges to Jesus Christ. In biblical society, being the firstborn had privileges associated with it that Jesus Christ, as the firstborn, certainly receives.

1:16. “created.” The Greek verb is κτίζω (#2936 κτίζω), and it means to create. This verse is not referring to Jesus creating the world in the beginning. It is referring to Jesus creating the positions of authority that are needed to run his Church, which started on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). God delegated “all authority” to Christ (Matt. 28:18), which would include the authority to create. Ephesians 2:15 confirms this by saying that Christ created “one new man” (his Church) out of Jew and Gentile. Also, by pouring out the gift of holy spirit into each believer (Acts 2:33,38), the Lord Jesus has created something new in each of them, that is, the “new man,” their new nature (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Eph. 4:24). The Church of the Body of Christ (the Christian Church) was a brand new entity, created by Christ on the Day of Pentecost out of Jew and Gentile. He had to also create the structure and positions that would allow it to function, both in the spiritual world (positions for the angels that would minister to the Church—see Rev. 1:1, “his angel”) and in the physical world (positions and ministries here on earth—see Rom. 12:4-8; Eph. 4:7-11). The Bible describes the physical and spiritual realities that Christ created by the phrase, “things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.”

Many people think that because Colossians 1:16 says, “For by him all things were created” that the verse is speaking of the original creation of the universe and that therefore Jesus must be God. That is not the case. To discover what this verse is saying, we must read the entire verse with an understanding of the usage of words and figures of speech. The study of legitimate figures of speech is quite demanding and academically rigorous, and the best work we know of was done in 1898 by E. W. Bullinger, titled *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*.

To understand this verse, we must be aware that when the word “all” (or “every” or “everything”) is used, it is often used in a limited sense. For example, when Absalom was holding a council against his father, David, 2 Samuel 17:14 says that “all the men of Israel” agreed on advice that was given. “All” the men of Israel were not there, but the verse uses “all” in its limited sense, meaning, “all” who were there. Another example is Jeremiah 26:8, which says that “all the people” seized Jeremiah to put him to death, but the context makes it very clear that “all the people” were not even present. Again, “all” is being used in a limited sense. The Bible says that Christians “know all things” (1 John 2:20), but surely there is no Christian who actually believes that he knows everything. The point is that whenever we read the word “all,” we must determine whether it is being used in the wide sense of “all in the universe,” or in the narrow sense of “all in a certain context.” When Colossians 1:16 says “all things were created by him,” we know from both the context and the scope of Scripture that “all” is being used in a limited sense.

Another thing we must understand in order to correctly interpret Colossians 1:16 is the figure of speech called “encircling.” Bullinger says that the Greeks called this figure of speech epanadiplosis, while the Romans labeled it inclusio, and he gives several pages of biblical examples of this figure. To understand the “encircling,” we must note that the phrase “all things were created” occurs at both the beginning and end of the verse, encircling the list of created things. The things that are “created” are not rocks,
trees, birds and animals, because those things were created by God in the beginning. The things mentioned in Colossians are: “thrones or lordships or rulerships or authorities,” and these are the authorities and positions that were needed by Christ to run his Church and were created by him for that purpose. By surrounding the “thrones, lordships, etc., the figure of speech epanadiplosis (“encircling”) helps us to identify the proper context of “all things,” and shows us that it is the narrower sense of the word “all” that is being used in the verse.

If Colossians 1:16 was referring to Jesus Christ creating the universe in the beginning of time, we should expect it to reflect something like the wording of Genesis 1:1, and say that Jesus created the heavens and the earth, or at least innumerate some of the common things that we associate with that creation. Instead we find in this verse a list of both angelic and human positions of authority. But is that what we think of when we think of the creation of the universe? Positions of authority such as thrones and lordships? Certainly not. But when God made Christ the head of the Church, he then needed to set up a structure for it, and that structure consisted of spiritual beings and people in positions of authority, and Jesus created those positions with the power that God gave him: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18)

“thrones or lordships or rulerships or authorities.” These are some of the authorities in the spiritual world and physical world that Jesus needed to create in order to run his church.

“thrones.” The Greek is “thrones,” the plural of thronos (#2362 θρόνος). Lightfoot writes: In all systems alike these ‘thrones’ belong to the highest grade of angelic beings, whose place is in the presence of God” (Lightfoot; St. Paul’s Epistles). We agree with Lightfoot that these “thrones” (likely a metonymy for those beings who sit on the thrones) are a high order of angelic beings, and the position was created by Christ for his Church.

“lordships.” The Greek is kuriotēs (#2963 κυριότης), from the word kurios, lord, which is the same word for “lord” in the phrase, “the Lord Jesus Christ.” It refers to those who have lordship. It appears by their name and their being next to the “thrones” that these also are very powerful spiritual beings.

“rulerships or authorities.” The Greek is archē (#746 ἀρχή) and exousia (#1849 ἐξουσία). The word archē refers to one who is first, a leader or ruler, while exousia refers to “authority.” These two words appear together ten times in the New Testament (Luke 12:11; 20:20; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15; Titus 3:1). Sometimes they clearly refer to earthly powers (Luke 12:11; Titus 3:1); in others they refer to spiritual powers (Eph. 6:12). Jesus created positions of authority in his church in both the spiritual and physical realm. The apostles, prophets, pastors, and teachers in the Church are part of the human authority structure. Although it could be argued that in this verse “rulerships or authorities” only refer to angelic rulers and were created “in the beginning,” that is an interpretation. It could just as easily be argued that in this verse the meaning, or part of the meaning, of these words refers to the human authorities in the Church, and that absolutely precludes Jesus creating “in the beginning,” because Church authorities did not exist back then.

“have been created.” As was pointed out just above, the word “create,” ktizō (#2936 κτίζω), surrounds and thus defines the things that Jesus created to properly order his Body, the Church. It is noteworthy, however, that the use of ktizō at the beginning of the
verse is in the aorist tense, indicating that there was a specific point in time when the thrones, lordships, rulerships, and authorities were created. At the end of the verse, however, the verb *ktizō* occurs in the perfect tense, indicating that the things that were once created are still in existence. Thus we know that the positions of authority that brings order to the Body of Christ were created at a point in time (relatively shortly after his resurrection), and still continue to this day.

1:17. “before all things.” The Greek word translated as *before* is the preposition *pro* (♯4253 πρό). *Pro* can mean “before” in the sense of either space, time, or priority [see Appendix 11: “Greek Prepositions”]. The meaning here is that of rank or priority; Christ is before all things in that he holds priority of rank above everything and everyone else.

“in him.” This is the “in” in the sense of sphere and relation. In that light, it can be translated, “in connection with” or even sometimes, “in union with” (see commentary on Rom. 6:3 and Eph. 1:3). The important meaning of *en* for the study of this verse is that it can mark a close association, or a limit. Thus BDAG notes that in Colossians 1:16, “in him” means “in association with him.” BDAG lexicon notes:

“Especially in Paul or Johannine usage, to designate a close personal relation in which the referent of the ἐν-term is viewed as the controlling influence: *under the control of, under the influence of, in close association with...* In Paul the relation of the individual to Christ is very often expressed by such phrases as ἐν Χριστῷ [in Christ], ἐν κυρίῳ [in the Lord], etc.,...in connection with, in intimate association with, keeping in mind.”

This verse is saying that in connection or association with Christ, all these positions of authority in his Church, the thrones, lordships, rulerships, and authorities are ordered and maintained. The relation of these authorities, and the authority they have, is only there by virtue of their connection and association with Christ. No spiritual or earthly authority has any true position or power apart from Christ, and apart from Christ they have no genuine or lasting relation with each other. Jesus said, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5), and that is true.

Although there are versions that translate the *en* in an instrumental sense, as “by him” (cp. HCSB; KJV), this is too strong in this context. The authority and authorities in the Church are ordered, maintained, and “held together” due to their association with him, not “by” him. The reason that “by” is attractive to some translators is that they interpret this verse from a Trinitarian perspective and misunderstand what it is saying. They believe that Jesus is God and the verse and context are referring to the whole universe being created by, then held together by, Jesus Christ. However, Jesus Christ is not God and this verse is not speaking of the whole created universe, but of the positions of authority that Christ created for his Church.

“are held together.” The Greek word is *sunistēmi* (♯4921 συνίστημι). The verb is intransitive (having no object) and in the perfect tense, but it has the sense of a present tense verb (Lenski), which is why the versions translate it as a present. This is a wonderful verb to express the complexity of the relationships that exist in the Church, and how Christ relates to the positions of authority he created (cp. v. 16). The sad fact is that the English cannot easily express the multiplicity of relationships that are contained in this verb. As was pointed out above in the comment on “in him,” most commentators interpret this verse from a Trinitarian perspective and misunderstand what it is saying.
This verse is speaking of the positions of authority that Christ created in the Christian Church, and how those authorities relate to Jesus and to each other. The verb has several meanings that are pertinent to how these authorities relate to each other. Moulton and Milligan state that συνιστῆμι “is very common in the papyri, and is used with a great variety of meanings.” They go on to say, “From its original meaning ‘set together,’ ‘combine,’ συνιστήμι passes into the sense of ‘bring together as friends,’ ‘introduce,’ ‘recommend.’” Moulton and Milligan also list “appoint” as one of the uses, and also “establish, prove,” “stand with(by)” “acting with,” and “consist” (2 Pet. 3:5). With specific reference to Colossians 1:17, they point out the meaning “hold together” and “cohere” (Moulton and Milligan, Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament).

Other lexicons add some depth of use to Moulton and Milligan, and some of the relevant meanings include “to bring together” “to establish,” “to put together (i.e., unite parts into one whole”) (BDAG). Friberg’s lexicon adds “have existence, exist, continue.” Louw and Nida’s lexicon adds, “to bring together or hold together something in its proper or appropriate place or relationship.” We should note that the verb is used 16 times in the New Testament, and the majority of them refer to commending or recommending one person to another (Rom. 16:1; 2 Cor. 3:1; 4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 7:11; 10:12, 18 (2x); 12:11), however, that does not mean that that is the use here, although it seems to be a sub-meaning in the verse, as the authorities in the Church, and especially the human authorities that are constantly changing, are introduced and recommended to each other. Having an understanding of the range of meaning of the word συνιστῆμι, we are ready to see how it fits into this verse and its context. When the Christian Church started on the Day of Pentecost, Jesus determined what it would take to administer the Church, and then created the positions to get the job done. He then “brought together,” and “appointed” spirit beings and people to fill the positions. He “introduced” and recommended them to each other, and now the authorities in the Church continue to exist and are held together by, and in relation to, him; they are maintained by him. In the case of the humans he placed in authority, such as apostles, prophets, and teachers, he continues to fill those positions generation after generation, continuing to appoint and recommend them to each other. This verse does seem to have a dominant sense of the Church being “maintained” in connection with Christ. As the authorities in the Church stay intimately connected with Christ and as Christ acts as Lord and Head, the Church is ordered, maintained, held together, and moves forward.

1:18. “he who is its beginning.” The Greek word “beginning” is arche (#746 ἀρχή), which has several meanings, including, “beginning, origin, or first cause.” Jesus Christ is the “beginning” of the Church, which is his Body. There are many events in the Bible that are referred to as the “beginning,” so what the word “beginning” refers to in any given verse depends on the context. Although most English versions read, “he is the beginning” (NIV), the word “the” is not in the Greek text. Some translators lean towards the translation “the beginning” due to their Trinitarian theology, saying that Christ was the beginning of the Church before the world began (“the beginning…goes back to creation….”” Lenski). However, there is no reason to connect “beginning” with the creation here, because the context of the verse is speaking about the Christian Church, and his being the firstborn from the dead, which happened just prior to his starting the Church on Pentecost (Acts 2). Jesus Christ is the beginning of the Church because he is its start and foundation, and his resurrection is the foundation upon which our hope rests.
William Hendrickson gets it right when he writes: “By his triumphant resurrection...Christ laid the foundation for that sanctified life.... This resurrection is also the beginning principle, or cause of their glorious physical resurrection” (W. Hendrickson; New Testament Commentary).

“the firstborn out from among the dead.” Jesus Christ is the first person to be raised from the dead to everlasting life. To fully understand this, it is necessary to understand that before the resurrection of Jesus Christ, no one received everlasting life (see, Is There Death After Life by Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit). The fact that the Bible calls him the “firstborn” guarantees that there will be others. All those who are saved will be raised from the dead and granted everlasting life.

“out from among the dead.” The Greek reads, ek tôn nekrôn (ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν). Scripture teaches that when a person dies, he is dead and in the ground awaiting the resurrection, and since neither the Rapture or any of the resurrections have occurred yet, everyone who has died is still in the ground awaiting being raised. Jesus, however, was raised, so he was raised “out from among” (ek) “the dead people” (tôn nekrôn). For a much more complete explanation of the phrase “out from among the dead,” see the commentary note on Romans 4:24.

1:19. “Fullness.” The Greek is pleroma (#4138 πλήρωμα), and it is used in a variety of ways in the New Testament, generally referring to that which fills something up, or makes something full or complete; and it also can refer to that which is full of something. There is much scholarly discussion about this word. Some scholars (and the REV) take “Fullness” as an epithet for God in this verse (cp. Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament), actually meaning “God in all His fullness” (cp. O’Brian, Word Biblical Commentary). Others note that sometimes the Greeks left “God” out of a sentence when He was clearly understood to be the subject, and thus they add it into the text and say something like the HCSB: “For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him.” The two ways of handling the verse end up with the same conclusion: that it is the fullness of God that is now in Christ. However, as O’Brian points out, if the pleroma is seen to be the subject, the grammar can be explained easily, and there is no need to supply a subject in the sentence that is not actually stated, nor needed, for as we saw above the word pleroma can refer to God in all His fullness.

The use of “Fullness” for God here ties this verse in with what God is doing in Christ and in us in 2:9, 10, and points out that the Fullness of God, “His spirit, word, wisdom, and glory, are displayed” in Christ (F. F. Bruce, NICNT, Colossians). It also ties in the work and promises of God in the Old Testament, for OT verses such as Jeremiah 23:24 (“Do I not fill heaven and earth?) use either pleroma or related words. Colossians 1:19 is saying that this God who has filled heaven and earth is pleased to fill Christ.


1:27. “Sacred Secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

1:29. “And I am toiling for that goal.” The verse opens with the Greek phrase eis ho, “toward which,” that implies movement toward an end of some kind; toward a goal. Thus the NET version has, “Toward this goal,” a very clear translation. Although the Greek text has the opening phrase in the order, “For that goal I am toiling,” it seemed to read
much better in English to say, “I am toiling for that goal.” The Moffatt Bible also follows that word order. Paul’s “goal” was to present every Christian mature in Christ (1:28). This shows that every Christian should want to be mature in Christ, not just “saved.” It is sometimes said in Christianity, “Isn’t salvation the important thing?” Salvation is important, and indeed, the foundation of the Christian life. However, we should never stop there. We should always press on to personal maturity in Christ, and help others get there also.

“struggling.” The Greek is agônizomai (#75 ἀγωνίζομαι; pronounced āg-ō-need'-zo-my), and it means to contend in the gymnastic games; to contend with adversaries, or “fight;” to contend or struggle with difficulties and dangers; to strive to obtain something. Paul uses it to refer to the great struggle he was in to move God’s causes forward in the world. Paul mentions this “struggle” a few times in Colossians: 1:29 and 4:12 (agônizomai); and in 2:1 (agôn). Although many versions use “strive” or “fight,” and these are not bad translations, the spiritual fight we are in involves a struggle both externally and internally. We struggle with our flesh to continually and faithfully obey God, and we struggle against the world to accomplish God’s purposes.

Chapter 2

2:1. “And indeed.” The Greek word is gar (#1063 γάρ), which is most often translated “for,” but it does not have to indicate cause or reason, and it does not here. It can also be marker of clarification or even of inference. In this case, it continues (thus “and”) and clarifies (thus “indeed”) the subject of the struggling which Paul speaks of in 1:29, and continues in 2:1. Some versions, such as the NIV, do not even translate the gar, starting 2:1 with, “I want,” while Cassirer’s translation, God’s New Covenant, also has “And indeed.”

“struggling.” The Greek noun is agôn (#73 ἀγων), and it means a contest or competition, or to struggle, fight, or contend in a competition. A very literal rendition of the Greek in this verse would be: “And indeed, I want you to know how great a struggle I am having for you,” but that can be somewhat confusing, which is why versions such as the NIV and NRSV have, “I am struggling for you.” In 1:29 Paul was struggling and striving to do the will of God, and in 2:1 he was struggling for the people of Colossae and Laodicea.

2:2. “the Sacred Secret of the Christ of God.” The last phrase of this verse is best translated, “the secret of the Christ of God,” or “the secret of God’s Christ.” See One God & One Lord. We translate the Greek word mysterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what mysterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

2:8. “empty, deceitful, philosophy.” The Greek literally reads, “through the philosophy and empty deceit,” but translating it literally is confusing to the English reader and misses the point the Greek text is making. This construction is the figure of speech Hendiadys (two for one; see Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible) where two things are mentioned, “philosophy” and “empty deceit,” when only one thing is meant, which is, “empty, deceitful, philosophy.” In sentences, nouns always have more emphasis than
adjectives, so it more strongly emphasizes the deceit of philosophy to say, “philosophy, even (kai can be “and” or “even”) empty deceit” than to say, “empty, deceitful, philosophy,” which is why the Greek is worded the way it is, but the latter phrase can be confusing, which outweighs the shift in emphasis.

2:9. “in a bodily manner.” The Greek is σωματικῶς (#4985 σωματικῶς), and it is an adverb. In this context it describes “dwells,” and is thus saying that what God is, His godly character and way of being, is embodied, or expressed in a mortal body, in Christ. This verse is very good proof that Jesus Christ was not God. It would make no sense to say that “what God is,” dwells in God. It is only because Christ is not God that it makes sense to say that what God is dwells in Christ. Also, the verse uses the word “God,” not “the Father.” If Trinitarians were correct that the Father and Christ were two separate “Persons,” but both the Father and Christ were “God,” then this verse should state that in Christ dwells all the fullness of “the Father.” The verse says “God” is dwelling bodily in Christ, that is, being embodied in him. What God was, all his character and glory, dwelt in Christ in a bodily form. Some Trinitarians recognize that logically what God is could not dwell in God, and so they assert that this verse is referring to the “man” part of Christ (the doctrine of the Trinity states that Jesus is both fully God and fully human. The fact that this is logically impossible by definition is ignored and taken as one of the mysteries of the Faith). For example, Lenski writes:

“It cannot even be said that ‘all the fullness of the Deity dwells in God,’ for ‘Deity’ is only the abstract term for God himself. Deity dwells in Christ because of his human nature, it could not ‘dwell,’ ‘reside,’ in him if he had not become man. The adverb modifies the verb and emphasized the manner of the indwelling: this manner is 'bodily,' the idea to be expressed being the that indwelling is not mystical, not spiritual, not in the spirit of Christ alone, but in his whole human nature” (R. C. H. Lenski, commentary on Col. 2:9).

The idea that what God is could dwell in the man side of Christ is a contrived argument, and based upon faulty Trinitarian logic. Jesus Christ was not a divided person, with what God was dwelling in one part of him but not in the other part because that other part was God. Lenski is correct that Jesus had to be a man: “Deity [what God is]...could not ‘dwell,’ ‘reside,’ in him if he had not become man.” Jesus was the created, fully human, Son of God, and what God was, all the character of God, dwelled in him, and could do so because he was a man, not God.

“all the fullness.” The Greek word “fullness” is πληρωμα (#4138 πληρωμα). The noun πληρωμα occurs 17 times in the New Testament, and has various meanings that all relate to the basic meaning of the word, which is “fullness.” For example, some of the things that it refers to are: to baskets full of food (Mark 6:43 and 8:20); to the full number of Gentiles (Rom. 11:12 and 25); to love being the “fullness” (i.e., fulfilling) of the Law (Rom. 13:10); to the full measure of a blessing (Rom. 15:29); to the fullness of the earth (1 Cor. 10:26); to a fulfilled time period (Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:10); to the Body being the fullness of Christ (Eph. 1:23); to the fullness of God that each believer has (Eph. 3:19); and to the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13).

Seeing the wide variety of subjects that “fullness” refers to shows us that we must understand the word in its context and from the scope of Scripture. Thus while Trinitarians want to assert that “all the fullness” means “everything God is,” it is clear that they are importing that meaning from their theology, because πληρωμα does not have...
to mean that. In this context plērōma means the same thing as it does in Ephesians 3:19, which says that each believer may be “filled with all the fullness [plērōma] of God.” Colossians 2:10 is saying Christ was filled with all the fullness of God, and the next verse, verse 11, says that we believers have what Christ had, and Ephesians 3:19 is saying that we should be, in a practical outward sense, filled with the plērōma of God also. In fact, it is very logical that since each believer has “Christ” in them (Col. 1:27), and is part of the “Body of Christ” (Eph. 5:30), and is in union with Christ (Rom. 3:3-6), and “in Christ” also partakes of the “fullness” (Col. 1:10), that the meaning of plērōma in these verses in Colossians refers to being filled with the character, power, and glory of God, just as Christ was. Reinier Schippers writes: “This fullness which is described in Col. 1:15-18 is entirely related to Christ’s cross (v. 20), death (v. 22), and resurrection (v. 18). For this reason believers also have this fullness in him (2:10). By his cross, death and resurrection they are reconciled through faith (2:12ff.), renewed, and made to participate in his triumph” (Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 740). There is no justification in saying that because the plērōma is in Christ, he must be God. If “all the fullness” of what God was, being in Christ, made him God, then the next verse (v. 10), would make us God also, because it says that we have that same fullness. No doubt plērōma was chosen carefully by God because of its meaning and use in the scope of Scripture (such as Ephesians 3:19), but also because of what it meant to the early Christians, because by the time Colossians was written (about 62 AD), some Christians were beginning to turn to Gnosticism.

“In Christian Gnosticism plērōma is a technical term for the totality of the 30 aeons. This totality is closest to God but is his product; he stands over it. The plērōma is the supreme spiritual world from which Jesus comes and into which the spiritual enter. Implied in the use of the term are the fullness and perfection of being. In the plural the aeons are called plērōmata, and plērōma is also used at times for the Gnostics’ angelic partners who help to carry them up into the spiritual world” (Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*).

The early Christian Gnostics were turning away from the simplicity of Christ and adding confusing mythology to the Gospel. Paul’s writing that all the plērōma dwelt in Christ was in essence saying that there was no point in looking anywhere else for spiritual knowledge, power, or fulfillment, because it all could be found in Christ.

“*what God is.*” The Greek is theōtēs (#2320 θεότης), which is an abstract noun for God (Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon*; Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of Theology*, Vol. 2, p. 86). Many versions translate it as “divine nature,” but Louw and Nida comment: “The expression ‘divine nature’ may be rendered in a number of languages as ‘just what God is like’ or ‘how God is’ or ‘what God is’ (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*). We thought that the translation “what God is” was very clear (ep. Stern, *Complete Jewish Bible*; “all that God is”). What it means for the fullness of the theōtēs to dwell in Christ has to be gleaned from the entire scope of Scripture, and not just the phrase or word itself, which is open to a number of interpretations. Gerhard Schneider notes: “The meaning of the Colossians passage is not entirely clear,” (Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 2, p. 143), and that is the reason for all the various interpretations of the phrase and the wide variety of ways it is translated. Thus different theologians have interpreted it to mean various things, including the will of God, divine grace and gift, and
even “the Church” itself, along with interpretations that can be found in many translations, such as Deity, divinity, Godhead, God, “God’s being,” “all that God is,” and “God’s nature.” What is clear from Scripture is that God gave Christ the gift of holy spirit and worked through him to accomplish His purposes. Thus, God was in Christ, reconciling the world (2 Cor. 5:20), and Jesus said, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.” This verse is not saying that Jesus was God, but rather the fullness of what God was in Christ—God’s character, power, and glory, resided in Christ, and now, as per verse 10, it resides in us, and our challenge is to allow it to show forth from our flesh bodies and walk like Christ walked. For more on theotēs (#2320 θεότης), see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, One God & One Lord.

2:10. “have been given that fullness.” The Greek of that phrase is the one word, plēroō (#4137 πληρέω), which is the verb form of the noun plēromā that occurs in verse nine. The idea of “that fullness” comes from the context. Although a strict translation of the verb would be, “you have been filled,” or “you have been given fullness [or “made full”]”, the “fullness” that we have have been given comes from our being in union with Christ (“in him”), and the fullness that Christ has is spoken of in verse nine. Since verses nine and ten are all part of the same sentence, it would likely have been better if they had not been two separate verses. The essence of the verses is: in Christ dwells all the fullness of what God is, and you [we] have been given that fullness because we are in union with him. The New American Bible has: “and you share in this fullness in him,” correctly understanding that it is “this fullness” that we have, not just any “fullness” as if the word could be separated from the context. We are able to have the fullness [For more on the meaning of “fullness,” see commentary on v. 9 above].

“by being in union with him.” The phrase “in him” refers to the union we have with Christ, which is in part due to being part of his Body (see commentary on Rom. 6:3; Col. 2:11). The italics are added to make the English clear.

2:11. “through union with him.” The preposition en, “in” [translated “through”] refers to a relationship, not a physical position (see commentary on Ephesians 1:3 and Romans 6:3). In this case, it is due to our being “in” union with Christ, but the reading “through” seemed much clearer in English (cp. Charles Williams, The New Testament, Cassirer, God’s New Covenant; Goodspeed’s translation). Another option of the translation would have been to repeat the pattern of verse 10, and saying, “by being in union with him.” This verse is making it clear that when we got born again, we became part of the Body of Christ and in union with Christ, a union that is so complete that we are said to be circumcised due to our “union with him.” The Christian was circumcised in Christ (Col. 2:11), crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20), died with Christ (Rom. 6:8), was buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4), and was raised with Christ (Eph. 2:6), and we are said to be already seated with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6; a future event; see commentary at that verse).

“made without hands.” The Greek word is acheiropoïētos (#886 ἀχειροποιητός), a compound word made up of the alpha privative, “not,” and the words for “hand” and “do, make.” It means, “not made by hands,” “made without hands,” “not done by hands,” etc. The Jews circumcised “by hand,” but God spiritually circumcises us (thus bringing us into the covenant; cp. Gen. 17:10-14).

“consisting of the removal of the body of flesh.” We must understand the emphasis on “body” in this verse. When the Jews performed circumcision, only the foreskin was
removed, the rest of the fleshly body remained—and caused problems. When Christians get born again, it is not just the foreskin that gets removed, but the whole fleshly body. Thus our circumcision in Christ is no ordinary circumcision! Our old man flesh nature is said to be removed (cp. Col. 3:3; “for you died”). Of course, scriptures such as Romans 7:13-25 and Galatians 5:16-18, as well as our daily experience of struggling with sin, show us that our sin nature is still alive and well, but the promise is that when we get our new bodies we will be rid of it. In the meantime, we Christians are to consider ourselves as dead to sin and not let sin reign in our bodies (Rom. 6:11, 12).

The word “removal” is the Greek apekdusis (#555 ἀπέκδυσις; pronounced, äp-ek'-doo-sis). It refers to stripping off clothes, then to removing something. Friberg’s Analytical Lexicon defines it “as an action, of clothes stripping off, undressing; figuratively, of believers being set free from their sinful nature through union with Christ putting off, removal (Col. 2:11).”

“by the circumcision of Christ.” This the instrumental dative of “in,” and the genitive, “of Christ” is a subjective genitive (cp. Lenski), pointing to the author, Christ. Meyer comments that it is “the circumcision which is produced through Christ” (Meyer’s Commentary; Colossians, p. 298). The phrase means, the circumcision we receive due to our being in union with Christ. It is by virtue of our being in union with Christ that our whole flesh body gets “circumcised,” removed. The circumcision of Christ in this verse does not refer to the circumcision he underwent as a baby. Now it is the job of each believer to walk in such a way as to manifest this circumcision in our lives.

2:12. “your baptism.” When a person is “baptized in holy spirit” (Acts 1:5; which is the “one baptism” of Eph. 4:5), that person is “saved,” “born again,” and has become a new creation. He is at that time in union with Jesus Christ (see commentary on Rom. 6:3), and via this union has been circumcised with Christ (Col. 2:11), crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20), died with Christ (Rom. 6:8), buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12), raised with Christ (Eph. 2:6), and will be seated with Christ in heaven (Eph. 2:6; see commentary there). Some scholars make the baptism in this verse Jesus’ baptism, but while his baptism made our union with him available, it was our baptism in holy spirit that made it a reality.

“through faith.” The idea is clearly that we have what we have because of our individual faith, but leaving out a modifier such as “your” before “faith” places the emphasis on “faith,” which is God’s provision, and not on what we have done to acquire salvation.

“out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. K. Wuest (Word Studies): “out from among the dead.”

2:13. “due to the transgressions.” The preferred Greek text is τοῖς παραπτώμασιν, a dative phrase which has the emphasis of “through,” or “by reason of” (Lightfoot), “due to” (Lenski). The Greek en in some Greek texts, which became part of the Textus Receptus, seems to be a scribal addition (see Lightfoot, Colossians; Robertson (Word Studies).) The Greek for “transgressions” is paraptoma (#3900 παράπτωμα) which is to “misstep,” “to fall by the wayside.” This “misstep” is not necessarily intentional, although it can be. Thus, in life, “trespasses,” are much more common than “sins.” Meanings of paraptoma include: “faults,” “deviations from truth,” “lapse,” “error,” “mistake,” “wrongdoing.” (See commentary on Eph. 1:7).
“uncircumcision of your flesh.” This is not referring to physical uncircumcision, as if that could keep someone from being saved. Jesus stated that “many” would come from the east and west (being uncircumcised Gentiles) and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven, but the “sons of the Kingdom” (i.e., the Jews who were chosen to be there and were physically circumcised) would be excluded (Matt. 8:11, 12). The “uncircumcision of your flesh” is the flesh nature that everyone has, and it is in union with Christ that we undergo a circumcision made without hands (Col. 2:11), and acquire a new nature and are righteous before God.

“having forgiven us.” The context thus far in the chapter has been “you,” but now Paul makes it “us,” thus showing that the forgiveness of God belongs to both Jews (of which Paul was one) and Gentiles.

2:14. “wiped clean.” The Greek is exaleipho (#1813 ἐξαλείψω; pronounced “ex-al-ā’-fō”), and in its basic meaning it refer to wiping something clean until no trace of what was written before exists, “to cause to disappear by wiping” (BDAG). In the ancient world, writing materials were scarce and expensive, so many of them were reused. Papyrus was sometimes washed clean and then re-written on.

...the verb used for “blotted out” is the technical term for “washing out” the writing from a papyrus sheet. So complete was the forgiveness which Christ by his work secured, that it completely cancelled the old bond, that had hitherto been valid against us...He made the bond as though it had never been (Exod. 32:23ff; Rev. 3:5)” (Vocabulary of the Greek Testament; Moulton & Milligan, p. viii.).

Some English versions read “erased,” and while that is not a bad translation, there were not pencils and erasers in the ancient world, so the reader may get the wrong impression. “Wiped out,” which some versions have, is fine if people do not get the wrong impression from the common use of “wipeout” today. The essence of what this is saying is the handwriting written against us is no longer there to be held against us—it is gone.

“handwritten document.” The Greek word is cheirographon (#5498 χειρόγραφον), a compound word made up of “hand,” and “writing.” It refers to a handwritten document. Many versions have something about debt, such as “certificate of debt” (HCSB), or “record of debt” (ESV), but that is reading too much into the text. While it is true that cheirographon is used in ancient literature of a bond of debt, it is also used of other things, including deposits, labor contracts, business agreements, and even authorization to act (cp. Lenski, Colossians, p. 114). Even if, as some theologians think, the Jews bound themselves to a debt in accepting the Law, the Gentiles did not. On the other hand, the Law made not only the Jews, but the whole world, guilty before God (Rom. 3:9-20). Furthermore, the Law was in a sense “God’s handwriting,” for it came by the mouth of God and then by the hand of God. (Exod. 20:1; Exod. 32:16). Not many people are aware that some of the Mosaic Law was spoken from the mouth of God directly to the people, but it was. (Exod. 19:9; 20:1; Deut. 4:10-13, 15, 36; 5:4-6, 22-27; 18:14-16; Heb. 12:18-21). The only reason God stopped speaking the Law to the people was that they asked Him to stop and to speak just to Moses (Exod. 20:19).

“which by means of regulations.” The two word dative phrase τοῖς δόγμασιν has been translated in numerous ways, and is the reason that almost every version varies in its translation of this verse. William Hendrickson (New Testament Commentary) has an extensive entry on “which by means of.” The thesis of the verse is that the handwritten
document that was against us (the Law) was hostile to us by means of all its regulations, which no one could keep (Rom. 3:20; 8:3; Gal. 3:11).

“regulations.” The Greek is *dogma* (#1378 δόγμα), a noun that occurs 5 times in the New Testament and means: a formal statement concerning rules or regulations that are to be observed; an imperial declaration, a decree; something that is taught as an established tenet or statement of belief, doctrine, dogma (BDAG). This word is used of the Law both here and in Ephesians 2:15. In this context, “regulations” is a good translation for the tenants of the Law (cp. note on Acts 16:4; cp. NIV).

“hostile.” The Greek word is *hupenantios* (#5227 ὑπεναντίος), and it means “against, opposed, contrary, hostile.” In this case, “hostile” seemed like a good translation, because while God in one sense meant the Law for good (Rom. 7:12; Gal. 3:24), He also knew that it would mean that everyone would become guilty when judged by its standards (Rom. 3:20; 8:3; Gal. 3:11), and therefore the Law brought a curse on people (Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26). Thus the Law is “hostile” (“openly against”) people, because there is no way to live by it and be safe from judgment and death.

“taken it away.” The Greek phrase is ἔρκεν ἐκ τοῦ µέσου, literally, “has taken it out of the midst (or middle).” This is a time when the Greek literature shows us that the phrase was used idiomatically for something being “removed” (cp. Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament, p. 308; Lightfoot, Colossians, p. 189, cp. Lenski). Jesus Christ took the Law, which was hostile to us due to all the regulations that we could not keep, and he “removed” it, he did away with it. By perfectly fulfilling the Law, Jesus nailed it to his cross when he was nailed to the cross, and when he died, we died to the regulations of the Law as a standard for righteousness.

2:15. “stripped naked.” The Greek word is *apekduomai* (#554 ἀπεκδύοµαι; pronounced “äp-ek-do’oh-my”). The key to understanding how to translate this word, indeed, the whole verse, is by paying attention to the whole verse and how the vocabulary interrelates. In this case, the words clearly refer to a Roman “Triumph,” the triumphal march (“parade”) that was held in Rome after a war that met specific conditions, such as adding territory to the Empire [For a much more complete description of a Triumph, see the note on 2 Cor. 2:14]. Once we understand the verse is referring to a Triumph, then many nuances of the verse, and many implications come to light.

The word *apekduomai* literally refers to taking off clothing, stripping off clothing (Friberg, Analytical Lexicon; BDAG; Liddell & Scott). Louw and Nida (Greek-English Lexicon) write: “To take off or strip off clothing; to undress, to disrobe, stripping off. ‘He stripped off the clothing of the rulers and authorities and made them a public spectacle’ (Col. 2.15). [The use in Colossians] appears to be a case of figurative usage, but it may refer to the stripping away of weapons and hence the removal of authority and power.”

It is also true, as BDAG points out, that the word can refer to “disarm,” and many versions read that way, but that is a secondary meaning, and furthermore it is difficult to see exactly how that would fit as well as “stripped” in this verse. If a person is stripped naked and chained as a prisoner in a Roman Triumph, of course he is also disarmed. On the other hand, to simply use the word “disarmed” does not fit the picture being painted by this verse, for the powers are not just “disarmed,” they are stripped, chained, and exposed to public view and ridicule.
Some commentators state that because the verb is in the middle voice that God stripped Himself in some way (cp. Wuest), but the middle is often used in an active sense and those arguments are well handled by Lenski, Hendrickson, Lange, Meyer, etc.

“(through him).” God has been in a war with Satan since Satan sinned, and the victory in that war has now been assured through the work of Christ even though every battle has not yet been fought. The Greek text puts the phrase at the end of the verse, but that makes the English read awkwardly. Of more concern is that the commentators and translators are divided as to whether the dative masculine pronoun (“him” or “it”) refers to Christ or to the “cross.” Many versions read “it,” while versions such as the Holman Christian Standard Bible, ESV, NASB, and Goodspeed’s translation, read “him,” and the scholars, both ancient and modern, are as divided as the versions. Both “cross” and “Christ” seem to make sense, and indeed it could be said that both Christ and the cross are vital to the victory. However, the use of the Greek ἐν αὐτῷ (“in him,” cp. v. 6, 7, 9, 10), “in whom” (v. 11, 12) has been consistent in this section in referring to Christ, not to something else, and it certainly is “in him,” (“in connection with him,” or “through him”) that God won the battle and was able to have the Triumph. Therefore, we believe that although the use of the pronoun retains the cross as an image in the background, the light is clearly cast on Christ himself and all that he did and accomplished.

“made a public spectacle.” The Greek word is deigmatizō (#1165 δειγματίζω; pronounced; “dag-mā-tee’-zō”), and it refers to disgracing someone in public. It is only used twice in the New Testament, the other time being when Joseph found out that Mary was pregnant, and did not want to disgrace her publicly, but wanted to divorce her privately (Matt. 1:19). Being paraded through the streets of Rome in chains (and usually stripped naked), was the ultimate public disgrace, and slavery or death, often in the arena, came shortly after the Triumph procession. In fact, the Roman historian Plutarch wrote that when Antony and Cleopatra lost the war with Octavian, and Octavian wanted Cleopatra to be a prisoner in his Triumph, Cleopatra committed suicide. Nonetheless, Octavian had an effigy of Cleopatra made and included that in his Triumph. In the context of the Roman Triumph, the translation “made a public spectacle” is a fitting translation (cp. NAB, NIV, NKJV).

“leading them as captives in a Triumph procession.” The Greek word is thriambeuō (#2358 θριαμβεύω); pronounced “three-am-byoo’-ō”), and it means to lead someone in a Roman Triumph procession. The words “as captives” were added to insure that the reader did not think that “to lead” simply meant “to go in front of,” but rather “to lead” as someone might lead a dog down the street on a leash. Lightfoot (Colossians) writes that the word is “wrongly translated in the A.V. [KJV], ‘causes us to triumph.’” He goes on to say “....it is the defeated powers of evil...who are led in public, chained to the triumphal car of Christ.”

We can see that it is tempting to remove the Triumph from the verse and turn it into a general reference of how God “triumphed” (“won”) over the forces of evil, and it does certainly make the verse easier to read for those Christians who do not know what a Roman “Triumph” is. However, although God did defeat the powers of evil, that is not what the verse is saying, and omitting the Triumph from the verse causes it to lose much of its meaning.

That the powers of evil are led in a Triumph means, among other things, that they have been totally defeated. They have no weapons, in fact, no clothes. Who and what
they are can be seen by everyone. They are chained and powerless. Their evil deeds are known, and they are being publicly disgraced for who they are and what they have done. Furthermore, their future holds nothing but more disgrace and destruction.

As part of every Triumph, the conquering general rode in a chariot, gloriously dressed and receiving the accolades of the crowd. While this verse confirms that the victory is “through him,” through Christ, it does not specifically refer to all the glory and honor Christ will receive, although that certainly is part of the analogy. Also, in every Triumph, the general’s army followed him, enjoying the fruits of victory. By using the analogy of the Triumph, we Christians are known to be enjoying the fruits of victory, even though that, like the glory the general receives, is not specifically stated.

2:16. “Sabbath day.” When it comes to the Sabbath, verses such as Colossians 2:16, 17, and Romans 14:5, as well as what was apparently practiced and taught in the first century, show that while rest and respecting God are important, God has not designated a day of rest for the Church even though He had designated the Sabbath to be specially respected by Israel.

To properly understand the Bible, one of the things we must know is that from time to time God changed the rules by which He governed mankind. This means that to live in obedience to God the proper question to ask is not, “What did God say?” but rather, “What does God say that applies to me?” For example, God said to Adam and Eve to eat only plants (Gen. 1:29). Later, He changed that rule and so now we can eat meat without breaking God’s command. Similarly, after Jesus’ resurrection, God changed the rule about the Sabbath.

God set the pattern for the Sabbath by Himself resting on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2). However, He never commanded people to rest on the seventh day until the Exodus when He gave the Mosaic Law, and there is no evidence from Scripture or history that the patriarchs such as Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob observed a Sabbath, which meant for the first 2,600 years of human history people did not keep the Sabbath. When God gave the Ten Commandments, however, He commanded Israel to keep the Sabbath (Exod. 20:8-11). The fact that this was a new rule is clear in part from the fact that God had to explain what it meant to keep the Sabbath and why the Jews were to keep it. Thus He took three verses in the Ten Commandments to explain it, whereas most commandments were very short, such as “You shall not murder” (Exod. 20:13). However, when the Christian Church started on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), God changed the rules for believers and no longer required them to keep the Sabbath.

It is clear in the Mosaic Law that God commanded the Israelis to keep the Sabbath, and was serious enough about it that He commanded that Sabbath breakers be put to death (Exod. 31:14). Moses obeyed God’s command and executed a Sabbath breaker (Num. 15:32-36). Although there is no other record of a leader putting a person to death for breaking the Sabbath, that does not mean that it did not happen. Nehemiah did not execute Sabbath breakers, but treated them harshly (Neh. 13:15-21). At the time of Christ, the Pharisees were very concerned about protecting the Sabbath and Jesus never reproved them for that. He only reproved them for making unreasonable rules about what activities, such as healing, violated the Sabbath.

Because in the Old Testament and Gospels keeping the Sabbath was a command of God, it was appropriate to “judge” people who did not keep it. But Colossians says not to let people judge us about the Sabbath, which would only be the case if God’s laws
about the Sabbath changed. Colossians also points out that the Sabbath was a shadow, but
the body who casts the shadow is Christ.

Another reason we know that Christians do not have to keep the Sabbath is from
the record in Acts. When the Jewish believers in Jerusalem decided what regulations the
Gentile converts should follow, they never mentioned keeping the Sabbath (Acts 15:24-
29). Similarly, although Peter, and especially Paul, taught the new Christians many
things, there is not one record where they taught people to keep the Sabbath. This is
especially important when Paul started reaching Gentiles. It could be argued that when he
went into synagogues and taught Jews that they were already keeping the Sabbath, but by
the end of Acts, when Paul was going to the Gentiles, it seems that if they needed to keep
the Sabbath it would have been mentioned at least once. He certainly spoke about being
obedient and holy in the context of many other behaviors.

Christians do not have a specific Sabbath to keep, but we should “rest” in Christ
every day.

2:17. “body.” The Greek word is “body,” σῶμα (σῶµα), and this is an example of
a verse that can be very confusing if it is translated literally, as it is in the KJV, “the body
is of Christ.” This verse is painting a picture using the word “body,” and the “shadow”
that is cast by the body. We all experience this when we walk in the sun. Our bodies cast
a shadow. The regulations of the Law about such things as eating and drinking, feasts and
fasts, etc. were only a “shadow,” they were not the “body,” the substance, the “real thing”
if you will. The body (reality) that casts the shadow is Christ’s. We thought it was best to
translated “body” literally, but to do so and make the verse understandable by English
readers we really need to add italics.

2:18. “disqualify you for the prize.” The Greek word is katabrabeúō (#2603
cαταβραβεύω; pronounced “ka-ta-bra-byoo'-ō”), and there are many different ways it can
be translated. In fact, this verse has a number of words that can be translated in different
ways, which explains the large number of variations among our English versions.

As Hendrickson and many other commentators point out, this word refers to the
judgment of a judge or umpire who would make a decision or judgment against someone.
In this case, the idea would be that someone who did not believe in Christ, and thus the
actions and beliefs of the Colossian Christians, would declare them to be disqualified.
Lenski writes:

“This pictures the man who awards the prize in the athletic contests and denies
this prize to the true Christians in Colosse, and does this mean thing in the way
and on the grounds now stated. Paul says: ‘Let no man do this sort of thing to
you,’ i.e., disregard him who tries it, laugh at him; the prize is yours whatever
decision the fellow may hand down.”

We see that meaning of katabrabeúō represented in translations such as the NET
Bible: “Let no one who delights in humility and the worship of angels pass judgment on
you.” Based on that meaning of the word, one thing this verse pictures is people telling us
we are not qualified when in fact we are, and we need to learn not to believe them. Far
too often Christians are discouraged in their Christian beliefs and activities because
unbelievers mock or disparage them.

Lightfoot points out that katabrabeúō can also refer to a fellow-competitor trying
to hinder us. What often happens in life is that this person who passes judgment on us
gets us to believe him, and we start to follow his ways, which does lead to us being
disqualified for the prize. In light of this, the translation, “Let no one disqualify you for the prize” (NIV; cp. HCSB, ESV, NRSV) is a good one. We are not to let people tell us we are not qualified, and we are certainly not to follow their disobedient ways and become “disqualified.” Here is an example of God packing a paragraph of meaning into one word, and the essence of the verse, in a very expanded form, is: “Let no one say, or try to convince you, that you are disqualified for the prize, and do not follow what they are doing and thus become disqualified.”

“by delighting in.” The Greek is thelōn en (θέλων ἐν). The commentators and versions differ on what this phrase means in this verse. Although the root word refers to “will” or “want,” which leads to translations such as “voluntary” (KJV); “doing his own will” (Darby); or “chooses to” (NJB), Lightfoot and many others show that the phrase is used to refer to delighting in, or taking pleasure in, doing something. Lightfoot notes: “The expression is common in the LXX [the Septuagint; the Greek Old Testament],” and he notes there is no valid reason not to understand it that way, as “delighting in” or “devoting himself to.”

“false humility.” The Greek word is simply tapeinophrosunē (#5012 ταπεινοφροσύνη) “humility.” Humility is generally considered to be a wonderful virtue, so here it obviously refers to a “false humility” (NIV), or unnecessary actions that are supposed to demonstrate humility (cp. “asceticism” (ESV); “self-abasement” (NASB)). The REV adds the word “false” in italics to make the meaning plain. Many religious people do things that demonstrate their humility that are unnecessary in the Christian faith, and can even derail the freedom we have in Christ by emphasizing works rather than faith and grace.

Many commentators have pointed out that in this specific context humility and the worship of angels are likely connected because the person who was so quick to judge others was trying to create the impression that he considered himself (or mankind) too lowly to approach God, but “humbly” tried to contact Him through the mediation of angels (cp. Hendrickson).

Using angels as mediators to reach God would make perfect sense in the Patron-Client culture of the Roman world. Dignitaries and powerful people were almost always contacted through intermediaries, not directly. This also helps explain the worship of angels. Although there are likely many reasons to worship angels, part of the ritual behavior of the Patron-Client society is that when someone in a more influential position (the “Patron”) helps you, you return the favor by praising and extolling that person, particularly to others.

It certainly seems that the meaning of this verse includes someone who appears very humble by using angels and mediaries to “get to God,” and worshipping those angels in return, all the while asserting that we mere humans are not good enough to approach God. This “humility” and worship may confuse some people, but the knowledgeable Christian is not deceived. We are to approach Jesus and God directly, and worship only them. In spite of the clear directives about that in the Word of God, many people today pray to saints instead of God, often asking the saints to procure the favor of God for them.

“The worshipping of angels.” The Greek phrase is thrēskeia tôn aggelōn (θρησκεία τῶν ἄγγελων). The phrase seems simple and straightforward, referring to the people worshipping angels. The definite article before “angels” is evidence that the word “angel”
is not used as an adjective or in a descriptive manner (“angelic piety.” or “worship practiced by angels”). Neither is there a need to see here the figure hendiadys (Bullinger, Figures), who would make the phrase “the religious humility of angels.” If that were the case, it would seem that the humility of angels would be something to aspire to, not something to be warned about.

Colossians goes to great lengths to establish the pre-eminence of Christ and that he is above all (cp. 1:15-20, 22, 28; 2:8, 9, 17). Furthermore, there is historical evidence that supports that angel worship was going on in the area of Colosse (cp. Hendrickson, New Testament Commentary). The Church Father Irenaeus, who lived in the second century AD, who historians believe came from Smyrna in the Roman province of Asia (modern Izmir, Turkey) not far from Colosse, mentioned “angelic invocations” in his writing, so it was going on in the culture (Irenaeus, Against Heresies; Book II, chapt. 32.5).

Even today there are very dedicated Christians who love God but who venerate angels and saints, so the idea that it was going on in Colosse when it was part of the native culture should not surprise us. In fact, that God does not ignore it but instead makes a point about it should show us that prayer to saints and veneration of saints and angels is not “harmless,” but a sin in the eyes of God.

“*taking his stand on what he has seen.*” The Greek is ᾃ ἑόρακεν ἐµβατεύων (ἃ ἑόρακεν ἐµβατεύων), a phrase that has led to “well nigh endless discussion” (Hendrickson, New Testament Commentary). The word ἐµβατεύω (#1687 ἐµβατεύω; “taking his stand”) occurs only here in the New Testament. Sir William Ramsay seems to have solved the problem about what ἐµβατεύω means due to its being found in inscriptions in the Temple of Apollo, and he wrote extensively on it. It refers to being fully initiated into a mystery religion and then taking a stand on what you know (Ramsay, The Teaching of St. Paul in Terms of the Present Day, p. 289-299).

The word ἐµβατεύω, which ordinarily means “to enter” or “to set foot on,” was used in a technical sense in the mystery religions of those who entered into full initiation and then took a stand on what they knew (they also apparently physically stood on something in the initiation).

Ramsay writes:

The Colossians are warned by Paul against someone, probably a known individual, who is cheating them of the prize of Christian life. Such a one would not be an outward enemy, misleading or harassing them. He is evidently a person that endangers the success of their Christian life by spreading false teaching among them as one of their own number; he had a wrong conception of the nature of the Christianity which he professed, being swayed by his older religious ideas and philosophic theories; and his influence was leading astray the minds of others. [Ramsay adds whether it was one individual or a group of people who held the same misconceptions].

The force of verse 18 is conditioned by its relation to 8 and 16. The whole passage, 8-19, consists of three connected and parallel warnings: (8) “See that there shall be no one who takes you captive by philosophy and empty illusion, after the tradition of men, after the elemental powers or rulers of the world, and not after Christ....” (16), “Let no one, then, make himself a judge (or critic), of you in meat and drink, or in respect of festival days: which are a shadow of things
future, but the body that casts the shadow is Christ’s.” (18) “Let no one cozen you of the prize of your life-race, finding satisfaction in self-humiliation and worshipping of angels, ‘taking his stand on’ what he has seen (in the Mysteries), vainly puffed up by his unspiritual mind, and not keeping firm hold on [Christ] the Head.”


“joints and ligaments.” The Body owes its functionality partly due to its articulation (joints), partly to the way it stays together (ligaments). The joints and ligaments join and hold together the members of the body.

2:20. “Since.” The Greek word ei (#1487 εἰ) usually means “if;” but in some contexts it can mean “since.” Friberg’s Lexicon states that in some cases, ei “express a condition of fact regarded as true or settled; since, because.” R.C. H. Lenski referred to it as the “if of reality” (cp. his note on Col. 3:1). E. W. Bullinger (Lexicon, “if”) wrote that it: “assumes the hypothesis as an actual fact, the condition being unfulfilled, but no doubt being thrown on the supposition.” Other verses that have ei used in the sense of “because” or “since” include Romans 6:8, Colossians 3:1. (Cp. NIV translation, “Since...”).

“pestered by.” This is a passive verb. It is not middle as most versions translate it. The Colossians were not “submitting themselves” (middle) to regulations. They were being pressured to submit to them (passive), as we all often are (Cp. Lenski).

“regulations.” The Greek is the verb, the noun in verse 14 (see commentary there).

2:22. “doctrines.” The Greek word is didaskalia (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse we felt “doctrine” was better than “teaching.” [For more on didaskalia, see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13].

2:23. “but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.” There are differences of opinion among commentators as to how this last phrase in verse 23 needs to be understood and translated. However, most modern commentators fall into one of two major camps. In the REV translation above, the translation “in stopping” comes from the Greek preposition pros, which, like most Greek prepositions, is very flexible and has multiple definitions. In fact, it is pros that is at the heart of the two major ways this last phrase of Colossians 2:23 has been interpreted. If the pros is seen as having the sense of “against,” as the majority of the modern versions and the REV represent it, then we end up with a translation similar in impact to the REV translation, “but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh” (cp. HCSB, ESV, NASB, NIV, RSV, NRSV). Although the use of pros in the sense of “against” is not its most common use of pros, the grammar of the verse seems to support it, which is why the majority of the modern translations favor it.

If, however, pros is understood to mean, “to, towards,” i.e., “with a view to,” which is its most common meaning, then the translations by Hendriksen, Williams (New Testament), and the NET would be the better translations. The NET reads: “Even though they have the appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship and false humility achieved by an unceasing treatment of the body— a wisdom with no true value— they in reality result in fleshly indulgence.” Hendriksen’s translation reads: “Regulations of this kind, though, to be sure, having a reputation for wisdom because of their self-imposed
ritual, humility, and unsparking treatment of the body, are of no value whatever, (serving only) to indulge the flesh.”

The translations by Hendriksen, Williams, and the NET, make a very important point, that regulating the flesh to somehow be right in the sight of God is not valuable in and of itself, but in fact serves only to indulge the flesh. The translation in the REV, while not making that point as clearly, show that regulation of the flesh does not stop the indulgence of the flesh. True! Fleshly regulations to not stop the indulgence of the flesh, in fact, they indulge the flesh. The “humble” and “disciplined” people who were trying to influence the Colossians were actually filled with pride. They rejected God’s grace and His simple truth about Jesus Christ, and piled on regulations and extra things to believe, trying to show themselves humble by their learning and disciple. Like the leaders among the Jews, they “load people with loads that are grievous to carry” (Luke 11:46). It is only pride and arrogance that leads people from the simplicity of Jesus Christ and salvation by faith. Furthermore, rules that supposedly produce righteousness in the sight of God by governing the flesh are really only an indulgence of the flesh.

A first-century Christian reading the Greek would see both definitions of pros as applying, and indeed they do, making the verse a kind of amphibologia (double entendre), in which we can see that fleshly regulations do not stop the indulgence of the flesh, they actually indulge the flesh.

Chapter 3

3:2. “Keep thinking about.” The Greek verb phroneō (φρονέω; pronounce fro-nay’-oh), means to think about something, give careful consideration to something, form an opinion about something. Here it is present tense, imperative mood, so it means “keep thinking about,” not think about something just one time or simply form an opinion about it. Our minds are always active, and we are always thinking about something. God commands that we keep thinking about heavenly things and the things of God.
3:4. “your.” There is good textual support for “your,” which is why almost all the modern versions follow that translation. Commentators suggest that Christ is called “your” life because now the Gentiles are included in Christ, whereas under the Law they were excluded. Thus, by saying “your life,” Paul is emphasizing that the Gentiles were included in Christ.
3:5. “and especially greed (which is idolatry).” In most English versions it is unclear if the word “idolatry” refers to the whole list of things in Colossians 3:5, or just the last item, “greed.” Thankfully however, the Greek text is clearer, and from it we can see that the word “idolatry” refers only to the last thing on the list, “greed.” We have tried to make that point clear in the REV.

Before we begin to discuss greed being idolatry, we should discuss if “greed” is the proper translation. Some versions have “covetousness” (ESV, KJV, RSV, YLT), while others have “greed” (HCSB, NASB, NET, NIV). In translating the Bible, our intent must be to try to duplicate the meaning of the original language (in this case, Greek), in the receptor language (in this case, English). While that sounds easy, it is actually often exceedingly difficult. This is due to many factors, one being that most Greek words
(indeed, most words in every language) do not have a singular meaning, but rather a range of meanings, which is referred to as the “semantic range” of the word. This means that the task of the translator becomes one of finding which English word has a semantic range that most closely matches the semantic range of the Greek word, and that often becomes a judgment call rather than a clear choice.

In this case, the Greek word that is translated “greed” or “covetousness” is pleonexia (Strong’s #4124 πλεονεξία), and it refers to a person desiring to have more than he needs, or more than his share. The English word “greed” is a selfish and excessive desire to have more than one needs. In contrast, the English word “covetousness” has two primary definitions. The first is simply to have a strong desire for something, apart from any reference to need, or to the abundance one already has, as in “I greatly covet winning the blue ribbon.” This definition of covet can be good or evil, depending on the context in which it is used. The second definition of covet is always evil and refers to wanting something that belongs to someone else, as in, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife” (Exod. 20:17). Upon studying the English words “greed” and “covetousness,” it seems clear that the word “greed” is a better match to pleonexia than “covetousness.”

It is not the entire list of sins in Colossians 3:5 that is idolatry, but only the last item on the list; greed. R. C. H. Lenski and J. Lightfoot both point out in their commentaries that the Greek construction of the sentence makes that clear. Thus we should understand that the Word of God teaches that greed is idolatry. By selfishly desiring to take and/or acquire more than we need, we are elevating ourselves in an unhealthy way. Greed makes us the center of our attention: we spend our money, time, and energy on ourselves, when the Word of God says to seek God and His kingdom first (Matt. 6:33). There are different reasons for greed, but one of them is certainly not trusting God to take care of us. Furthermore, a hurtful aspect of greed is that the greedy person is not sensitive to the needs of those who are less fortunate, and who could use what he is needlessly accumulating.

God says greed is idolatry, which alerts us to another important aspect of greed: it is a heart issue, not a “things” issue. Having great wealth is not necessarily “greed,” and there are certainly wonderful people in the Bible who were wealthy, including Abraham and David. True greed is an issue of the heart that is evidenced in the flesh, so we cannot just look at how much a person owns and decide the person is greedy. Idolatry is always an issue of the heart, and sometimes the idol is clearly manifested in the senses world for all to see, while sometimes it is not.

Greedy people who end up with lots of material goods can seem to have confidence or peace from a fleshly perspective, but from God’s perspective, they are really hurting themselves. “I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner” (Ecc. 5:13). It is specifically because earthly wealth promises things like power and safety, but in the end does not deliver those things, that the Bible twice mentions “the deceitfulness of wealth” (Matt. 13:22; Mark 4:19). Wealth is deceitful because it promises much but delivers little. The only true fulfillment for the heart, come from God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3:6. “is coming.” The present tense would normally be understood as “is now coming,” but the wrath of God that is coming is mainly coming in the future. This is what Greek grammarians refer to as a “gnomic present,” a general use of the present tense to
represent something without a specific reference to when. The present tense is also used because there is indeed a sense in which ungodly people are under the wrath of God at this time (cp. Rom. 1:18).

“upon the sons of disobedience.” This phrase is omitted in many early manuscripts, and thus left out of many versions. Its omission would cause the reader to want to complete the thought, and the parallel in Ephesians 5:6 is a ready source for completion, which would explain how it could have been added if the original did not have it. However, there is enough evidence for it that it is left in brackets in the UBS and NA Greek texts, and it does seem to need to be there since verse 7 has “you also.”

3:8. “even you.” The commentators differ as to what the words καὶ ὑμεῖς in this verse refer to, which accounts for the many differences in the way this verse is translated. We thought that it most likely represented the fact that the believers of Colosse were to not do any of the things Paul was about to list, and not to think that they could overlook cleaning themselves of them. Too many times believers do not get truly serious about living godly lives, and give themselves a “pass” on things like anger and shameful speech.

“defaming speech.” The Greek noun is blasphēmia (#988 βλασφημία; pronounced blas-fay-me'-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmia, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

“dirty talk.” The Greek word is hard to define, and this verse would be a good place to argue for an expanded translation. (#148 aischrologia; αἰσχρολογία). Vulgar, low, obscene, abusive, shameful, foul, abusive, etc. all fit. “Obscene, shameful speech involving culturally disapproved themes - vulgar speech, obscene speech, dirty talk (Louw-Nida). “Speech of a kind that is generally considered in poor taste, obscene speech, dirty talk. Aischrologia might properly be defined as story-telling involving such unseemly deeds as adultery or pederasty” (BDAG).

3:9. “Never.” The “never” comes from the present imperative of “not.” It is more than just “do not lie.” For one thing, notice how lying is not in the list of sins in verse 8, but is listed separately and has its own imperatives. Lying is a very harmful and hurtful sin that cannot be a part of a Christian’s life.

“since you have put off.” At first reading this seems to be a kind of built in contradiction, for if you have put off the old man and its practices, why do you need to be told not to lie? We have put off the old man nature in a spiritual sense, for we have died in Christ. However, our flesh and old nature still exert an influence in our lives, and we must be aggressive to live in the flesh in a way that matches the work that Christ has done in us.

3:11. “barbarian.” The Greeks were very proud and prejudiced, and thought of others who did not speak Greek as only saying, “bar-bar.” Hence the onomatopoetic word, “barbarian” to describe one who was not familiar with Greek language and culture, and thus “uncivilized,” no matter how highly educated or morally cultured they actually were. Thus, “barbarian” as an English translation does a disservice. “Foreigner” will usually do, but in this case, it is contrasted with “Scythian” who were considered savage and barbaric even to “uncivilized” foreigners. “The savageness of the Scythians was proverbial” (Lightfoot, Colossians, p. 218).
3:12. “clothe yourselves.” The Greek means to put on clothes, or apparel, thus, “to dress,” and the middle voice indicates that we are to clothe ourselves. We have freewill, and if we are going to be like Christ by being compassionate, kind, humble, etc., we have to make a diligent effort. We can pray all we want to for God to make us like Christ, and He will help, but we have to do a lot of work also.

3:13. “must forgive.” The verb is not supplied, and although not completely necessary and therefore not necessarily an ellipsis, nevertheless, it seems logical to supply the verb, as many English versions do. Even those English versions which do not supply the verb “forgive,” often add words so the English reads easily. The Greek text is quite abbreviated, ο ull tò ò kai ù mé tò; literally, “so also you.” Even the KJV adds the word “do” to help complete the sense: “so also do ye.”

3:14. “bond of perfection.” The Greek is sundesmos tês tekei tòs (sundesmos tès tekei tòs), where sundesmos is a bond, something that hold things together, and is tekei tòs “perfection,” or “perfectness.” The Greek noun translated “perfection” is telei tòs (#5047 τελειοτής), and it means “perfection; perfectness; completion, maturity.” It refers to bringing something to a goal or an end state. Its root word is telos (#5056; goal, finish, thus that which has reached its goal or end). Putting telei tòs in the genitive case creates a couple different meanings, each of them true. When one phrase can be read in at least two different ways, and both are true, it is the figure of speech amphibologia (cp. Bullinger, Figures of Speech). There is no doubt that when God inspired Paul to write, He knew He was making a sentence with multiple meanings, and now it is our joy to understand everything that God has packed into the verse.

One way of reading the Greek phrase “bond of perfection,” is to see it as the figure of speech antimereia, in this case where a descriptive word (an adjective) is put in the nominative case as the subject of a genitive phrase. This is done for emphasis because in a sentence nouns naturally have more emphasis than adjectives. As an antimereia, the phrase means “perfect bond,” meaning that love is the perfect bond that unites all the godly attributes and also the people. Versions that have a reading such as “perfect bond” include the HCSB; ESV; NET; NIV; NJB; and NRSV.

Besides being read as an antimereia, the genitive can also be understood to be a genitive of character, specifically production, and thus the phrase would mean that love is the “bond that produces perfection.” Hendriksen points out that this seems to be the most natural reading of the text based on the Epistle of Colossians itself. For example, in 2:2 Paul wants the Colossians to be united in love. He also point out the epistle points people away from the false teachers’ ideas of philosophy and knowledge, and also obedience to human regulations, and points instead to love as being what will strengthen and unite the people and lead them to where they want to go. He writes: “Love, then, is ‘bond of perfection’ in the sense that it is that which unites believers, causing them to move forward toward the goal of perfection.”

No doubt both meanings are true. Love is both that which unites and binds things together, and it is also that which leads us on to perfection, and indeed, helps us along the way to reach that goal. Given that, we felt it was best to leave the ambiguity of the Greek text in the English translation, and have it read, the “bond of perfection.”

3:16. “psalms.” The Greek word is psalmos (#5568 ψαλμός), and although the general meaning of the Greek word is a song of praise, in this context it no doubt refers to the
psalms of the Old Testament, which have brought comfort and inspiration to generation after generation of believers.

“hymns.” The Greek word is *humnos* (5215 ὑμνος), and in the Greek culture it was used of a song that praised gods and heroes. As it was used by Christians it referred to songs that praised and exalted God and Jesus Christ, extolling them and what they had done.

“songs.” The Greek word is *odē* (#5603 ὠδή; pronounced, “O-day”). In Greek, *odē* was wider in meaning than *psalmos* or *humnos*, and referred to any song, ode, or even poems. Thus it was important to put the adjective “spiritual” with the word *odē* in order to properly delimit it for the believers. Far too many Christians spend time and money listening to music that is contrary to Christian beliefs, morals, and practices. It is important that we notice that this verse, which speaks of the word of Christ dwelling in us “richly,” is immediately conjoined with music. Music exerts a powerful influence on what we believe and how we act, and Christians must pay serious attention to what they hear.

3:18. “submit yourselves.” The Greek verb *hupotassō* (#5293 ὑποτάσσω) means to be subordinate, submit to, be subject to, to yield to one’s admonition or advice. While the verb has the same form in both the passive and middle voice, it makes the most sense that this verse is middle voice, the women are to submit themselves out of their freewill (cp. Robertson, *Grammar*; Lenski, *Colossians*).

“fitting.” The Greek verb is *anekō* (#433 ἀνήκω), and it means fitting, proper, appropriate.

“in the Lord.” This is the common phrase and concept, sometimes represented by the Greek preposition *en* and sometime by *eis*, that indicates “in connection with the Lord” or sometimes even “in union with the Lord” (cp. commentary Rom. 6:3). It is very important when reading Colossians that we notice that when it comes to wives submitting and children obeying (v. 20), these things are to be done “in the Lord,” that is, in connection with the Lord. Thus, of the “wives” (v. 18), “husbands” (v. 19), and children (v. 20), only the verse about wives (v. 18) and the verse about children (v. 20) have the phrase “in the Lord.” The middle verse, about husbands (v. 19), does not have the phrase “in the Lord” because the husband is not being asked to submit to or obey a fallible human being.

Whenever someone is asked to submit to or obey another person, it is always upon the condition that what they are asked to do is right and godly. Thus, the woman submits, and children obey, “in connection with the Lord, Jesus Christ.” These verses (18 and 20) are not saying that it is fitting to the Lord that women and children submit or obey, no questions asked. Husbands have a responsibility to make sure that if their wives are being submissive, that they are being godly in their leadership, not worldly, asking things of their wives that Jesus would not approve of. Similarly, parents have a responsibility before God to make sure that what they ask their children to do is godly, not sinful in any way. In accordance with this verse, wives have a responsibility not to submit to requests that are clearly outside the will of God, and children have a responsibility to not obey if the requests of the parents are clearly outside the will of God. Since Christians expect to be able to live by the Bible they read, it is unfortunate that the same phrase at the end of verses 18 and 20, “in the Lord” (*ἐν κυρίῳ*), is almost always correctly translated “in the Lord” in verse 18 in our English Bibles, but is almost always
translated differently in those same English Bibles at the end of verse 20. For example, the HCSB, ESV, NIV, and RSV, all end verse 20 by saying: “for this pleases the Lord.” The KJV, NAB, NJB, and YLT end the verse in ways that are similar in meaning. But this makes the verse say that it pleases the Lord when children obey, no questions asked, which is not at all what the verse is saying. God saw fit to put the conditional phrase “in the Lord” at the end of the verses about wives and children, and English translators should represent that in their translations.

The phrase “in the Lord” governs the verse instead of modifying a specific word. It brings the concept, “in connection with the Lord,” into the verse. Thus, we could translate verse 18 into English as it is, with the phrase at the end, but the meaning would be the same if we said, “In the Lord, wives submit...,” or “Wives, in the Lord, submit....,” or “Wives, submit yourselves, in the Lord, to....” That the phrase “in the Lord” governs the verse instead of modifying a specific word in the verse occurs in some other places in the NT as well as here. For example, Ephesians 5:8 says, “for you were once darkness, but now, in the Lord, you are light.” The idea is that it is only “in the Lord,” in association or union with the Lord, that we are light. Various versions place the phrase in different places in the verse, most having “in the Lord” at the very end of the verse. In Colossians 3:19, concerning the children, the phrase “in the Lord” is also a governing phrase instead of just modifying a single word in the verse. For more on submission, see the commentary notes on Ephesians 5:21 and 22.

3:19. “do not be harsh with them.” This phrase is seen by some commentators (cp. Lenski, Hendriksen) to be the figure of speech litotes (also called miosis), or “belittling.” In other words, the phrase is placed in the negative “do not be” so that we will see it in a much larger, and more positive, light. In that case, although the vocabulary says, “do not be harsh,” our hearts say, “be totally good, kind, and considerate.”

3:20. “in the Lord.” This verse is not saying, as so many versions say, that when Children obey it is “pleasing to the Lord.” While it is true that if the parent’s request is godly, it is pleasing to the Lord when the child obeys, the point of saying “in the Lord” in this verse is that sometimes parents ask children to do things that are clearly outside the will of God, but children are only required to obey when the parents are “in the Lord.” See commentary on “in the Lord” in 3:18.

3:21. “exasperate.” The Greek verb is erethizō (#2042 ἐρεθίζω), and it means to stir up, excite, stimulate, to provoke. A person can be stirred up for good (2 Cor. 9:2), or, as in this verse, in an evil sense. The essence of the verse is that fathers should not stir up their children by unjust or evil treatment, and thus “exasperate” fits well here (cp. HCSB). The Greek-English Lexicon by Louw and Nida has: “do not cause your children to become resentful,” which catches the sense well also.

3:22. “masters.” The Greek is kurios (#2962 κύριος), “lords,” the same Greek word as “Lord” in verses 18 and 20. However, here it is properly translated “masters,” referring to the earthly owners of slaves, whereas in verses 18 and 20 it refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. The word kurios was used in a large number of ways in the Greco-Roman world, and referred to one who had authority. Thus, Lord, master, owner, are all good translations depending on the context, and when used in direct address, it was used like we use the word “sir” today (cp. Matt. 27:63). God is called “Lord” (Matt. 1:20, 22); a slave owner was called “lord” (Matt. 10:24); a landowner was referred to as “lord” (Matt.
13:27; 20:8; 21:40); a father was sometimes called “lord” by his children (Matt. 21:30); and Jesus Christ is called “Lord.”

“not only to win their approval when their eye is on you.” See commentary on Ephesians 6:6, where the same phrase is used.

“soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is ἰσχί (5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here “soul” is inclusive of the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the person himself; in other words, “work with all that is within you,” which is why some versions have “heartily.” The verse could read, “Whatever you do, work from your soul, like you are working for the Lord and not for people.” [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

3:24. “the reward, namely, the inheritance.” The Greek reads, “the reward of the inheritance,” which is a genitive of apposition (a way to structure the genitive of apposition is, “the reward, that is to say, the inheritance”). The NIV gets the sense of this passage, and it reads, “you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.” In this verse, the “inheritance” we receive from God for the good works we have done is called an “inheritance.” This helps explain difficult verses such as Galatians 5:21 and Ephesians 5:5, that say that flagrant sinners will not “inherit” the Kingdom of God. People are saved by faith in Christ and not by works, and every saved person sins. However, there is more to the future than just salvation. People who serve God will get a reward, an inheritance, while people who do not serve God will get no reward or inheritance. [For the permanence of salvation for Christians, see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation”. For the difference between salvation and rewards, and what some rewards may be, see commentary on 1 Cor. 5:10. To see why some people may get no rewards, see commentary on 1 Cor. 3:13, 15].

“paid back.” This is from the Greek antapodosis (#469 ἀνταπόδοσις), which only occurs here in the New Testament, but which Lightfoot points out is common word in both the Septuagint and the Greek classical writers. He says, “The double compound involves the idea of exact requital” (St. Paul’s Epistles). This “repayment” can be either good or bad depending on whether the work done was good or bad. That is not reflected well when antapodosis is translated “reward,” because we think of a reward being only for good done, which is not the case in this verse. Salvation is by grace (Eph. 2:8), but the repayment we receive at the Judgment is in correspondence to what, and what quality, work we have done. When Jesus comes to earth and sets up his kingdom [see Appendix 3: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”], he will reward or punish people for what they have done [see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10].

Chapter 4

4:1. “Masters.” The Greek is kuriōs (#2962 κύριος ), “lords,” here properly translated “masters” (see commentary on Col. 3:22). From the structure, this should have been the last verse of chapter three, because 3:18 is “Wives,” 3:19 is “husbands,” 3:20 is “children,” 3:21 is “fathers,” 3:22 is “servants,” and now 4:1 is to “masters.”
4:3. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word *musterion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what *musterion* actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

4:4. “make it clear.” The Greek is *phanerō* (#5319 φανερόο), to make it manifest, or reveal it. In this context, “make it clear” is a good translation, because that is what Paul was trying to do for his listeners (cp. ESV, NAB, RSV).

“as I should.” The Greek verb is *dei* (#1163 δεῖ, pronounced “day”), and it means to be necessary, to be right and proper. Translators try to pick up the sense in different ways: “as I am required to speak” (HCSB); “as I ought” (KJV); “as I should” (NIV; NET; REV); “as I must” (NAB); “as it is my duty to do” (NEB). The point is that speaking up for the Lord is not just something that is “nice” to do, it is something we are obligated to do. He died for us, now we are his ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20), and we must speak up on his behalf.

4:5. “walk.” The Greek verb is *peripateō* (#4043 περιπατέω), and it means “walk,” but it was used idiomatically for “live,” as we might say, “live your life.” People walked everywhere, so “walk” came to mean “live.” The verb is present tense, active voice, so the meaning is “Be walking,” continuously be “walking” (living) in wisdom. “Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders” catches the meaning of the phrase.

“making the most.” The Greek is *exagorazō* (#1805 ἐξαγοράζω). It means, 1) to redeem by payment of a price and thus recover from the power of another; to ransom; 2) metaphorically, of Christ freeing the elect from the dominion of the Mosaic Law at the price of his vicarious death 3) to buy up, to buy up for one’s self, 4) to make wise and sacred use of every opportunity for doing good.

The idea of the verse, combining *exagorazō* (“buy up, buy back”) with *kairos* (an opportune time, opportunity), gives us the mental picture of us buying up the opportunities to reach out to others or to bless others before those opportunities get away. Every shopper knows that truly good deals are short lived. If we do not move quickly, they are gone; other people have snatched up the good deal before us. We are to walk in wisdom toward outsiders, and when there is an opportunity to be a blessing and especially to lead them to Christ so they become “insiders,” we should quickly buy up that opportunity and not let it get away. Perhaps an expanded way to translate this verse would be: “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, buying up your opportunities to be a blessing.” [See commentary on Eph. 5:16.]

“opportunities.” The Greek word is *kairos* (#2540 καιρός), and it refers to a fixed and definite time, an opportune or seasonable time; the right time; and means in this context, the “opportunity.” This is not the Greek word *chronos* (#5550 χρόνος), which usually refers to a period of time.

4:6. “always be with grace.” The Greek word for “grace” is *charis* (#5485 χάρις), but it is in the prepositional phrase, *en chariti* (ἐν χάριτι). Hendriksen (*Colossians*) points out that at the time Paul was writing, the phrase *en chariti* was used by the pagans as well as the Christians. However, when the pagans said “in grace” (with grace), they meant your speech should include witty and clever remarks. In contrast, what Paul means is the language we use should be the outflow of the grace of God at work in our hearts. This is why the REV went with “with grace” instead of “gracious,” like many other versions (HCSB; ESV; NET; NRSV). In English, “gracious” usually means marked by courtesy,
tact, delicacy, and kindness. However, anyone who has been much exposed to “Southern hospitality” knows too well that “graciousness” can be devoid of any grace in the heart. Thus the REV went with “with grace.”

“seasoned with salt.” Often a metaphor like salt is hard to exactly describe. Christ said that we are the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13). Salt preserves, heals (sometimes with a little pain, like putting salt in the wound), cleanses, adds flavor, and as one young man observed, “kills slugs.” Also, in the Greco-Roman world at the time of Christ, salt was quite valuable. There is no reason to believe that any of these meanings is excluded. When we speak to others, and in this context, to unbelievers, our speech it to be healing, but it also might well be challenging, and it should be “worth its salt” to hear.

“so that you come to know.” The Greek verb eidō (#1492 εἰδῶ) means “know,” but in this case the perfect tense infinitive is an infinitive of result (Lenski; Robertson, Grammar, p. 1090), and thus pulls in the meaning of “so that” and “come to know.” Lenski has, “so that you get to know.” Verse 6 has to be understood as the conclusion and the “how to” of verse five. We are to walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of our opportunities with them. In that context, our speech with them should always be combined with grace, seasoned with salt for truth, cleansing, and healing. If we will speak this way with people, we will come to know how to respond to them and the concerns or situations they bring up to us. If, in contrast, our speech is condescending, harsh, condemning, or “better than you,” the outsiders will not speak to us or share their hearts with us, and we will never get to know them or find out how to respond to them to reach them for the Lord.

“respond.” The Greek verb is apokrinomai (#611 ἀποκρίνομαι), and it means to answer, to reply, to continue speaking, and it can refer to the continuation of discourse, each person replying to the other as the conversation moves forward. Thus, while most versions have “answer,” that seemed too much like all we are doing is answering questions, which is not the case. The CJB, NAB and NASB have “respond,” which seemed more conversational. The NEB translates the last phrase: “study how best to talk with each person you meet.” While that translation is certainly not literal, it does carry much of the meaning of the phrase.

4:8. “I am sending.” The Greek is in the aorist tense, which normally would be “I sent,” or even “I have sent,” but this is the idiom of the “epistolary aorist,” because the Greeks thought in terms of the arrival, not the time of departure, so this has the force of “I am sending.”

4:10. “received commands.” The scholars debate whether or not this is an “epistolary aorist,” or a standard aorist. If it is an epistolary aorist, then Paul was actually saying that you “are receiving” commands, which would be along with the letter itself, likely brought by those who were carrying the letter. On the other hand, if it is a standard aorist, then Paul, by some means, had already sent instructions to the Church at Colossae about Mark.

“commands.” The Greek word is entolē (#1785 ἐντολή), and means a command or commandment. Although many versions go with “instructions,” and that is certainly part of the semantic range of the word, entolē really does communicate a command or order, and shows Paul’s apostolic authority in action. When speaking by revelation and standing in the place of Christ on earth as an apostle, he could give commands to the Church.
“welcome.” The Greek word is dechomai (#1209 δέχομαι), receive, but in contexts such as this it does not just mean to “receive” in a formal way, but rather to favorably accept, or “welcome.”

4:11. “Jesus, who is called Justice.” “Jesus” is the English name of Joshua, and in Greek the name was Iesous (#2424 Ἰησοῦς; pronounced Ė-ā-soos). Joshua was such a very famous person that many Jewish boys were called “Joshua.” However, after the Christ was called “Joshua,” the Jews stopped using the name to avoid association with the Christians, and the Christians stopped using the name out of respect for Jesus Christ. Here is a man named Jesus who became referred to by another name: Justice.

“You are a man named Jesus who became referred to by another name: Justice.” The Greek word is hina (#2443 ἵνα), and in this context it is not clear whether it is a result clause (“in order that”), or rather also points to the context of the prayer: “he is praying that you will stand mature....” It can actually be both, and so we left the English just “that.”


“struggling.” The Greek is agōnizomai (#75 ἀγωνίζομαι; pronounced āg-ō-need'zo-my), and it is used in 1:29 of Paul’s struggle to bring Christians to maturity in Christ (see commentary on “struggling” in 1:29 and 2:1). In this verse Epaphras is struggling in prayer for the believers in Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. Anyone who prays faithfully understands this struggle. First, prayer is itself warfare. God is a warrior (Exod. 15:3), and we help Him in the spiritual battle when we pray. Just as no soldier fights half-heartedly or carelessly, so we too should battle in prayer with great diligence. Second, prayer is a struggle because we fight our flesh, which gets distracted or tired. We lose focus and it is a struggle to stay focused in our prayer life. Third, we struggle against frustration. Anyone who prays for a cause as great as the salvation of others or the movement of the Word of God in an area knows what it is to pray day after day and see little results. It is frustrating and can lead to us giving up in prayer. It is exactly why Christ “spoke a parable to them about the necessity for them to pray always, and not become discouraged” (Luke 18:1). Prayer can be a struggle, but it is a good fight and one we all need to stay engaged in.

4:13. “Indeed.” The Greek is gar (#1063 γάρ), which is usually translated “for.” However, there is no causal link between verse 12 and 13. Instead, this is what Greek grammarians refer to as a “confirmatory gar.”

“works very hard.” There is a variation in the Greek texts, with some reading zelos (zeal, concern), and some reading ponos (which is pain, distress, or hard work that causes that pain). Most scholars believe the reading ponos, which is more unusual and therefore more likely to be switched to a more common word, is the original. Epaphras worked very hard for the believers in Colossae, even causing himself some pain concerning them.

4:15. “Nymph, and the congregation that is in her house.” The Greek manuscripts vary on this verse, some making Nymph a woman, some a man, and some saying “her” house, some “his” house, and some even “their” house. The strongest manuscript evidence supports that Nymph was a woman. Furthermore, when there is disagreement between the manuscripts, one of the ways to determine the original is to ask which reading would be the most difficult, and which the most sense to create. In this case, if the original was Nymphas, and “his” house, it is very unlikely that scribes would change the masculine to a feminine. However, if the original was feminine, it can easily be seen
that a later scribe would consider that so unlikely that he would change the feminine to a masculine.

4:16. “read.” Read out loud. Since only a small percentage of the people could read, it was very important that letters be read to the people so they could learn the Scripture.

“among.” The Greek is para, which is not normally “among,” however, in the context of reading a letter the meaning becomes “among” (cp. Peter O’Brien, Word Biblical Commentary; Colossians). The Church would assemble, and someone would read the epistle to them.

“the letter from Laodicea.” There has been much scholarly debate about the letter to the Laodiceans. Marcion (c. 85-160) taught that this was the letter to the Ephesians, and historically that position has been taken and defended by John Mill and John Lightfoot. However, it seems most likely that Ephesians was written after Colossians, which would rule out that interpretation. Some have suggested that the Epistle to Philemon is this letter, but Philemon lived in Colosse, not Laodicea, and the letter would have come directly to him. It is most likely that this letter has not survived (cp. O’Brien, Word Biblical Commentary; Lenski, Colossians). Of course the debate then rages about “some of the Word of God being lost.” There is no reason to believe that every letter Paul wrote was the Word of God. In fact, Paul was likely an aggressive communicator, with contacts in churches all over the Roman world, and he certainly would have written many letters in his many years in prison (two in Caesarea, Acts 24:27; two in Rome during his first imprisonment there, Acts 28:30; and an uncertain amount of time in his second imprisonment in Rome, from which we know he wrote 2 Timothy, so he was allowed to write letters). Not all of these would have been the Word of God, and none of his letters except the ones we know to be the Word of God have survived.


“ministry.” The Greek is diakonia (#1248 διακονία) and means “service,” and depending on the context refers to different kinds of service. Because it can refer to the lifelong call of a person to ministry, it can in some contexts be “ministry.” There is not enough context here in Colossians to really understand what Paul is referring to, and if he is making a general statement, like, “fulfill your ministry,” or if he is making a reference to a specific service or duty that Archippus was supposed to fulfill. However, since Archippus is mentioned in Philemon as being a “fellow-soldier” with Paul, it seems like Archippus was a leader, and likely the local leader there in Colosse. Therefore, in light of the fact that there is no mention anywhere in the context of any specific task that Archippus was assigned to do, it seems that it is more likely that Paul is encouraging Archippus to fulfill his ministry as a leader in the Body of Christ.

4:18. “with my own hand.” Paul usually wrote some kind of closing to his epistles in his own handwriting. See commentary on Galatians 6:11.
1 Thessalonians

Chapter 1

1:1. “Silvanus.” = “Silas” (Acts 15:22). “Silvanus” is Silas’ Roman name and “Silas” is his Hebrew name. As Lenski writes, “From Acts 16:32 we know that Silas was a Roman. The added Roman name of a native Jew was often chosen because of a similarity in sound.” (cp. 2 Thess. 1:1).

“In God.” The Greek word ἐν (#1722 ἐν) has a wide semantic range. The phrase is ambiguous on purpose, and means many things, all of which are true, because the Christian is “in” God or “in” Christ in many ways. We are “in connection with” God (Lenski), and the connection is due both to our position as children of God by birth and our being connected to God by our life and love. “In” as “in connection with,” or “in relation with,” is one of the foundational meanings of “in” (BDAG). “Christians are not simply people who have heard about God and trust Him. They live “in” Him day by day. All their deeds are done in Him” (L. Morris, The New International Commentary on the New Testament). Some authors prefer “in union with” (Barnes’ Notes) and that also is a meaning. The spiritual union we have with Christ is intimate indeed, because we are part of his very body (Col. 1:18). In this instance, the phrase “in God” can also be a locative usage, and thus mean “grounded in” God (Hendriksen New Testament Commentary; Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament). Since the locative and dative cases are exactly the same in Greek, only the context can be used to tell the difference, and in situations like this when both meanings are true and apply, the ambiguity is purposeful and can be the figure of speech amphibologia (cp. Bullinger, Figures).

The phrase “in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” is necessary as a modifier of the word “congregation” because, as a study of ekklēsia (congregation; church; assembly) shows, there would have been many “congregations” in Thessalonica (see Matt. 16:18 commentary on “congregation”). There would have been some congregations that gathered to worship the Emperor, some to worship the Roman gods or various mystery religions (such as the cult of Isis), and other congregations as well. This epistle from Paul was to none of those “congregations,” but was to the congregation that was grounded in, in relation to, and in union with, God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son.

1:2. “always for all of you.” This is the figure of speech, homoeopropheron (Alliteration). The Greek is “pantote peri panton,” quite an attention grabber.

1:3. “work prompted by faith, and labor prompted by love, and patience prompted by hope.” The Greek reads, “work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope.” We take these phrases to be three genitives of origin, along with Bullinger who also admits the possibility they are genitive of character, and in that case would read “faithful work, loving labor, and hopeful patience” (Companion Bible). The reason for translating the genitives rather than leaving them, “work of faith,” etc., was that their meaning is not easily understood in English. As S. J. Kistemaker points out in his commentary, “What is patience of hope, anyway?” When one reads “labor of love,” it would be easy to miss that love is the spring out from which our labor flows.
We gather support from Ecclesiastes 2:17-26 for understanding these expressions as genitives of origin. The Preacher bewails the fact that his toils are meaningless because he has no hope—the profits of his life will be left for another. Then in 2:17 he states that, apart from God, no one can find any enjoyment in their work or labor. Thus scripture teaches it is one’s faith in God that is the source for our energy to work and labor.

1:4. “have come to know.” The perfect tense of this verb shows that the action of knowing began in the past and has continued into the present. They have come to know (and still know it).

“brothers loved by God.” The prepositional phrase “by God” goes with the verb “loved,” and not with the “chosen” (“election” in some versions). This is the natural reading of the Greek, and is grammatically more proper (cp. Meyer’s Commentary; Lenski; Hendrickson, New Testament Commentary).

1:5. “and in holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

“proved to be.” The Greek for this phrase is the verb ginomai (#1096 γίνομαι), “to come to be; come into existence, or become.” However, in this context it is not referring to what sort of men that Paul and company became, but how they came to be perceived by the Thessalonians who did not know them at first. Hence, BDAG (definition 7) defines the word in this verse as, “proved to be, turned out to be.” Cp. ESV, NASB, and NRSV.

1:6. “joy of the holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.

“despite being.” Cp. NET and HCSB translations. The point is that the Thessalonians received the word with joy, even though they had to endure affliction with it. This is what made them an example to other churches (v. 7).

“severe.” The Greek word polus (#4183 πολύς). Polus here indicates the degree of affliction experienced by the Thessalonians (BDAG def. 3a). The extent of their suffering was high, much, great; thus we have translated polus as “severe.” Cp. NIV; HCSB.

1:9. “to serve.” The verb is douleuō (#1398 δουλέω), to serve as a bond-servant, not latreuō (#3000 λατρεύω), which is to perform religious duties and services. When the Thessalonian believers turned from paganism, they did not just change religious behaviors and functions, they literally changed masters and the whole orientation of their lives.


Chapter 2

2:2. “bold in our God.” How is this phrase to be understood? It could either be a dative of means or of association. If association is intended, Paul means to say we emboldened ourselves “in our blessed connection with him” (Lenski). A dative of means, on the other
hand, would indicate they emboldened themselves by means of God, i.e., looking to God was the means by which they emboldened themselves. This latter understanding is more likely.

“after having suffered and having been shamefully mistreated in Philippi.” This refers to the record in Acts 16:12-40. In Philippi, Paul and Silas suffered, being seized and dragged before the rulers, having their clothes torn off, beaten with rods, thrown in prison, and feet placed in stocks. They were shamefully mistreated in that this treatment was undeserved—especially since they were Roman citizens—and adding insult to injury, the rulers attempted to quietly cover it up, without giving personal apologies; as Paul said, “They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out” (Acts 16:37, ESV).

2:3. “appeal.” Paraklēsis (#3874 παράκλησις) can be translated in large number of ways. Two common ways it has been translated in this verse are “appeal” or “exhortation.” “Appeal” was the more accurate translation in this case. The sense is more of an appeal here because when Paul first came to the Thessalonians they were not yet Christians. You exhort someone who is already walking in the way, but make appeals to someone who is not on the path yet. [See Appendix 10: “The Greek Words for Prayer”].

“nor.” The repetition of “neither” and “nor” or “either” and “or” is the figure of speech Paradiastole.

“impure motives.” Cp. NIV; NRSV; NAB. The Greek is simply akatharsia (#167 ἄκαθαρσία), the word for “impurity” or “uncleanness.” In this context, however, to say their appeal did not come “out of uncleanness” means it did not come from internal impurities of motives or desires.

2:5. “flattering speech.” Greek = “words of flattery.” This is an objective genitive, where “flattery” becomes the object of the words spoken.

“greed as a motive.” Cp. HCSB: “greedy motives.” The Greek literally reads “a motive/pretext of greed.” The word prophasis (#4392 πρόφασις) can mean both a motive or a pretext. The idea is that Paul did not come putting up a front, with a disguise or pretext to cover up his true greedy motives.


“imposed our weight” is the translation of the phrase “to be with baros” (#922 βάρος). Baros is a noun meaning “burden;” it also has the sense of a claim to influence, importance, or authority (BDAG). The NASB translation captures the sense of authority well, but misses the notion of burden: “As apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.” To say we could have “imposed our weight,” on the other hand, gives the impression of burden and authority.

2:7. “gentle.” The Greek word is epios (#2261 ἐπίος). We believe “gentle” to be the original meaning, and not “infants,” as some texts have. It makes no sense that Paul would say he was “as an infant” among the Thessalonians, especially if the verse would then say that the infant was like a nursing mother.

2:8. “souls.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is used more broadly of the individual himself with an emphasis on his thoughts and emotions. Thus, while the verse could read something such as, “share with you…our own

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lives” (HCSB; cp. ESV, NASB, NET; NIV), the inclusion of the word “soul” points us to the fact that the thoughts, feelings, and emotions are specifically being emphasized. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

In this verse Paul shows us what it is to be a true minister of the Good News. We do not just take people a message about Christ, we take that message as part of Christ living in us, and share with people our mental and emotional life as well.

2:9. “night and day.” This is according to the custom of starting the day with the sunset, so the first part of a day available to work is the night.

2:10. “purely.” Cp. Williams’ New Testament; NRSV. This is from the adverb ὕσιός (#3743 ὅσιος), which Bullinger defines as “being pure from all crime, and religiously observant of every duty” (Critical Lexicon, p. 379). The noun form occurs in Acts 2:27; 13:34, 35; 1 Timothy 2:8; Titus 1:8; Hebrews 7:26; and Rev. 15:4; 16:5.

“among you who believe.” For this translation compare NIV and HCSB. We have taken the dative phrase human tois pisteuousin to express sphere—“among you who believe”—rather than a simple indirect object—“to you who believe.” If the expression is taken as an indirect object, then Paul is reminding the Thessalonians how the apostles conducted themselves towards the believers, which does not seem to fit the flow of thought as well as the dative of sphere.

2:12. “encouraging you, and comforting you, and urging.” The repetition of “and” is the figure of speech Polysyndeton. The “and” emphasizes each part.

“comforting.” The Greek is paramytheomai (#3888 παραθυθέω). As comfort, its base meaning is to soothe and console, but its semantic range can extend to speaking “persuasively and tenderly” (Bullinger). Yet not as persuasive as parakaleō (#3870 παρακαλέω), translated here as “exhorting.”

“encouraging.” We followed the Nestle-Aland verse divisions, dividing verse 11 and 12 at “encouraging,” as all other modern translations do.

“urging.” This word for “urging” is the normal Greek term for “bear witness” or “testify,” marturomai (#3140 μαρτυρέω). BDAG lists the second definition of marturomai as “implore” or “insist.” The full meaning of the term, therefore, gives the sense of urging from personal testimony. The apostles were personally testifying to the necessity of living a life worthy of God, bearing witness to the rewards of such a life and the severity of the consequences for failing to do so. See Ephesians 4:17 note on “implore.”


There is an additional kai (“and” or “also”) at the end of this verse, which we have not brought into the translation. It serves as an intensifier in the Greek, having no lexical purpose that changes the meaning. We felt to leave it in would give the wrong impression in English: “Which also is at work in you who believe.” To be “also” at work implies that the word of God is at work elsewhere, which may be true but is not the point of the verse.

2:14. “countrymen.” The Greek word, sumphuletēs, “own countrymen” tells us that Gentiles persecuted the church at Thessalonica (instigated by Jews), even as Jews persecuted the Church in Judea. The Jews had a “reason” for persecuting Jewish Christians, because they were spreading (what the Jews believed were) false doctrines
about a false Messiah. But why would the Gentiles, who had thousands of gods, and
dozens of philosophies, persecute Christians? The battle is spiritual and the Adversary is
behind it.

“Jews.” This is the restricted use of the word “Jews,” referring only to the religious
leaders of the Jews and those who oppose God and Christ. [For more information, see
commentary on John 1:19].

2:16. “Hindering” is better than “forbidding.” The Greek word can mean either. The
Jews really were not in a position to “forbid” Paul and his companions from speaking to
the Gentiles, but they sure did hinder the work.

“But the wrath of God has come upon them at last.” (Cp. Robertson, Word
Pictures in the New Testament). The phrase “at last” comes from eis telos (#1519 εἰς and
#5056 τέλος), literally, “unto the end.” The saying could be understood temporally, as we
have rendered it, or it could mean that God’s wrath has come upon them completely,
utterly, wholly. Louw-Nida write:

‘wrath has come down completely upon them.’ …It is also possible to understand
telos… as a temporal expression… so that this passage may be rendered as ‘and in
the end wrath has come down on them’ or ‘and wrath has at last come down on
them’.

We believe the temporal expression is better than the statement of completeness,
because in this life God’s wrath never falls completely on anyone, he has deferred
judgment until the next age. Speaking of the judgment as now is the idiom called the
prophetic perfect (see commentary on “seated,” in Ephesians 2:6). Christ is risen, the
Judgment is coming, evil will be avenged. These things are certain.


“orphaned.” The literal meaning of the Greek. This whole section is full of family
terms, displaying the close relationship between Paul and the Thessalonians. The nursing
mother, the father, the orphaned child.

“period of time.” The Greek literally reads, “We were torn from you for a time, an
hour,” using kaipos (#2540 καιρός) and hōra (#5610 ὥρα). The meaning is that they have
been separated for a period of time.

2:18. “again and again.” An old Greek idiom meaning more than once.

“the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which
has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the
word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark
1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the
Slanderer”.

“prevented us.” Paul says Satan “prevented” his entourage from visiting the
Thessalonians. The Greek word translated “prevented” is egkopto (#1465 ἐγκόπτω), and
its meanings include to “hinder” or “thwart” (BDAG). The translations are divided as to
whether the meaning here is “prevented” or simply “hinder.” The word occurs five times
(Acts 24:4; Rom. 15:22; Gal. 5:7; 1 Thess. 2:18; and 1 Pet. 3:7), sometimes meaning
hinder and sometimes meaning a hindrance to the point of actual prevention. Here, it is
prevention, for Paul, desiring to come to them, was actually inhibited from coming.

Scripture does not tell us how Satan prevented Paul from getting back to
Thessalonica, but the fact that Paul never mentions any reasons leads us to believe that
they were largely known and understood. One likely candidate was Claudius expelling
the Jews from Rome. The Jews of Thessalonica tried to bring Paul and his companions before the Roman magistrates, but could not find them, but the charge they leveled at Paul and the others was that they “act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus (Acts 17:7). These were very serious charges. Roman Emperors were constantly threatened by rebellion and revolution, and stamped it out quickly and decisively whenever there was a hint of it. If Paul was in Corinth (or he even could have been in Thessalonica) when Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome, news of that would have gotten to Thessalonica very quickly along the Egnation Way. That news would have made the Roman magistrates even more on the alert against any suspected Jewish sedition, and the Jews in Thessalonica were not above lying and twisting the facts, as we have seen. In any case, that is a possible reason Paul could not get back to Thessalonica. When he visited there again, Claudius was dead and Nero was the new Emperor.

2:19. “For who is our hope.” “Who” not “what” (as the KJV), because the people are the joy and crown.

“Crown of boasting.” Genitive of relation; the crown about which we boast. The Greek kauchesis means “boasting,” or object of pride or boasting. The word boast can have two connotations—just like English usage—one can boast in a negative way and in a positive way. Scripture uses both instances (e.g., James 4:16 and Rom. 15:17).

“is it not you.” The Greek kai has overtones of “also you,” meaning that the Thessalonians were “also,” along with Paul’s other converts, his joy, but the fact that the next verse says “you are our glory” indicates that the primary meaning is “even.” Paul is not by that trying to exclude his other converts, but is simply emphasizing the joy the Thessalonians will be to him at the Parousia.

“before our Lord Jesus at his coming.” This is the natural reading of the Greek text and there is no reason to change it, as the NIV does. The question is what goes with the prepositional phrase, “in his presence.” Do we boast in his presence (NIV), or are the people “in his presence” at the Parousia? The versions are divided. There is no reason not to leave the Greek word order intact, for the verse makes perfect sense that way. Paul’s boasting is the people, who will be before the Lord Jesus Christ at his parousia, his coming and personal presence.

Chapter 3

3:3. “these are bound to come to us.” Literally, “unto this we were set/placed.” “Unto” is the result use of eis [See Appendix 11: “Greek Prepositions”]. The word for “set” is from keimai (#2749 κεῖµαι), which has the base meaning of being placed somewhere. It is not as though specific sufferings are “destined” or “appointed” for us in a fatalistic sense. Rather it is as Lenski writes, “God placed us in a position where we are bound to encounter affliction.” When we become Christians, we are drawn into God’s battle plans; we become one of God’s valuable pieces battling on the chessboard of life. And in this spiritual battle it is inevitable that afflictions will arise.

3:5. “that is why.” The Greek is dia touto, usually translated “for this reason” or “because of this.” Here we went with the translation “that is why” to be clear that the expression refers to what preceded and not what follows.
“for fear that.” There is no specific word for “fear” in the Greek. It comes from the expression *me pôs*, a “marker of a negative perspective expressing misgiving, frequently rendered lest” (BDAG). The “misgiving” being expressed is Paul’s concern that the Thessalonians’ faith had faltered.

“the Tempter.” The Tempter is Satan of chapter 2:18. The Adversary is actively and aggressively tempting people to destroy them. Christians need to open their eyes to the spiritual battle that rages invisibly around them. Most Christians act as if temptations “just happen” and they are an accidental and spontaneous part of life. While some temptations are simply due to life and a person’s sin nature and individual personality and character, Satan is always working behind the scene to figure out ways to make people stumble in their walk with Christ. That is one reason we must “pray without ceasing.”

“had tempted you.” Although the translation fits the context, the verb in Greek is a participle in the present tense and active voice, indicating that the Tempter keeps on tempting us. He wages a relentless assault.

3:6. “think of us with affection.” Cp. NET. The point Paul is making is how the Thessalonians are currently thinking of him and the apostles, not that they have some good memories (past) of them. Paul is pleased that they “always think kindly” (BDAG) of them, making pleasant remembrance when they are brought to mind.

3:10. “night and day.” An accurate rendition of the thinking of the time, because the Jewish day starts with sunset.

“complete what is lacking in your faith.” The verb *katartizo* (#2675 Καταρτίζω) could either mean “complete” or “restore” (BDAG). Here it should be translated *complete*, for as recorded in the book of Acts, Paul’s time in Thessalonica was cut short when a mob attempted to seize him, and so the new believers sent him away secretly (17:1-11). Thus he did not wish to “restore” the Thessalonians to the faith they once had, but to complete what was lacking in their faith in the first place.

3:11. “our God and Father…and our Lord Jesus.” This verse is good evidence that Jesus is not God. God is the Father, and the Lord Jesus is separate. If Jesus were God, this verse would have read something like, “Now may our God, the Father and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you.” Simple verses like this one, which occur throughout the NT, are strong evidence Jesus is not God.

3:13. “in the presence.” The Greek is *en ho parousia*. The word *parousia* has two definitions: “presence” and “coming,” and it is used both ways in the New Testament. It is used as “presence” in verses such as 2 Corinthians 10:10 and Philippians 2:12. It is used as “coming” in verses such as 2 Corinthians 7:6 and 2 Peter 3:4. When we are in the presence of the Lord, we will be there with all the “holy ones,” both Christians and angels, and “He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God” (1 Cor. 4:5; cp. also Matt. 10:26; Luke 8:17, 12:2). In light of the clear verses that everything done in secret will be revealed, it is astounding that so many people sin in secret as if no one will ever know. At the Judgment, God and the Lord Jesus will know, and so will everyone else.

If *parousia* was to be understood here as coming, it would be his coming at the Rapture, and the “holy ones” would be the angels that accompany Christ. The Old Testament (and thus Septuagint) refer to angels as *hoi hagioi* (the holy; plural; see Meyer).
Chapter 4


“that you excel even more.” Cp. NASB; HCSB; NJB. The verb is perisseueō (#4052 περισσεύω), meaning “to cause something to exist in abundance,” and thus by extension it can mean “to excel” in something (BDAG). Paul is urging the believers to live in a godly manner even more and more than they already have, even though their behavior was already exemplary.

4:4. “take his own vessel.” This section has been hotly debated, and we confess that we are still studying it. There are two primary interpretations: the section is speaking of “controlling” one’s own body, or the section is speaking of one’s relation to his wife. Although “vessel” can refer to the human body (Acts 9:15; 2 Cor. 4:7; etc.), the wife is referred to as a “vessel” in 1 Peter 3:7. Besides “vessels,” women were referred to as a “fountain,” “garden,” “spring,” (Song of Sol. 4:12), “cistern,” “well” (Prov. 5:15).

“take.” The Greek is ktaomai (#2932 κτάομαι). This is a major key to this section. Robertson (Word Pictures in the New Testament) notes: “Present middle infinitive of ktaomai, to acquire, not kektêsthai, to possess.” Lenski, Vincent, and others point out that the natural meaning of ktaomai is “take,” not “possess” or “control, in which case another word, perhaps kektêsthai would be used. However, other people assert that the word can mean “possess” in the sense of “control.”

If this section of Scripture is speaking of taking a wife, then the word “take,” which also means “acquire,” has a double meaning in this section. Every Christian man is to take, or acquire, his own wife to avoid sexual immorality (1 Cor. 7:1, 2), however, beyond that, the man should “take” (i.e., take sexually) his wife with the same sanctification and honor. Thus there is a sense in which the phrase could be translated that each should know how to treat his wife in sanctification and honor. Vincent has: “that every one of you know how to treat his own wife honorably.” (Also cp. Williams, New Testament) In a culture where women were regularly brutalized by their husbands, the Word of God states that women were to be “taken” by their husbands in sanctification and honor, not like the Gentiles did, who acted out of the passion of lust, the men forcing their will upon the women simply because they were stronger.

4:5. “lustful passion.” The Greek is literally “in passion of lust.” It is a genitive of character, meaning “in passion characterized by lust.”

4:6. “an avenger.” The Greek is the adjective ekdikos (#1558 ἔκδικος), and it relates to punishment. In this verse it is used as a substantive, meaning, the one who avenges, or perhaps more clearly, the one who punishes. The NIV reads: “The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you.” The New English Bible reads, “as we told you before with all emphasis, the Lord punishes all such offences.”

The Lord will punish people for their unforgiven sin, even if those people are Christians. A Christian’s salvation is assured and secure (see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:23). However, salvation and rewards are different. Salvation is receiving everlasting life. Our rewards are what we will have in the Kingdom of Christ. God is an avenger of sin, He punishes people for unforgiven sin. That punishment may take different forms. People can lose rewards, or lose their inheritance entirely (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or worthless;” also commentary on 1 Cor. 3:13, 15).
It is worth noting that the way the Greek text is worded, “an avenger is the Lord concerning all these things,” leaves the door open for other things to be “avengers” (punishers) as well as just the Lord. Someone who ignores God’s sexual standards is likely to run into trouble from many directions: angry people, disease, and finally, at the Judgment, the Lord.

4:7. “so we could be impure.” The preposition is epi, and the use of epi with a noun in the dative case to express purpose is in both classical literature and the Bible (cp. Eph. 2:10; you were called “to do good works,” that is, with the purpose of doing good works). See F. F. Bruce, Word Biblical Commentary.

“to holiness.” We have translated the dative here as “to holiness” rather than “in holiness.” This was to avoid the possible confusion that we were called while already “in” a holy state, which is not true. Rather, we were called “in connection with” holiness, that is, God has called us to live in the sphere of holiness rather than uncleanness.

4:8. “his holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

“you.” The “you” is plural, it is speaking to “all of you,” i.e. the Church.

4:9. “brotherly affection.” The Greek is philadelphia (#5360 φιλαδελφία), a compound Greek word made up of philos (a strong liking, a friendship; see commentary on John 21:15) and adelphos (#80 ἀδελφός), which means “brother.” It is the strong bond of friendship that exists between brothers.

“by God.” The Greek is a genitive of origin: “taught of God.”

4:11. “to lead a peaceful life.” Cp. NAB. The verb for quiet, hēsuchazo (#2270 ἡσυχάζω), can sometimes refer to being “silent,” as in Luke 14:4, and sometimes to “refrain from disturbing activity, be peaceful/orderly” (BDAG). This is the sense here.

4:12. “concerning those who are outsiders.” Cp. Kistemaker. This is the meaning of the preposition pros in this context (#4314 πρός), which most translations render as “towards” in this verse. But the most likely meaning is living “with reference/regard to” (BDAG) outsiders, rather than behavior “towards” them.

“have need of nothing.” The versions are split on the translation of this phrase. Some read, “be dependent on no one” (ESV; NIV; NRSV; HCSB; NAB), while others go with the translation “have no need of anything” (NASB; NET; KJV; ASV). The difference in translation comes from the word medeis (#3367 μηδείς), which could be either neuter (“nothing”) or masculine (“no one”). Are we to work with our hands so that we have no need of anyone (i.e. not be dependent on anyone), or not have need of anything? We feel the latter translation is more accurate. Working to have no needs logically includes not being dependent on others. However, being dependent on others and working was not mutually exclusive during this time—the culture of the Roman world was based on a patron-client system in which nearly everyone was dependent on others in some form. Given this, we felt “have no need of anything” was the better translation.

4:13. “are asleep,” The Greek verb is koimaō (#2837 κοιμάω), to fall asleep, to be asleep, and in this verse it is in the passive voice, indicating that death happened to the believers, it was not something they initiated. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.

“grieve like the rest of mankind.” Death is an enemy, and it hurts very deeply. The natural and proper response to death is grief. Even animals grieve, even if it is for a short
time. The orthodox belief that the dead go immediately to heaven to be with Jesus has sometimes caused Christians to try to not grieve, but to rejoice. This is confusing at best, can be especially harmful to children, who hurt terribly over the death of a loved one, but are told that they should be happy for them instead of being sad, as if being sad was selfish. If it is proper doctrine to rejoice at the death of a Christian, then this would be the place to say it. But no, Paul writes that we should grieve, but not in the same way as the rest of mankind, who believe that death ends any meaningful life. This points also to the Greco-Roman culture of the time. Although there was among some people a concept of an afterlife, even then it was uncertain and not a wonderful place. The majority of the people, however, were uncertain as to whether there even was an afterlife, so death was very bitter indeed.

4:14. “since we believe.” This is the use of ei (εἰ) that is not conditional and is best translated “since,” or something similar.

“was raised.” This is a better translation than “rose again.” See commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:15.

“in the same way.” The Greek is houtos kai, meaning, just as Christ died and came back to life, “in the same manner also” Christians are not lost forever, but will be raised.

“through Jesus.” This is the preposition dia with Jesus in the Genitive case, showing agency or means [see Appendix 11: Greek Propositions]. God is going to raise the dead by means of Christ, who will give the command for the dead to be raised (John 5:25-29; 6:39, 40, 44, 54).

“bring from the grave.” The word for “bring” could also be translated “lead.” It is from ago (ἄγω), “to lead, bring, lead off, lead away” (BDAG). The question arises, “lead away from where?”

The context supplies the answer: these dead saints rise from the grave (v. 16), then together with us will be taken to meet the Lord in the air (v. 17).

“in him.” This is the use of sun (σύν) meaning “in association with” [see Appendix 11: “Greek Prepositions]. This has a double application in the verse. It applies association with Christ to those who have fallen asleep “in him” and to those he will bring from the grave “with him.” Scripture consistently includes us as participants in Christ’s death and resurrection. It says we were “crucified with him” (Gal. 2:20), “died with him” (Rom. 6:8; Col. 2:20; 2 Tim. 2:11), “buried with him” (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12), and “raised” and “made alive with him” (Rom. 6:8; 2 Cor. 4:14; Col. 2:12, 13; 2 Tim. 2:11). (See also 1 Cor. 15:20-23). When referring to Christians being raised from the dead, often the word sun is employed, either directly (2 Cor. 4:14) or as a prefix to a verb (Rom. 6:8; Col. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:11). All these sayings are not to be taken as literal physical happenings, rather they point to an association in (sun) Christ’s death and resurrection. Such is also the case here in 1 Thessalonians 4:14. Christ does not bring the dead physically with him since they are in the grave, which is why he is going to raise them. To “bring with him” from the grave is the equivalent of being made alive and raised with him, whereas to have “fallen asleep in him” is to have died in association with Christ’s death.

This verse has been used to teach that when Jesus comes from heaven he brings with him the souls (or spirits) of those who have already died, and then unites them to their dead bodies, which have just been raised. This is not the correct understanding of this verse. First, the verse says nothing of disembodied souls being brought with Jesus.

1 Thessalonians
That is an interpretation based on the theology that when a person dies his soul or spirit goes to heaven.

The text says that Jesus will “bring with him those who have fallen asleep.” “Those” is those people who have died, not those disembodied souls. It is the people who fall asleep, not the “souls.” If it were the “souls,” then the verse would be saying that Jesus brought with him “those souls which had fallen asleep.” That would make no sense, and furthermore, the people who believe that the soul exists in heaven after the body dies claim that Jesus brings the souls back to earth precisely because they did not “fall asleep” (die).

If God, through Jesus, is going to bring people “with” him, in the context, where did Jesus go? The early part of the verse says, “For if we believe that Jesus died and was raised…” Jesus was raised from the dead by God, and the believers who died will also be raised “with” Jesus, not in time but in effect. What happened to Jesus will happen to us. This exact point is made in 2 Corinthians 4:14: “Knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.” The Greek, “with Jesus” (sun Iesou) is the same in both Thessalonians and Corinthians.

God did not want the Thessalonians to be ignorant about those believers who had died, “or to grieve like the rest of men” (v. 13). If the dead were with Jesus in heaven, then the way to keep the Thessalonians (and the rest of us) from grieving would be to plainly say that the dead were with Jesus. Instead, the comfort that this verse is giving is to say that Jesus died (just like the Thessalonians who had died), and Jesus rose (and we will too). F. F. Bruce comments on the word “with:” “Although later in time, the resurrection of the people of Christ is their participation in his resurrection; they are to be raised from the dead ‘with him’…” (Bruce, Word Biblical Commentary).

Meyer comments on why the text would read “bring with Jesus” instead of “raise with Jesus.” “For the words instruct us not concerning Jesus, but concerning the koinmethentes [those fallen asleep]; it is not expressed in what manner the return of Christ will take place, but what will be the final fate of those who have fallen asleep. The apostle selects this pregnant form of expression instead of the simple egerei [to awaken; to raise up], because the thought of a separation of deceased Christians from Christ was that which so greatly troubled the Thessalonians, and therefore it was his endeavor to remove this anxiety, this doubting uncertainty, as soon as possible.”

Adam Clarke notes: “will God bring with him—he will raise them up as Jesus was raised from the dead, in the same manner,…”

Even Christian commentators who believe and teach that the spirits of dead Christians will come back with Jesus do not believe that this verse is teaching that doctrine. The noted commentator, Albert Barnes (Barnes’ Notes), writes, “Will God bring with him. This does not mean that God will bring them with him from heaven when the Saviour comes—though it will be true that their spirits will descend with the Saviour; but it means that he will bring them from their graves, and will conduct them to glory….”

“have fallen asleep.” See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

4:15. “the word of the Lord.” This is referring to revelation from God. To declare by a word from the Lord is to speak by direct revelation from God (e.g., Gen. 15:1, 4; 1 Sam. 3:1; 3:7; 15:10-11; 1 Kings 6:11-12; Isa. 38:4-5; Jer. 1:4-5).

“have fallen asleep.” See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:13.
4:16. “loud command.” Comes from the word keleusma (κέλευσμα), which the KJV translates as “shout.” However, it is more than a simple shout. This was a common word in ancient Greek—although it is only used once in the N.T.—and it always refers to an order or command of some kind (BDAG). Lenski writes, “The Lord shall descend ἐν κελεύσματι, ‘in connection with an order’…this word is common to designate a loud military command, the shout of a charioteer to his horses, of a hunter to his hounds, of a shipmaster to the rowers… ‘Shout’ in our versions is inexact; the word means a shouted order or command.”

4:17. “suddenly caught up.” The Greek word translated “suddenly caught up” is harpazo (ἁρπάζω) and it means to seize, snatch, carry off by force, to eagerly seize and claim for one’s self. It is implied in the meaning of the word harpazo that the thing taken is taken suddenly or quickly, thus the REV adds the word “suddenly” in italics to pick up that emphasis.

The Church being suddenly taken to heaven to be with the Lord is referred to theologically as “the Rapture.” The study of theology in English uses many descriptive words that are not in the Bible and that come from the Greek and Latin. For example, the words “theology” (the study of God), “eschatology” (the study of the end times), and “pneumatology” (the study of the spirit), come from the Greek, while “Trinity,” “sacrament,” “orthodox,” and “millennium” come from Latin. The word “Rapture” comes from the Latin. In 1 Thessalonians 4:17 the Latin Vulgate has rapiemur (from the root rapio, “caught up,” from which our English word “rapture” comes). Thus although it is common to hear people say, “The word ‘rapture’ is not in the Bible,” since it is in the Latin Vulgate, the more accurate statement would be: “The word ‘rapture’ is not in the English Bible.”

Some ministries have resisted using the word “Rapture” and refer to the Rapture of the Church by other terms, such as “the gathering together,” but that can be confusing since there are several times in the Bible when groups are gathered together in the end times. For example, Matthew 25:32 says when Christ comes he will gather the nations, but that gathering together refers to Jesus’ gathering of the survivors after the Battle of Armageddon; it does not refer to the Rapture. An important thing about the word “Rapture” is that theologians who use it all know exactly what it refers to.

Some critics of the Rapture have called it, “the secret Rapture” because Jesus did not mention it in his teaching on the end times in Matthew 24 (cp. Mark 13 and Luke 21). However, that criticism misses the point. Jesus did not teach about the Rapture because he did not know about it, or, if he did, he knew his disciples did not and thus did not mention it. What the Bible calls the Administration of the Sacred Secret, started on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 and ends with the Rapture [For more on this, see commentary on Ephesians 3:2]. Furthermore, the Administration of the Sacred Secret is called that specifically because it actually was a secret.

The Administration of the Sacred Secret was not foretold in the Old Testament or Gospels, so Jesus did not teach about it. In that sense, the Rapture was like speaking in tongues, which was not foretold or spoken of until after Jesus’ resurrection. The fact that Acts and the Pauline epistles talk about speaking in tongues is enough for us to believe it, and the fact that Paul writes clearly about the Rapture is good enough too.
God started the Christian Church on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, and it was a totally new program than what had gone before. For example, in the Christian Church, Jews and Gentiles became one in Christ. Also, Christians were guaranteed salvation, something God had never done before [see Appendix 1, “The Permanence of Christian Salvation”]. This new program of God’s, the “the Christian Church,” had a distinct beginning on the Day of Pentecost, and it has a distinct ending, which is the Rapture, when all Christians, dead and alive, are taken to heaven. In contrast to the Rapture and the promise to be taken to heaven, Israel had a different promise, which was that their graves would open and they would be taken back to the land of Israel (Ezek. 37:12-14). This promise to Israel will be fulfilled after Jesus Christ fights the Battle of Armageddon and conquers the earth.

One thing that the Rapture does well is allow for God to be completely fair to mankind, and demonstrate His wonderful justice. After the Rapture the Great Tribulation will occur. The Great Tribulation was spoken of many times in the Old Testament and Gospels. Daniel 12:1 calls it a time of distress, and says, “There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.” Isaiah indicates that so many people will be killed that people will be “scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir” ( Isa. 13:12). Jesus spoke of the Great Tribulation in Matthew 24 (cp. Mark 13 and Luke 21), and said there would be earthquakes, famines, wars, pestilence, and that “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive” (Matt. 24:22).

The reason the Great Tribulation will be so terrible is that God will pour out His wrath upon mankind for the sins of all people. In fact, Jesus made it clear that one generation would experience God’s wrath for people’s sins from as far back as the first murder, the death of Abel (Gen. 4:8), all the way forward through history to the murder of a man named Zechariah, who was apparently killed during the lifetime of the Messiah himself.

Luke 11:50 and 51
50) Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world,
51) from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.

It is a fair question to ask how one generation can deserve the wrath of God for the sins of all mankind. This has always been a very troubling aspect of the Great Tribulation. After all, will the generation that experiences the Great Tribulation be any more sinful than other generations have been? We, like Abraham in Genesis 18:25 must ask, “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” How can God be righteous and punish one generation for the sins of all mankind for all time?

The Bible makes it clear that with a few exceptions, God has been withholding His wrath and not punishing mankind for their evil deeds. That is part of the lesson of the Parable of the Good and Bad Seed (Matt. 13:24-30; often called, The Parable of the Tares of the Field). The bad seed is allowed to grow until the end of the world, at which time it is plucked up and cast into the fire. Thankfully, God planned a way to be completely fair to the generation who will go through the Tribulation.
As we have seen, the Administration of the Sacred Secret comes to an end with the Rapture, when every Christian is taken off the earth and into heaven. Since salvation is by faith in Christ, when the Rapture occurs every single person who has faith in Christ as well as their children who are not yet old enough to have faith on their own will be taken from the earth to be with Christ (1 Corinthians 7:14 makes it clear that the children of Christians who are too young to have faith on their own are considered “holy” to God). That means that immediately after the Rapture, for the very first time in all of history, the only people on earth will be those who do not have faith in the true God. At every other time in history at least some of the people on earth had faith in God; but not immediately after the Rapture. At no other time in the history of the world has it occurred that no one alive had faith in God and His Messiah. Thus the Rapture clears the way for God to pour out His judgment upon the world in a totally righteous way. God offered salvation and escape from wrath to anyone who had faith in Him and His Messiah, and thus only those who rejected God’s salvation experience the wrath of God.

In His love and mercy, God begins to try to win people right after the Rapture. While the Bible lets us know that the vast majority of people will continue to reject God during the Tribulation, some people will believe. Eventually there will be 144,000 Jews who believe (Rev. 7:4) and a great multitude of people from the nations (Rev. 7:9).

“together with them.” “Together” comes from sun (#4862 σοῦν). The word “with” is from hama (#260 ἀμα), meaning, “at the same time” “simultaneously” with them. Thus, since we go up at the same time we will not “precede them” (v. 15).

“meet.” The word “meet” is apantēsis (#529 ἀπαντησία; pronounced ā-pān-tay-sis), which is an event that included going out from a city to meet a visiting dignitary, spending some time exchanging niceties, and escorting him back to the city. Christians will be raptured into heaven before the Tribulation, and they will be with Christ in heaven until he comes back down to earth and sets up his kingdom. When Christ does come down from heaven to the earth, Christians will come down with him. He will not leave them up in heaven. The Bible says that Christians will be with the Lord Jesus Christ forever, and we will be—we will be on earth with him.

The fact that Christians are going to come back to the earth with Jesus is contained in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, but unfortunately that truth is usually lost because the English is not as clear as the Greek text. Almost all English versions say we will “meet” the Lord in the air, but there is a lot to that, since “meet” is the Greek word apantēsis. An apantēsis was a meeting, but an apantēsis also included additional activities. In the ancient world there were no reliable city maps, street names, or house numbers. If a friend who had never been to your town was coming to visit you, the way to be sure that he arrived safely at your house was an apantēsis. You would leave your house and go out to a well-known place, meet him, and travel back with him. If a dignitary or important person were coming to town, even if he knew the correct directions, then the apantēsis was a way of honoring him, and it included speeches and other niceties, and was often very ritualized. The people of the town would show their love and respect by traveling out and meeting the person, then escorting him back.

When an important dignitary paid an official visit to a city in Hellenistic times, and “came” to the city in person (a parousia), the action of the leading citizens in going out of the city to meet him and then escorting him back was called an apantēsis. It was quite a formal and ritualized event. Sabine MacCormack writes: “The subjects would leave their
city to welcome the ruler at some distance beyond the walls and would solemnly conduct him into the city; upon arrival there, the proshphonetikos [a formal speech lauding the dignitary] was to be delivered.” In fact, if the dignitary was important enough, such as the emperor himself, MacCormack writes, “it was unwise to absent oneself” from at least being in the audience when he arrived at the city (Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity, p. 21, 17). No wonder that Cicero, describing Julius Caesar’s progress through Italy in 49 B.C., says, “Just imagine what apanteseis he is receiving from the towns, what honors are being paid to him! (F. F. Bruce, Word Biblical Commentary: 1 & 2 Thessalonians, p. 102).

We Christians will have the honor of having an apantesis with the Lord Jesus Christ. We will go up to him in the air, spend a little time with him in heaven (we will be there through the time of the Tribulation), and then accompany him back to earth. Of course, it is always appropriate for the approaching dignitary to spend some time celebrating and exchanging niceties with those who have come to meet him before continuing the journey. The Greek poet Menander said that upon first meeting the dignitary, before returning to the city, someone would recite an epibaterios, an oration of praise for the occasion (Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity, p. 21).

When we understand the meaning of apantesis and place it in the social context of the New Testament, and also fit it with the prophecies that the Church will end up on earth, we can see why Thessalonians says that Christians will have an apantesis with Jesus. Such a solemn event honoring the Lord Jesus would be expected in any Greek city such as Thessalonica. We Christians will go out of our cities to meet him (actually, “up” to meet him), spend some time with him, and escort him back. That kind of event was common for visiting dignitaries, and so an apantesis for Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, would only be natural.

The meaning of apantesis as going out to meet someone and then escorting him back to the city is corroborated by its other three uses in the Greek New Testament. The “Parable of the Ten Virgins” in Matthew has the first and second use of apantesis. As the parable unfolds, the ten virgins were to go out to “meet” the bridegroom and then travel back with him to the waiting bride (Matt. 25:1,6). That event was an apantesis.

The third use of apantesis is in Acts 28:15. The apostle Paul was being taken prisoner to the city of Rome. The believers in Rome heard about Paul’s coming and set out for an apantesis with him. They left Rome and came to the Forum of Appius (43 miles, or 69 km., from Rome) and the Three Taverns (33 miles, or 53 km., from Rome), waited until Paul arrived, and then traveled back with him to Rome. These biblical uses clearly shows the full meaning of apantesis. These believers so respected the apostle Paul that they went out more than a day’s journey from Rome, met him, and then traveled back with him to Rome.

The fourth and last use of apantesis is in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, and it portrays the same thing: we Christians will leave our home, this earth, go into the air to “meet” the Lord, and then travel back with him to the earth. Thus, the honor that first-century people knew would be given to any visiting king will also be given to the King of Kings. [For more information on Christ’s kingdom on earth, see Appendix 3: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”].

“in this manner we will always be with the Lord.” The phrase “in this manner” shows the process for how we will be with Lord forever occurs. It is not saying we will
be with the Lord in the air forever—as though the verse meant, thus we will always be in heaven with the Lord. It is true that we will always be with the Lord where he is. First we will be with him when we meet him in the air, then we will be with him when he returns to reign on the earth (Rev. 5:9-10; 21:1-22:5). The phrase “in this manner” comes from houtos (#3779 οὕτως), which refers to the whole rapture process that precedes it, “in the way described” (Lenski), i.e., “this is how it will happen” (cp. BDAG Greek-English lexicon).

4:18. “encourage.” From parakaleō (#3870 παρακαλέω). Comforting is a part of the semantic range of this word, which is why many versions translate it as “comfort.” However, paramutheomai (#3888 παραµυθέομαι) (e.g., John 11:19) is the strong word for comfort. Instead of paramutheomai God used parakaleō here. Hence, encouragement is more of the overtone with strong undertones of comfort (so you do not grieve like the rest).

Chapter 5

5:1. “that anything be written to you.” Perhaps more literally, “you have no need to be written to.” But the infinitive “to be written to” requires an object that is supplied: “anything.”

5:2. “will come.” In the Greek the verb for “come,” erchomai (#2064 ἔρχομαι), is the present tense; it is the “prophetic or futuristic present tense” (Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament). Thus, rather than “the Lord comes,” we have translated the phrase “the Lord will come.”

5:3. “ruin.” See commentary on “ruin” in 1 Corinthians 5:5.

“will come.” This is the futuristic present, see commentary on 5:2.

“will certainly not escape.” This is the futuristic subjunctive (Lenski).

5:4. “the Day.” The “Day” refers specifically to the Day of the Lord spoken about in verse two, and therefore we capitalized “Day.”

5:5. “sons of light and the day.” Biblical custom. Light here is an idiomatic way of referring to truth, enlightenment, and what is right. This is in contrast to the night—moral depravity and ignorance—which we are not of. See also Ephesians 5:8.

5:6. “clear-minded.” This is from the verb nephō (#3525 νήφω), which is rendered in most versions as “sober.” Although nephō can have the meaning of staying sober, as in not being drunk, this meaning is most likely not found in scripture (Louw-Nida, 30.25). The word speaks of more than avoidance of inebriation, it points to having a clear mind and being self-controlled (BDAG). Louw-Nida writes: “It is possible that in 1 Thess. 5:8 nephō means lack of drunkenness, but most scholars interpret the use of nephō in the NT as applying to a broader range of soberness or sobriety, namely, restraint and moderation which avoids excess in passion, rashness, or confusion” (88.86; cp. 30.25). Hence, we have translated the verb as “clear-minded” rather than “sober,” feeling that the rendering “sober” would cause the reader to only think of drunkenness and miss the deeper meaning of the word.

5:7. “are sleeping, sleep… get drunk, are drunk.” The repetition of different forms of the same word is the figure of speech polyptoton (Bullinger, Figures of Speech).

“putting on.” This verb is in the middle voice. The middle voice means the subject of the action acts upon him or herself—the action of the verb is reflexive, it comes upon the subject. E.g., “he washes himself.” Hence, the action of “putting on” the breastplate of faith and love is something you yourself must do. It is not something that happens to you (which would be the passive voice), but something you put on for yourself. An alternate translation would be “clothing ourselves with the breastplate…”

“a breastplate of faith and love.” There is no definite article with breastplate. Hence, it is not the breastplate of righteousness that is referred to in Ephesians 6:14. Ephesians speaks of “the breastplate of righteousness,” but here Paul speaks of “a breastplate of faith and love.” Breastplates protect the heart. The qualities of righteousness, faith, and love will form a protective barrier around one’s heart, guarding from pain.

“hope of salvation.” The Scripture speaks of our salvation as a future occurrence that is yet to be hoped for—the “hope of salvation.” This is the literal truth regarding our salvation, that it is still future. No one has yet “been saved,” which will happen when we are delivered from physical death and the future judgment coming upon the world. Verse 9 reflects on our future salvation by saying we were not appointed (intended) for wrath in this judgment. Because we are ensured to be delivered from these things the Bible often speaks of our salvation as a present and past reality—this is the prophetic present and prophetic perfect idioms (see also notes on prophetic perfect in Eph. 2:6 and cp. Eph. 2:8).

5:9. “appoint.” From tithemi (#5087 τίθηµι). We have rendered tithemi as “appoint” as did the NIV, HCSB, KJV, and ASV. Other versions read “destined” (ESV; NASB; NRSV; NET; NAB). But destined gives the wrong impression to the modern reader. It sounds as if the verse means God did not fatalistically destine us to experience his wrath. But fate has nothing to do with the verse. Rather, tithemi has the meaning of being placed for something, appointed, often showing the subject’s intention. It could be translated “intend” here—meaning God did not intend for us to experience wrath.

“to obtain salvation.” The Greek literally reads, “unto the possession/obtaining of salvation.” This is saying God intended (tithemi, see entry above on “appoint”) for us to obtain salvation in the future. The Christian’s salvation is presently guaranteed, but experienced in the future. To speak of “obtaining” salvation does not mean one has to work to meet a standard, or additional necessary conditions for salvation. The point is that God intends for us to receive salvation in the future [For future salvation, see 5:8 note on “hope of salvation”].

5:10. “who died.” The words “who died” are in the genitive case, which connects it to the phrase “our Lord Jesus Christ” and the preposition dia in verse nine. Dia occurring with words in the genitive can indicate agency or means, as it does here [See Appendix 11: “Greek Prepositions”]. We “obtain salvation” (v.9) by means of, or through, the death of Jesus Christ. In the Greek the words “who died” are not just a side note describing Jesus—as it can seem in the English—but actually a part of the means by which we obtain salvation.

“in our place.” The Greek preposition huper can be used in the sense of substitution, “in place of, instead of, in the name of” (BDAG, 1c). [See also: Appendix 11: “Greek Prepositions”; Robertson, The Minister and His Greek New Testament, pp. 35-42; and
Robertson’s *Grammar*). More than simply dying “for us,” Jesus actually died in our place; he died in our stead.

“*whether awake or are sleeping.*” The Greek verb for “sleeping” is *katheudō* (#2518 καθεύδω). This phrase is the figure of speech “double entendre,” which is when a phrase has two meanings. Up to this point, “sleeping” has been used in two senses in the epistle of Thessalonians; it has been used to refer to dead believers who are sleeping the sleep of death (4:13), and to living people who are walking in moral and spiritual blindness (5:6). Now here in 5:10 Paul says whether awake or asleep, we will live with the Lord. Which sense of sleeping is meant? The more immediate context is the depraved, living-sleepers of 5:6, which uses the same Greek word for sleep as does verse ten, *katheudō*. The remoter context is the dead-sleepers of 4:13, who are described with a synonymous word for sleep, *koimaō* (#2837 κοιµάω). Both meanings of “awake” and “asleep” are likely included in this one phrase. Whether we are actually dead, or spiritually and morally “dead” (i.e. inattentive and disobedient), we will nevertheless live with the Lord. Seen in this light, this verse becomes a powerful affirmation of the doctrine that one cannot lose his or her salvation, as well as the resurrection from among the dead.

“*will live.*” Cp. HCSB; NASB; NET. The subjunctive mood of the verb does not cast any doubt on its fulfillment, but comes from the *hina* clause. Since the subjunctive mood frequently expresses uncertainty, the word “will” is often translated as “may.” However, the subjunctive mood, from which the “may” translation comes, does not always express uncertainty. Here the subjunctive is due to the *hina* purpose-result clause, and hence does not necessarily express any doubt that we will be glorified with Christ. As Wallace writes, “Sometimes the subjunctive acts like a future indicative… When used in result clauses, for example, the subjunctive cannot be said to express “probability” (*Grammar*, p. 462). Seeing this is the case, we have rendered the verb with the future “will” to avoid mistakenly inferring doubt from the subjunctive, which grammatically is not intended here.

5:11. “*just as you are doing.*” There is a *kai* in this phrase serving as an intensifier, “just as you are even doing,” which the NET catches as “just as you are in fact doing.”

5:12. “*are leading you in the Lord.*” The word for “leading” is an interesting word, *proistemi* (#4291 προίστημι). “Over you,” as some versions read, is not the best translation. The word means to be placed before, or first, to lead; and inherent in the word is also the sense of having an interest in, caring for, being enthusiastic about (BDAG). This paints a picture of a leader as one who cares for the people, has an interest in them, and who goes out before them (Greek: *pro* “working hard” (5:11). We express leadership not as an exercise of ecclesiastical authority or according to dominating models of secular leadership, but as one who supports people in love and cares for them.

5:18. “*in Christ Jesus.*” Meaning, “in connection to Christ Jesus.” As Lenski writes, “This is his sweet gospel will ‘in connection with Christ,’ in connection with all that is embodied in the Anointed One.”

5:19. “*Do not quench the spirit.*” Verses 19-21 all deal with the same subject, the manifestations of holy spirit, especially prophecy. We are not to quench the gift of holy spirit, but encourage its use. Similarly, we are to encourage prophecy, and when a prophetic word comes, not to treat it with contempt, but rather think of it as being from the Lord. However, because prophecies can also come from people’s minds or even
demons, God exhorts us to test everything. We hold on to what is good, and stay away from every form of evil, which in this context is any form of false manifestations, lying signs and wonders, and such as that.

The word for quench is σβέννυμι (#4570 σβέννυμι), meaning to put out or extinguish; the word also can mean, by figurative extension, suppress, stifle. Of course the spirit can never be extinguished in the sense of being totally dissipated, so the lesson of this verse is a warning to not suppress the work of the spirit, especially to not hinder the manifestations, as can be seen in the context (vv. 20-21).

5:20. “treat…with contempt.” This word, exoutheneô (#1848 εξουθενεω), is often translated treat with contempt, despise, or reject. And all three meanings are inherent within the word. The basic meaning is “to show by one’s attitude or manner of treatment that an entity has no merit or worth” (BDAG). We have translated exoutheneô as “treat with contempt” in nine of its eleven usages, with the exceptions being, “reject” (Acts 4:11) and “have no standing” (1 Cor. 6:4).

5:21. “test everything.” Although there is a general lesson here, that Christians are to be wise and test everything, in this context the “everything” has the more specific meaning of prophecies and other manifestations. So this verse is similar to 1 John 4:1, which says we are to test the prophecies (see commentary on 1 John 4:1).

5:22. “stay away from.” The Greek is ἀπεχομαι (#567 ἀπέχομαι). The sense of this word is much more than “abstain” (e.g. KJV, ESV). To abstain from something is simply not to participate in an activity, even if one is in proximity to the action. For instance, one could be in the company of drunkards and yet abstain from alcohol. But ἀπεχομαι is saying “to avoid contact with” and “keep away from” evil (BDAG). It is not enough to simply refrain from participating in evil actions; one must physically remove himself away from evil. The context of this is the manifestations of holy spirit, although there is, of course, a wider application as well. We are to stay away from false manifestations and lying signs and wonders.

“form.” The KJV reads “appearance,” which is one possible definition of eidos (#1491 εἶδος). However, the meaning is more than just staying away from everything that appears to be evil, it also includes keeping away from every kind of evil (NIV). Eidos can have the meaning of “a variety of something, kind” (BDAG). The translation “form” captures both senses of appearance and kind.

5:23. “sanctify.” Scripture uses the word sanctify in two senses. It is used to refer to the state of holiness we are granted by Christ as a free gift of righteousness (e.g., Acts 26:18; Heb. 10:10), and it is used to refer to the Christian’s allowing Christ to make him more holy by helping to eliminate sinful behavior and energizing good works (e.g., 2 Tim. 2:21). Here, sanctify is used in the sense of becoming more like Christ throughout one’s life. For Paul would not ask God to sanctify completely these believers who already received sanctification when they became Christians. Instead, this is a genteel way of Paul encouraging the Thessalonians to be holy in every area of their lives by allowing God into those aspects of their lives.

“spirit.” The Greek word is pneuma (#4151 πνεῦμα), which is used of spirit, breath, and wind. In this verse, “spirit” refers to the attitude of the mind and posture of the heart, as it does in phrases such as “poor in spirit” (Matt. 5:3). Other places it refers to attitude are Matthew 26:41 and Mark 14:38, when Peter and the other disciples were sleepy and Jesus told them, “The spirit [attitude] is willing, but the body is weak.” It is also
“attitude” in Acts 18:25 when Apollos was called, “fervent in the spirit” (KJV), which is why the NRSV translates the phrase, “he spoke with burning enthusiasm.” Interestingly, English also uses “spirit” as “attitude.” For example, we speak of a person being “in good spirits,” or a school having good “school spirit.” “Spirit” is used of attitude and juxtaposed with “soul” in Philippians 1:27 as well as in this verse.

“soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (ἕν; pronounced psoo-kay'), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here “soul” is inclusive of the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the person himself. It is placed together with “spirit” which more specifically emphasizes the attitude or posture of the heart (thus this is similar to Philippians 1:27), and with the “body” which speaks to one’s physical well-being. Paul is concerned about the whole person: his attitude; his mental and emotional life, and his physical well-being. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

“until.” The en does not mean “at,” as if we were not kept between now and the Parousia (coming) but at the Parousia we were suddenly kept. “At” the Parousia we will be complete in every way, because we will get our new, spiritual bodies. As Lenski writes, “the preservation occurs in this life,” i.e., we are preserved until the coming, the Parousia of Christ.

5:24. “who will also do it.” The one who calls us is faithful, so he will not just call us and then abandon us. He will call us, and then work in us to complete the goal of the calling, he will also “do it.”

5:27. “I put you under oath...” A strong command to read the Scripture to the congregation, a necessity since very few people could read. See commentary on 1 Timothy 4:13.

5:28. “be with you.” There is no verb for “be” in the sentence. The Greek reads: “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ—with you!” Like many languages, Greek does not need a “to be” verb for a sentence to be complete. Thus, the sentence “The cow brown” is understood in Greek to mean “The cow is brown.” Nevertheless, the Greek language does have a “to be” verb that can be used for clarity, so if God does not use it, He may be communicating multiple meanings or overtones besides the primary meaning, and that is the case here. This verse, the very end of the epistle, is a wish and prayer for the people, and the essence of it is: “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you in an active way throughout your daily life.” The believers in Thessalonica had been severely persecuted (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14), and only had a few weeks of teaching and training from the apostle Paul before he was chased out of the city (Acts 17:1-9, esp. v. 2), so they needed much grace. However, because the “to be” verb was purposely left out of the verse, it can also legitimately be translated, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with you” (YLT). This is a secondary meaning, but one that is throughout the epistle, because the grace of Christ is with us. Our salvation is secure, our hope is assured, and the grace in the lives of the believers of Thessalonica was evident. It is possible to look at this verse as the figure of speech amphibologia, where one thing is said, but two things are meant.
Chapter 1


1:3. “as it is fitting.” Fitting comes from *axios* (#514 ἄξιος). It could be rendered, “as is appropriate,” or “as is right.” The point is that the behavior of the Thessalonians is worthy of, and deserving of, thanks to God.

“is growing... is increasing.” The verbs are in the present active tense. It is the durative present, showing continual action. Their faith is growing and continues to grow; their love is increasing and continues to increase. Kistemaker translates the latter as “constantly increasing.”

1:4. “boast.” The word *boast* can have two connotations—just like English usage—one can boast in a negative way and in a positive way. Scripture uses both instances (e.g., James 4:16 and Rom. 15:17). This is the positive sense of boasting; Paul was proud of the Thessalonians in a godly way. See also 1 Thessalonians 2:19 note on “crown of boasting.”

1:5. “which is a clear indication of the righteous judgment of God: that you are counted worthy of the Kingdom of God.” This phrase is translated differently in nearly every Bible version. The differences lie in the understanding of how the phrase “counted worthy” relates to the “judgment of God.” In the Greek “counted worthy” is an *eis* with the articular infinite construction: εἰς τὸ καταξιωθῆναι. Grammatically, this construction could be understood in three different ways (Wallace, *Grammar*, p. 611):

1. To indicate the purpose of God’s judgment. E.g., “This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, and is intended to make you worthy of the Kingdom of God” (NRSV; cp. NASB; NET). This view makes the sufferings of the Thessalonians part of God’s judgment, intended for the purpose of counting them worthy.
2. To indicate the result of God’s judgment. E.g., “All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God” (NIV; cp. ASV). On this view the Thessalonians’ suffering could have been the judgment of God which resulted in their being counted worthy, or it could simply be that they suffered apart from God’s will and his having a judgment (i.e. legal opinion) of them resulted in their being considered worthy.
3. The construction could also be used as an elaboration of what God’s judgment is (this is known as “epexegetical” usage; Wallace, *Grammar*, p. 607, 611). E.g., “It is a clear evidence of God's righteous judgment that you will be counted worthy of God's kingdom” (HCSB). On this view the “being counted worthy” is simply an elaboration on what the “judgment of God” is. In other words, the judgment (i.e. legal opinion) of God is one that considers the Thessalonians worthy.
Like the HCSB, the REV translation takes the third option for considering the eis with an articular infinite construction. Rather than being the purpose or result of God’s judgment, we feel the “being counted worthy” is God’s judgment. “Worthy,” from kataxiōō (#2661 καταξιοοω), is in the aorist tense, showing it is the onetime consideration of God. When the Thessalonians were saved, God in a one-time action considered them worthy, which stands in contrast to their continual perseverance of faith though persecution. Rather than judging that the Thessalonians “will be” counted worthy (HCSB), the sense is that they “are” presently counted worthy of the kingdom (REV). This judgment is said to be “righteous,” from dikaios (#1342 δικαιος), meaning, right, correct, fair, and just. That God correctly judged the Thessalonians as righteous is demonstrated by the Thessalonians’ growing faith and love, and their steadfastness and faith even amidst persecutions. They would have been saved and thus righteous before God even if they had not stood faithful in persecutions, because Christian salvation is guaranteed. However, the fact that the Thessalonians did stand faithful in the midst of the persecution was a clear indication (endeigma [#1730 ἔνδειγμα]) that God’s saving them was righteous.

1:6. “for indeed.” The Greek is eiper (#1512 εἰπερ), in what is known as a first class condition. The word literally means “if indeed,” however, there is no doubt being shed on the certainty of the condition. Hence, Kistemaker translates the verse as follows: “If indeed, (it is) righteous in God’s estimation (as it certainly is) to repay…” “it is a righteous thing with God.” This is the meaning of the phrase para (with/aside) Theos (God). From beside where God is, i.e., from His point of view, it is a righteous, or just thing to repay evildoers. (Cp. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament).


“in flaming fire inflicting vengeance.” This is one of the places in the text where the verse is broken wrong. The phrase in flaming fire obviously goes with the inflicting vengeance of verse eight, and so verse 8 should have started before “in flaming fire.”

1:8. “inflicting vengeance.” “Inflicting” is from the Greek verb didomi (#1325 διδομι) and “vengeance” is from the noun ekdikesis (#1557 ἐκδίκησις). The word didomi in its basic sense means “to give.” Hence, God is going to “deal out” retribution (NASB). The translation “inflicting” comes from a consideration of the context—it is judgment, punishment, and retribution that is being dealt out; thus, to deal out punishment is to “inflict” vengeance (cp. ESV; NRSV; NAB).

There are two types of justice administered in the Bible: corrective (or redemptive) justice, and retributive justice. Corrective justice deals out punishment in the hope of reforming the punished. For instance, the rod of correction drives foolishness from a child (Prov. 22:15)—the child’s punishment is a form of justice, but it is meant to restore the child to what is right. The delivering unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so the spirit may be saved, is another example of corrective justice (1 Cor. 5:5). Retributive justice, on the other hand, does not intend to reform the sinner at all, but is only meant as pure punishment so the offender gets what is deserved. Old Testament capital punishment exemplifies retributive justice; if a murderer is stoned to death, there is no chance for his or her reform; the only result is that justice is paid. Likewise, when the unrepentant are thrown into the lake of fire, retributive justice will have been meted
out with no hope of future reform. While it may seem that retributive justice is not loving, it is just and fair, and God is just. Also, no individual is predestined to retributive justice; it is only given if it is deserved. God tells us ahead of time that the wicked will get what they deserve, so that people have the choice not to be wicked. If they ignore God’s warning, only then do they get the justice they deserve.

Here in 2 Thessalonians 1:8, it is clear from the context of “repaying” affliction (1:6) that what is meant is justice in the sense of retribution or vengeance. (Cp. also Romans 12:19: “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (ESV). In English, the word vengeance has the connotation of a just retaliation that is in proportion to the crime committed (Webster’s Dictionary of Synonyms), which highlights the justice of God. Only He is qualified to exact vengeance, because only he can pay back in exact proportion what is truly deserved, leaving the scales of justice equal in the end.

1:9. “glory of his strength.” The phrase “of his strength” is descriptive of the Lord’s glory. They are cut off from the glory of the Lord, glory that is characterized by strength.

Another interpretive option is to view the phrase as the figure of speech antimereia, the exchanging of parts of speech (Bullinger, Figures of Speech). In this case, the adjective “glorious” is put in the noun form “glory.” Cp. HCSB “glorious strength.”

1:10. “when he comes.” The subjunctive mood of this verb is due to the particle otan (when, whenever). It is not expressing any doubt or uncertainty as to the actuality of the coming of the Lord, rather, it refers to uncertainty of the timing—whenever he may come.

The truth that a day was coming when God would come (by sending His Messiah) to judge the earth was well established in the Old Testament. Psalm 96:13 (HCSB) says of Yahweh, “for He is coming—for He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with His faithfulness” (cp. Ps. 98:9). The prophetic books clearly revealed a “Day of Yahweh” when He judged the earth and its inhabitants (cp. Isa. 13:6-13; Joel 1:15, 2:1, 2; Amos 5:18-20; Obadiah 1:15; Zephaniah 1:14-18; Malachi 4:1-5).

“marveled at.” The Greek is thaumazo (#2296 θαυµάζω). This word refers to both admiration and respect, as well as awe and wonder (BDAG). When Christ is seen by his believers, he will at once induce a profound awe within those present, who will feel great admiration and respect welling within them.

“this includes you.” Cp. NIV. The NIV captures the heart of what is meant by the parenthesis: “This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.” Versions such as the ESV and others are wrong because they translate the hoti clause as if it causally effected the rest of the verse: e.g., “…when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints…because our testimony to you was believed” (ESV). This makes it sound as though the Thessalonians’ belief causes the Lord to come on that day—which is obviously mistaken. Rather, the hoti clause is the figure of speech epitrechon, or parenthesis, meaning to include the Thessalonians among the believers who will marvel at the Lord. For information on the figure epitrechon see commentary on Romans 10:6.

1:11. “will.” See commentary entry on “will live” in 1 Thessalonians 5:10.

“desire for goodness.” Compare the NASB, HCSB, and NET translations: “desire for goodness.” Literally, the phrase reads, “desire of goodness.” The word goodness is in the genitive case; it is the objective genitive. That is to say, “goodness” is the object of
desire. Paul prays God would fulfill the Thessalonians’ every desire for goodness. This genitive phrase likely also has a secondary meaning of “a desire that flows out of goodness” (a genitive of production), making this use of the genitive an amphibologia.

1:12. “will.” Not “may.” See entry on “will live” in 1 Thessalonians 5:10.

“in you...in him.” “In” means, in connection with; in union with. See commentary on Romans 6:3. Our relationship with Christ is a win-win situation when we walk in love and godly character. Jesus Christ is glorified by his association with us, and we are glorified by our association with him.

“in accord with.” Cp. the NAB translation. The Greek is the preposition kata; for this usage of kata see BDAG def. 5: “marker of norm of similarity or homogeneity; [thus] according to, in accordance with, in conformity with, according to.”

Chapter 2

2:2. “quickly.” I.e., do not hastily, precipitously swerve from your present beliefs regarding the coming of the Lord (Cp. Morris, New International Commentary on the New Testament). By extension from the idea of “quickly,” this word, 

“state of mind.” Kistemaker translates: “(normal state of) mind.” The Greek reads, simply, “be not shaken from the mind (nous [#3563 νοῦς]).” This is the figure of speech metonymy, where mind is put in place of beliefs, or one’s mindset (Cp. Bullinger, Figures of Speech).

“a spirit.” The natural reading of “spirit,” pneuma (#4151 πνεῦμα), in this verse is the same as in 1 Corinthians 14:12 and 1 John 4:1-3, where “spirit” refers by the figure of speech metonymy to an utterance produced by spirit, i.e., either to a prophecy or a spiritual utterance from someone who has a demon. It is less likely, but the text is open to “spirit” also having the meaning of an apparition, the appearance of a spirit-being (cp. Gal. 1:8-9). The Greek word, “spirit,” is used in 1 Corinthians 14:12 and 32, and 1 John 4:1-3 to refer primarily to a prophecy. Thus Paul assures the believers in Thessalonica that no genuine prophetic word would indicate that the Day of the Lord had already arrived. See commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:12.

“that the Day of the Lord has come.” The Day of the Lord in this case is the Great Tribulation, the terrible time on earth that is described in the book of Revelation. Christians will be Raptured off the earth before the wrath of God comes (1 Thess. 4:13-18). There is some uncertainty as to the timing of the Rapture, and whether Christians will experience any of the specific plagues described in Revelation, particularly any of the seals in Revelation 6 (although the weight of evidence is that the Rapture will be before the seals are broken), but it is clear that the Rapture will occur before the great plagues described in the later chapters of Revelation.

This verse in 2 Thessalonians is more evidence that Paul taught the Rapture would occur before “the Day of the Lord,” with its plagues and judgments. Only those who had been taught that there was a Rapture before the Tribulation would be “unsettled or alarmed” at the thought that the Day of the Lord had begun and they were still on earth. If Paul taught that the Rapture came before the Day of the Lord, and now they were being taught by others that they were in the Day of the Lord, then they would be alarmed
because that would have meant they were not saved and they had missed the Rapture. If, on the other hand, Paul had not taught them about the Rapture (as if there was no Rapture), or taught that the Rapture was in the middle of the Day of the Lord or at the end of it, then if people taught them they were in the midst of the Day of the Lord that would not have been alarming. On the contrary, it would have been exciting because then they would know they were very close to Jesus’ return. If Paul did not teach that there was a Rapture before the Day of the Lord, then he would have taught Christians to “stand fast and prepare for trouble” in the Day of the Lord, which is what Jesus taught Israel (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). The fact that the Thessalonians were unsettled and alarmed at the teaching they were in the Day of the Lord clearly indicates Paul taught a pre-Tribulation Rapture.

2 Thessalonians 2:5 shows that Paul had been teaching on the Rapture and what would happen after it when he was at Thessalonica. Furthermore, the fact that the Rapture is clearly in 1 Thessalonians, which was written shortly before 2 Thessalonians (likely 6 months at most) shows that Paul had spent considerable time in Thessalonica explaining the Christians hope and future.

2:3. “the apostasy.” The Greek word is ἀποστασία (#646 ἀποστασία), and it refers to people’s changing their loyalty or allegiance; disobeying established authority. Thus it means an apostasy, a rebellion, a defection, a revolt. In the Septuagint, written about 250 BC, it became a technical term for a rebellion or apostasy (cp. Josh. 22:22; 2 Chron. 29:19; 33:19; Jer. 2:19. See Theological Dictionary of the New Testament; cp. Friberg’s Lexicon). The meaning “apostasy” or “rebellion” for ἀποστασία is so universally attested in New Testament times that most lexicons only list meanings such as “rebellion” or “apostasy” for ἀποστασία (cp. BDAG, Bullinger, EDNT, Friberg, Louw-Nida, Renn, Thayer, UBS, and Vine).

Apostasia and its cognate forms and related words are used over 40 times in the Septuagint, and they are all used of a political or religious defection or rebellion. This becomes extremely significant when we remember that, especially for the Greek speaking believers such as the ones in Thessalonica, their Old Testament was the Septuagint, not the Hebrew text. Thus, their exposure to ἀποστασία was clearly in referral to an apostasy or rebellion, and so that is what they would have expected the word to mean in Paul’s letter to them, unless the context clearly indicated something different, which it does not. Even more reason that the Thessalonian believers would have expected ἀποστασία to have the same meaning in Paul’s letter to them that it had in the Septuagint is that when Paul quoted the Old Testament in his epistles, the majority of the time he quoted the Septuagint, not the Hebrew text, thus establishing a continuity of thought between what God had said in the Old Testament and the points He was making in the New Testament. Furthermore, the only other use of ἀποστασία in the New Testament is Acts 21:21, where it is used of a rebellion or apostasy.

Because ἀποστασία is derived from the noun ἀφίστημι (#868), which means “to depart,” some Christians assert that this verse is referring to the Rapture. It is also stated that since ἀποστασία is preceded by the definite article, “the,” in the Greek, that it must be referring to the well-known departure, the Rapture. But it is a mistake to insist that the meaning of a noun (in this case ἀποστασία) is basically the same as the verb (in this case ἀφίστημι) as some commentators have done (cp. Wuest, English). As more and more secular Greek documents are unearthed by archaeologists and historians it is clear that it
often occurs that nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, even when from the same root, have very different meanings. This is especially the case when a certain inflection of a word takes on a special meaning, usually referred to by scholars as a “technical meaning,” and that is exactly what has happened with the noun *apostasia*, as Friberg states in his lexicon.

We can see from the context why this apostasy has the definite article and is called “the *apostasia*,” “the apostasy,” and that it is a reference to the well-known apostasy that even Jesus spoke to his disciples about on the Mount of Olives shortly before his crucifixion (Matt. 24:10). But even more than that, after speaking of “the apostasy” in verse 3, Paul then goes into a very long discussion about it through verse 12, and he gives details that are not in the Old Testament or Gospels. The Man of Sin will come, powered by Satan and doing Satan’s work. There will be all kinds of lying signs, miracles, and wonders, and many people will be deceived. The Man of Sin, sometimes called the Antichrist, will not be atheist or agnostic. Quite the opposite! He will be a religious person, but will lead people away from the true God, true worship, and even truth itself (Dan. 8:12; 2 Tim. 4:4). Thus he will lead people in a great apostasy. This should not be surprising because Satan has effectively used false religion to turn people from God and truth for millennia. So verse 3 speaks of the apostasy, and the following 9 verses enlarge upon some of what is involved with that apostasy.

We should mention that some of the early English versions such as Tyndale (1526), Coverdale (1535), Beza (1565), and the Geneva Bible (1599) translated *apostasia* as “departure,” because these are sometimes used to support the idea that this verse is speaking about the Rapture. However, there are some things we must keep in mind about those early English translations. First, “departure” does not mean “Rapture.” A “departure” can refer to an apostasy and rebellion. Second, those translations were made from the Greek before the Greek papyri were discovered by archaeologists, so the proper meaning of many New Testament words was not known (this in part explains why the modern versions differ from the older ones in so many verses). Also, the early versions were made during a time when Greek lexicons and even Greek lexical studies were almost non-existent. Furthermore, Greek studies in the Septuagint had hardly begun, and there was nothing in English or Greek that could be considered a decent concordance (and there would not be one for many years to come). So to insist that the early translations referred to a “Rapture” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 as if they had a truth that has now generally been lost is simply not true.

Another important reason for believing the word *apostasia* refers to a rebellion or apostasy is the context itself. Paul had already taught the Thessalonians that there was going to be a Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-17), and from the scope of Scripture and this section in 2 Thessalonians it is clear that that Rapture would precede the wrath that will come upon the world during the Day of the Lord. Thus the only way that the Thessalonian believers could be in the Day of the Lord, as some false teachers were saying, would have been if they missed the Rapture (or Paul had been wrong in his teaching). So it would not have helped the situation for Paul to say the Rapture would come before the Day of the Lord, because they knew that already and apparently were confused about it and whether they had missed it. Instead, Paul is showing them that the Day of the Lord and its wrath had not come because the well-known apostasy had not yet come and the Man of Sin had not yet been revealed. That being the case, it is clear the Rapture had not happened yet.
2:4. “proclaiming himself to be God.” The word for “God” in the Greek, theos (#2316 θεός), lacks the definite article and so could either be “God” or “a god.” The fact that there is no definite article does not demand the translation “a god,” for there are clear instances where the word lacks the article and yet refers to the true God (e.g., 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Thess. 2:5). As Lenski points out, grammatically the word is functioning as a predicate, which is why the article is lacking here. The reason we know the antichrist proclaims himself to be God Himself, rather than a god, is that he sits himself in the naos (#3485 ναός), the holy of holies or inner sanctuary, which both early Christians and Jews would have understood to mean he was putting himself in the place of the true God (See: Earnest Best, First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians; Black's New Testament Commentaries. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993.).

2:5. “Do you not remember…?” The question posed in this verse is the figure of speech erotēsis, a rhetorical question (Bullinger, Figures of Speech). It is also a parenthesis with the continuation of thought about the man of Lawlessness flowing from verse four, picked back up in verse six.

“Used to tell you these things.” cp. Williams; Kistemaker’s translation. “Used to tell” is the imperfect tense of the verb “to speak,” legō (#3004 λέγω). The imperfect tense highlights that Paul “was telling them,” that it was a continual or habitual practice of his while he was still with the Thessalonians. Bible preachers and teachers should take note of this: it is never enough to teach the great truths of the faith once; we must teach them over and over again, so they can sink deep into the hearts of men.

2:6. “now holding him back.” The Greek word for “now,” nun (#3568 νῦν), goes with “now holding back” (e.g., HCSB; ESV; NASB) not “now know” (e.g., NIV; NAB) (Lenski; Kistemaker). One of the reasons is the juxtaposition between the Antichrist “now” being held back but “will be” revealed.

“will be revealed.” The verb “revealed” is in the subjunctive mood, but that is due to the conjunction hina at the beginning of the phrase that almost always is followed by a verb in the subjunctive mood. The context makes it clear that it is referring to a future event, hence the translation, “will be revealed.”

“when his time comes.” Compare NRSV. This is an idiomatic translation of the Greek ἐν τῷ καιρῷ ἑαυτοῦ, literally, “in his own proper time.” This is a difficult phrase to translate, not because of its meaning, but because there are many possible English translations, each with their own set of possible misunderstandings. The meaning of the Greek is clear, that there is a proper or right time (kairos (#2540 καιρός)) for the man of Lawlessness to be revealed. But how to bring this into English and avoid misreadings? The translation, “in his time” (KJV; ESV; NASB) misses the important aspect of kairos, that the time is particularly suited for his revelation, it is the proper time. But to say he will be revealed at his “appointed time” (NJB) gives the sense there is a fixed date for the revealing, which is not what the Greek conveys by using kairos. Kairois is only indicating that the revealing will be at the right and proper time; this in of itself does not mean God has set an appointed date for the eschaton. Neither should we look to the translation “in his own time” (NET), for to English readers this makes it sound like it is the antichrist’s choice of when he will be revealed, and he will do it “in his own time.” The translation that captures the sense of the Greek best for the English reader is, “he will be revealed when his time comes.” This puts the control of the revelation in God’s hands and yet recognizes that there is a proper time for him to be revealed.
2:7. “sacred secret of lawlessness.” We translate the Greek word *musterion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret,” because it referred to a “secret” that was in the sacred or religious sphere. A secret in the secular realm was referred to by the Greek word *kruptos*. Furthermore, *musterion* does not mean “mystery,” which is something incomprehensible, something that cannot be understood, but it means “secret,” something that some people know but others do not [For more information on *musterion* and the translation, “sacred secret,” see commentary on Ephesians 3:9].

There are many “sacred secrets” in scripture. For example, Paul uses the plural of *musterion* (#3466 μυστήριον) and refers to “sacred secrets” in 1 Corinthians 4:1: “regard us as… stewards of the sacred secrets of God.” (1 Cor. 13:2 has another usage in the plural). Other sacred secrets spoken of in the New Testament include: the sacred secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven/God (Matt. 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10; ), of Israel's partial hardening (Rom. 11:25); the content of speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:2); of new, transformed bodies at the return of Christ (1 Cor. 15:51); of Christ’s relationship to the church (Eph. 5:32); the sacred secret of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:7); and of godliness (1 Tim. 3:16); as well as several “sacred secrets” in the book of Revelation (1:20; 10:7; 17:5; 17:7). A major “sacred secret” in Acts and the Epistles is the dispensation, or “Administration” of Grace, called “the Administration of the grace of God” (Eph. 3:2), which is also referred to as the “Administration of the Sacred Secret” (Eph. 3:9).

At first it seems to be incongruous to refer to how the Devil is bringing forth lawlessness on earth as “the sacred secret of lawlessness.” That is because we typically use the word “sacred” to refer only to godly sacred things, not ungodly sacred things. However, looking in a dictionary shows that the word “sacred” refers to things set apart for the worship of any god or deity, and it also relates to things in the religious sphere in general in contrast to the secular or profane sphere. Thus actually, the Greek and English use “sacred” in much the same way. Understood that way, it is revealing to know that both God and the Devil have “sacred secrets,” and they reveal those secrets as the time and circumstances suit them. In this case, behind the scenes, unknown and unseen, the Devil is working his sacred secret of lawlessness, and certainly part of the fruit of that lawlessness is the general lawlessness, including the persecution of Christians, that we see on earth.

“taken out of the way.” The Greek reads, “becomes out of the middle.” This is a Greek Idiom for saying “taken out of the way.” Thayer’s lexicon addresses this in his definition of *mesos* (#3319 μέσος), translated “middle”: i. e. “out of the way, out of sight... γίνομαι ἐκ μέσου, to be taken out of the way, to disappear.”

“things.” This translation is purposely ambiguous as to what exactly is being held back—as the Greek is equally ambiguous. Many versions supply either *it* (e.g., ESV) or *him* (e.g., NET), thus dictating for the English reader what is being held back. If we say, “holding *it* back,” the “it” is impersonal and must refer to the sacred secret of lawlessness. If we say, “holding *him* back,” then “he” must be the man of lawlessness. However, the Greek does not specify what is being held back, it simply reads, “the one holding back.” The translation “holding things back” captures the ambiguous feeling of the Greek text.

“until taken out of the way.” This translation is also purposely ambiguous (see “things” above). Supplying *he is* or *it is* would designate the nature of the one holding back, putting into the translation whether this “one” is personal (“he”) or impersonal
“it”). Since the Greek is ambiguous, we have left the translation equally ambiguous: “there is one now holding things back until taken out of the way.” This leaves open what exactly is being held back and the nature of the “one” holding things back.

2:8. “the spirit from his mouth.” The word for “spirit” is pneuma (#4151 πνεῦμα). We retained the reading “spirit of his mouth” rather than “breath of his mouth,” feeling the former captured the phrase’s meaning more fully, and better exemplified the spirit power of the mouth. Scripture often uses the word “spirit” to refer to spiritual utterances, especially prophecy (See commentary on 1 Cor. 14:12). Such is the case here; Christ pronounces destruction by the breath of his mouth. This is portrayed as a sword coming out of Christ’s mouth in Revelation 19:15, 21. Isaiah 11:4 also says that the Messiah will destroy the wicked with the spiritual utterance from his mouth. It says, “He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath [ruach; spirit] of his lips he will slay the wicked” (NIV).

“bring to nothing his operations.” The verb for “bring to nothing” is katargeo (#2673 καταργέω), which has two primary definitions: (1) to render ineffective or powerless, and (2) to destroy or abolish. By the appearance of his coming, Christ will simultaneously destroy the lawless one by the prophetic utterance from his mouth and render unproductive all of his works on earth. The translation “bring to nothing” captures both senses. And because Paul already mentions the lawless one will be killed (seen both in this word, katargeo, and the word for “kill,” anaireo), the “rendering powerless” aspect refers to any residue of influence left after the death of the lawless one—his entire system of error is brought to nothing. Hence, Christ will “bring to nothing his operations.” Cp. Williams’ translation: “put a stop to his operations.”

“glorious appearance.” The word for appearance is epiphaneia (#2015 ἐπιφάνεια), from which we get our modern word “epiphany,” meaning, “a sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something.” In Greek, the word’s base meaning is to make visible, to shine light upon, hence, to appear. Epiphaneia has connotations of brightness and splendor, which is brought out by several different translations (e.g., KJV: “the brightness of his coming;” see also: NIV; HCSB; NJB). To capture its full sense, we have expanded the word to “glorious coming.”

2:9. “is.” The “is” is in the present tense; it is the prophetic present, speaking of future events in the present tense (Kistemaker). Wallace’s grammar refers to this as the futuristic present (Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, p. 535-36). The coming of the lawless one is a future event, yet Paul speaks of what his coming “is” in accord with, rather than what it “will” be in accord with. Writing in the prophetic present highlights the certainty and inevitability of lawless one’s coming (cp. Wallace, Greek Grammar, p. 536. For more information, see the commentary on Luke 3:9).

“by virtue of, and in accord with.” The Greek simply has the preposition kata, but kata has so many different meanings in this context that it needs to be expanded to get close to what it meant to anyone reading it in the first century. Note some of the many different ways it is translated by our English versions: “whose coming is marked by the working of Satan” (BBE; NJB); “it will happen through Satan’s efforts” (CEB; cp. CJB; ESV; NAB; NET); “the man of sin will come with the power of Satan” (GWN); “whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan” (NASB; NIV); “this man will come to do the work of Satan” (NLT). It is clear that the Greek preposition kata has at least two meanings in this verse; that the man of sin will come due to, and empowered by, Satan,
and also that the works that he will do will be “in accord with” Satan, i.e., the kinds of things that Satan himself has done throughout history.

“The Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

“and...and.” This repetition of the word “and” is the figure of speech polysyndeton (cp. Bullinger, Figures of Speech).

2:10. “deception for those.” An alternate translation would be: “every kind of unrighteous deception that deceives those who are destroying themselves,” or “that reaches those.” The Greek is simply the article (“those”) in the dative case, indicating that the action of deception reaches and affects those who are destroying themselves.

“destroying themselves.” The verb apollumi (#622 ἀπόλλυμι), “destroy,” can be middle or passive voice, and we believe that the middle voice fits best here. The middle voice means that the action of the verb comes back onto the subject itself. These people are not just “perishing” (which would be passive); rather, they play a role in bringing their destruction upon themselves. They are literally destroying themselves. Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible has, “And with all manner of deceit of unrighteousness, in them who are destroying themselves, because, the love of the truth, they did not welcome, that they might be saved.”

“love the truth.” The Greek text has a genitive construction and is amphibibological, that is, it contains the figure of speech amphibologia, or multiple meanings (cp. Bullinger, Figures of Speech). The genitive could be read as a genitive of relation (“love relating to the truth”), origin (“love that comes from the truth”), attributive genitive (“the true love”), or objective genitive (“they did not love the truth”). The objective genitive seems to best fit the context, but the fact is that these evil people did not accept any of these possible relationships between love and truth.

“and so be saved.” In the Greek this phrase is a result clause: the eis to with an infinitive construction. [For the eis to with an infinitive construction and result clauses, see Wallace, Greek Grammar, p. 592-93, 611]. These unbelievers refused the love of the truth, and by extension refused its result, the result that they may be saved. This result clause parallels the same expression of result in the next verse: see commentary on “so that” in 2:11.

2:11. “sends.” There is a lot in the verb “send,” which is the Greek pempō (#3992 πέμπω). First, it is in the present tense, even though the sending is still a future event. This is the prophetic present; see commentary above on “is” in 2 Thessalonians 2:9. The reason for the present tense is that it makes a stronger impression than just “will send,” and the second reason, one that is very important today, 2000 years after Paul wrote, is that the influence is not just for after the Rapture, but can easily start in the end times. Putting the verb in the present tense opens the door for the deluding influence of the Adversary to start at any time.

Second, the verb “send” is being used as the idiom of permission. God set up in the beginning that sin had consequences, and when people sin God’s justice requires that He cannot effectively protect them from the Adversary. God “sends” the deluding influence, which might even be a demon, only in the sense that when people sin and refuse to repent
they open themselves up to attacks of the Devil and being blinded and influenced by him. [For more on the idiom of permission, see commentary on Romans 9:18].

“deluding influence.” Cp. NET; NASB; NAB; NJB. In Greek the phrase literally reads, he sends “a working of deception.” God does not send the lie itself, but the “working” or “power,” from energeia (#1753 ἐνέργεια). This power is described by the noun plane (#4106 πλάνη) in the genitive case. Plane is an “error” or “deception,” thus God sends a power that is characterized by delusion, it is a “power of delusion.” This translates into “deluding influence.” Lenski comments on the KJV translation, “strong dilusion,” and says the KJV has: “‘strong dilusion’ as if energeian were adjectival; but the governing noun is never adjectival, only the genitive may be, thus here the meaning is not ‘energetic energy,’ (‘strong dilusion’).”

“so that.” In the Greek this phrase is a result clause: the eis to with an infinitive construction. [For the eis to + infinitive construction and result clauses, see Wallace, Greek Grammar, p. 592-93, 611]. This result clause parallels the result clause in the preceding verse. The unbelievers refused the love of the truth along with the result of being saved, and so God sends them a deluding influence with the result of believing what is false. These people did not love the truth but rather clung to falsehood and so God gives them what they want. They first chose the result of damnation and believing error, then God honored their decision. God does not inhibit these people’s free will; they have made their free decision and now in an act of judgment God strengthens their position, much like Pharaoh who first hardened his own heart then God hardened it also.

2:12. “judged.” The Greek word is krino (#2919 κρίνω). Why did Paul use krino and not katakrino, which has the more obvious connotations of judicial punishment and pronouncing of a sentence? The answer is that the connotations of krino’s semantic range fit better with the context. Krino has heavy implications of making a choice or decision, having an opinion; by logical extension it is used to refer to a judicial decision, hence, “judgment.” The context of this verse centers around the choices of unbelievers. They “took pleasure in” (from eudokeo, (#2106 εὐδοκέω), which also means “to choose”) unrighteousness, and they did not accept the love of the truth but opted for falsehood. The unbelievers have made their choice, they have deemed what seems good to them and now in this verse God is making a choice in the word krino—He shows His divine, judicial opinion of those who did not choose Him.

2:13. “firstfruits.” The Greek word translated “firstfruits” is aparchē (#536 ἀπαρχή), which means “firstfruits; the first of a harvest.” We have the firstfruits of the spirit (Rom. 8:23), and we are the firstfruits of those who are saved (cp. James 1:18). How can that be? Our salvation is guaranteed now, and it will be completed first when we are Raptured, before others are resurrected from the dead to everlasting life.

Some Greek texts of this verse do not read aparchē, but instead have “from the beginning” (ap’ archē, composed of a contraction of apō (#575 ἀπό) meaning “from” and archē (#746 ἀρχή) meaning “beginning”) (cp. KJV; NIV). We agree with Metzger’s arguments in A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, that the most likely reading is “firstfruits.” Paul uses the word for “firstfruits,” aparchē, in six other places, and he does not use the term archē to refer to the beginning anywhere (except possibly Philippians 4:15). Furthermore, there are other instances when scribes have altered “firstfruits” to “from the beginning,” even though the changes do not fit the context (Rom. 16:5; Rev. 14:4).
Given developing Christian theology and a trend towards predestination, we can see that there would be theological motives for scribes changing “firstfruits” to “beginning,” but there are no such reasons for changing “beginning” to “firstfruits.” Also, the reading “firstfruits” is the more difficult reading, because the Thessalonians were not technically the first people in Europe to whom the Gospel was brought (the people of Philippi were), they were only among the first to be saved. In textual criticism there is a principle known as lector difficilis (“difficult reading”), which says the more difficult reading is likely the original because it would be more likely to be changed by later scribes trying to smooth out the tension in the text. Thus scribes who did not understand how the Thessalonians were chosen as firstfruits, and had a theological preference for the reading “from the beginning,” most likely changed the text here from aparchē to ap’ archē.

“holiness produced by the spirit.” The Greek simply reads “holiness of spirit.” Theologians argue about the meaning of the phrase. The word “spirit” is in the genitive case in Greek, and the phrase “holiness of spirit,” can be, and is usually accepted to mean, “holiness that is produced by the spirit,” the genitive being a genitive of production. That is what we think is most likely going on here. However, some theologians (R. C. H. Lenski, for example) say that it refers to the “spirit” being made holy. Thus if our “spirit” is our attitudes, emotions, etc., (like in the phrase, “poor in spirit”), we would be chosen for salvation in connection with us believing the truth and also our minds and emotions being made holy.

If the verse is saying, “holiness produced by the spirit,” the question, “What is being made holy” is not answered. It is assumed that “we” are being made holy. If the verse is saying that “the spirit is being made holy,” then the question, “What is making the spirit holy,” is not answered. It is assumed that it is the spirit of God that is working in us to make our “spirit,” our attitudes and emotions, holy.

Thus the difference between the two readings is quite small. Since the way the Greek reads makes both interpretations possible, it is quite possible that God wants us to consider both options and realize both are true. Unfortunately, although it is possible to word the Greek such that both meanings are possible, if we simply say, “holiness of spirit” in English, the readers are usually just confused. They are not used to the genitive being flexible, and not generally used to reading “spirit” as the attitudes, thoughts, and emotions. Given that situation, the more likely, and to us the more dominant, way to read the verse, that our holiness is produced by, and in concert with, the gift of holy spirit inside us, was the way to translate the verse.

“belief in the truth.” Literally, “faith of the truth.” It is the objective genitive, where the word in the genitive case (“truth”) is the object of the head noun (“belief”), thus the idea is “belief in the truth.”

2:14. “so you can obtain.” The translation “for” comes from the Greek word eis (#1519 εἰς), which the KJV renders as “to.” The problem with the KJV translation is that it misses the meaning of eis here, which is to communicate the purpose of our calling from God; namely, God called us for the purpose of obtaining the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Greek, eis is often used to communicate purpose (BDAG, def. 4f). On the other hand, if one is called “to” something, it usually means there is a standard to which one is called to meet. But this is not the meaning of the Greek here. We are not called to the obtaining of the Lord’s glory, rather, we are called for the obtaining of the Lord’s glory.
2:15. “letter.” This refers to the letter of 1 Thessalonians, which was also sent from Paul, Silas, and Timothy (i.e., “us”). (Cp. Lenski).

“traditions.” Scripture uses the word for “traditions,” paradosis (#3862 παράδοσις), in both a negative and positive sense; there are good traditions and bad traditions. The word simply refers to instruction that has been passed down, whether good and true instruction, or bad instruction. In the Gospels it is always used in a negative sense of the Scribes and Pharisees’ “traditions of men,” which hinder the commands of God (Matt. 15:2, 3, 6; Mark 7:3, 5, 8, 9, 13). It is also used in the negative sense in Colossians 2:8. Paul uses the term three times, however, in a positive sense (1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6). We are told to be careful to adhere to the things passed down from Paul, and to remain in them.

2:17. “establish.” The versions are split between the translations “establish” and “strengthen” for sterizō (#4741 στηρίζω). The word means both; it refers to an internal strengthening which causes one to be committed and firmly in place. We prefer the translation “establish” over “strengthen” because the former better captures the full sense of the word. In other words, “establish” includes the idea of “strengthen,” but the term “strengthen” does not necessarily contain the idea of being established.

Chapter 3

3:3. “Wicked One.” The Greek is poneros (#4190 πονηρός), which the BDAG Greek-English Lexicon describes as, “pertaining to being morally or socially worthless; therefore, ‘wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, and degenerate.’” Poneros is an adjective, but it is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun; for more on substantives, see the commentary on Matthew 5:37). The Slanderer is the fount and foundation of wickedness. It was in him that wickedness was first found, when he was lifted up with pride and decided to rebel against God. Ever since that time he has been true to his name, “the Wicked One,” and has been doing and causing wickedness wherever he can, which, since he is “the god of this age,” is a considerable amount of wickedness. [For more names of the Slanderer (the Devil) and their meanings, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

3:4. “confidence concerning you in the Lord.” The word for “concerning” comes from the Greek preposition epi (#1909 ἐπί). In this case epi does not here have its usual meaning of “over” or “upon.” Rather, it is functioning as a “marker of feelings directed toward someone” (BDAG, def. 15). Paul is expressing his feelings of confidence towards the Thessalonians.

3:6. “in the name of Jesus Christ.” This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority. [For more on the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6].

“disorderly.” The word “disorderly” comes from the Greek ataktōs (#814 ἀτάκτως). The term has been translated numerous ways: “idleness,” “unruly,” “responsively,” “undisciplined,” and “disorderly.” Etymologically, it comes from the prefix a-, meaning
“not”, and taktōs, meaning “in order,” “proper”; and so literally, the word means “not in order,” or “not proper.” The word does not specifically refer to “idleness,” as many versions translate it (E.g., ESV; NRSV), but rather speaks more of improper behavior generally. Although, from the context of the epistle we can see that the disorderly behavior was idleness: “the specific manner in which the irresponsible behavior manifests itself is described in the context: freelancing, sponging” (BDAG, ataktōs).

3:10. “and indeed.” The Greek reads kai gar. The word gar is often used as a logical connection, “for,” but here it is not so used. There is more of a break intended. Lenski calls this the “confirmatory gar,” which does not imply a logical connection from what proceeds, rather it simply confirms it—hence the translation “indeed.” See commentary on Romans 9:3.

“used to give.” Compare the NASB and NET translations. The rendering “used to” comes out of the imperfect tense of the verb. The imperfect tense denotes continual past action—we gave and kept on giving the command—and thus frequently implies habitual, customary behavior. By employing the imperfect tense here Paul is saying, “It was our custom to give you this command while we were with you.” This is a good reminder that we ought to continuously teach and reteach the truths of proper Christian living—we must relay the commands of the Lord again and again.

3:11. “not busy at work, but busybodies.” The Greek of this phrase contains a play on words—it is the figure of speech paregmenon, the repetition of words derived from the same root (Bullinger, Figures of Speech). In Greek, the words “busy at work” and “busybodies” have the same root word meaning “work,” but the word “busybodies” adds peri as a prefix—ergazomai (#2038 ἐργάζοµαι) and peri-ergazomai (#4020 περιεργάζοµαι). The word ergazomai is usually translated simply “work,” however, in this case, to capture the play on words, it was translated “busy at work.” It is fitting that Paul writes this admonition to the Thessalonian church, for it was these types of “busybodies” who fomented the mob against Paul and company in Acts 17:5.

3:12. “busy working.” This is the same word in 3:11, see commentary there.

“in a quiet fashion.” The description “quiet” is adverbial, describing how they are to work. The term does not literally mean there is to be no talking during work hours, but, referring to the previous verse, they are not to be busybodies.

“to eat their own bread.” This is an idiomatic way of saying “earn your own living” (ESV; NRSV), i.e., you work, make money, buy food, and then you eat it. We might say “pay your own way.”

3:13. “do not grow weary doing what is right.” The Greek text does not have the word “in,” as most versions do; e.g., the NRSV reads, “do not be weary in doing what is right.” We felt adding the word “in” was unnecessary and slightly changes the meaning of the verse.

3:14. “in this letter.” The Greek does not read “in” but “through,” from the preposition dia (#1223 διά), which is here used to indicate means by which [Cp. Appendix 11: “Greek Prepositions”]. The understanding is, “our word [which came] through the means of this letter.” Compare also the usage of dia in 2 John 1:12: “Though I have many things to write to you, I don't want to do so with [Greek: διά] paper and ink.”

“so that.” This is a purpose-result clause; see Matthew 2:15 commentary, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.” The Thessalonians are to avoid such a brother with the purpose of his being shamed, and with the result that he is in fact shamed.
“put to shame.” This verb is in the passive voice, meaning the action of shaming comes upon the brother, rather than describing his internal state. It is not “be ashamed,” which would imply the feelings rise up in the person himself; rather, the shaming comes upon him, he is “put to shame.”

3:16. “may.” The verb translated “may…give” is in the optative mood, which expresses Paul’s wish—thus the translation “may.” Though the Western text also has the optative mood of this verb, the KJV does not render it correctly, but puts the verse as a command of sorts to God: “Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace…” This translation is unfortunate because the optative does not express a command, but rather Paul’s heart for the Thessalonians.

“at all times.” This phrase is a Greek idiom comprised of the words dia pantos, literally meaning “through all.” When placed together, dia pantos has the meaning of “always” or “continually” (BDAG, dia def. 2a).

“in every way.” The word “way” is from the Greek tropos (#5158 τρόπος), meaning “manner,” “way,” or “kind.” The meaning is that Paul wishes that in every different manner God can bring peace, may he do it. Cp. the KJV, “by all means.”

“The Lord be with you all.” The Greek text does not have “be” in the sentence, but the sentence makes sense in Greek without the “to be” verb. This verse at the close of the epistle is a wish and prayer that the Lord would be with the Thessalonians in a powerful and evident way (see commentary on 1 Thess. 5:28). However, due to the way the Greek text is worded, it can also mean “The Lord is with you all.” While that is not the primary meaning in this context, it is a legitimate translation and meaning of the Greek, and is true. Thus, by wording the Greek the way it is, Paul expresses his prayer that the Lord be actively with the Thessalonians to help and guide them, while at the same time reminding them that the Lord is in fact with them. It is possible to look at this verse as the figure of speech amphibologia, where one thing is said, but two things are meant.


3:18. “be with you all.” This is very similar to the ending line of 1 Thessalonians (1 Thess. 5:28), see the note on that verse, and compare this verse to verse 16 above.

“you all.” This is different than the way the epistle of 1 Thessalonians ends, which does not have the word “all.” Reading and comparing both the epistle of 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians shows that the divisions in the church at Thessalonica were not specifically dealt with in 1 Thessalonians. The church was seen as having persecution problems from the outside, needed knowledge on several different issues, and needed to deal with a couple issues of sin. However, 2 Thessalonians makes it clear that there were believers in the church who were disorderly busybodies (2 Thess. 3:6-12), and some who would not obey Paul’s teaching, with whom the rest of the church was not to associate (2 Thess. 3:14, 15). In light of the obvious division in the church, there may have been a temptation to assume that Paul’s wish and prayer for grace was only directed to the believers who were obedient to the doctrine, but Paul makes it clear by placing the word “all” at the end of the sentence that he desires every single Christian to live in the grace of God, and that every single Christian has the grace of God upon him.
1 Timothy

Chapter 1

1:1. “by the command of.” The Greek is (κατ᾽ ἐπιταγὴν; the lemma is κατὰ ἐπιταγὴν) and it is a technical phrase that means “by the command of; by order of.” A. Nyland writes that this expression is strongly attested in the papyri, and “shows the person is under divine injunction” (The Source New Testament). The Greeks used it of commands by people, but especially of commands by oracles and gods (Word Biblical Commentary note on 1 Tim. 1:1). The specific phrase κατ᾽ ἐπιταγὴν appears in Romans 16:26; 1 Corinthians 7:6; 2 Corinthians 8:8; 1 Timothy 1:1; and Titus 1:3.

1:2. “my true child.” Although the Greek omits the word “my,” and some commentators try to assert that Timothy is “a” child and not “my” child, it is clear the “my” is implied. As Hendrickson and Kistemaker point out so clearly, “The omission of the possessive in such a case is not at all unusual” (New Testament Commentary: Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews). That Timothy was considered Paul’s spiritual child is clear (1 Cor. 4:15 and Gal. 4:19).

“in regard to the faith.” The Greek reads, “en pistis” (ἐν πίστις), which is a difficult phrase to translate easily into English. It means, “in” as “in the sphere of, in the realm of, in respect to, when it comes to,” (Cp. Lenski, Hendriksen-Kistemaker; Meyer’s Commentary; International Critical Commentary by Walter Lock). The phrase means more than just “in the faith,” which would have been easy for Paul to write (and easy to translate). The fact that Paul did not write that means there is more to “in faith” here that just “in the faith” which is a way of saying, “in the Christian faith,” it is Timothy’s faith in, and loyalty to, Christ and the things of God, including the entirety of the Christian faith. Also, we must keep in mind that “faith” here is a noun, not a verb. This verse is not talking about the action of faith. Some people in the faith movement have tried to make this into a verb, as if Timothy was a true child of Paul’s by virtue of his great faith. That is not the meaning here.

1:4. “genealogies.” The Jews had a great interest in genealogies, but now there is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ, and any Jewish believers needed to leave arguments about genealogy behind and fulfill their calling as an individual member of the Body of Christ. See commentary on Titus 3:9.

“in connection with faith.” The word “God” is in the genitive case, and the next phrase, starting with the article, becomes like a genitive of apposition. (cp. Robertson, Grammar, p. 776, and the explanation by Lenski).

1:5. “goal.” The Greek is telos (#5056 τέλος), end, finish; here well understood as “goal.” (cp. HCSB; NASB; NIV).

1:10. “teaching.” The Greek word is didaskalia (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse we felt bringing didaskalia into English as “teaching” was better than “doctrine,” because the subjects the verse is speaking about need to be covered by more than just “doctrine,” i.e., more than just is written down as commands, but “sound
teaching,” which involves logic and logical deductions from all God has given us. Of course, sound “doctrine” is the fundamental basis for sound teaching. [For more on didaskalia see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13].

1:15. “this statement is trustworthy.” This is the first of the five “trustworthy statements” found in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; Tit. 3:8). Interestingly, they only occur in the Pastoral Epistles. Here and in 4:9 Paul adds the phrase “and deserving of full acceptance.” “Statement” is translated from logos (#3056 λόγος), which here does not refer to the Bible as the Word, nor as Christ as the Word of God, but is used idiomatically to mean a “dictum, maxim or weighty saying” (Thayer). This statement is said to be pistos (#4103 πιστός), that is “worthy of belief or trust, trustworthy, faithful, dependable, inspiring” (BDAG). When the Bible says, “this statement is trustworthy,” sometimes it is referring to the statement that was made immediately before (1 Tim. 3:1; 4:9; Tit. 3:8), and sometime it refers to what is written next (1 Tim. 1:15; 2 Tim. 2:11).

1:16. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.]

1:18. “this command.” This is the command (made up of several different commands) that is in 1:3-17.

“the prophecies previously made about you.” Timothy was publicly ordained and prophesied over, something that is clear from 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6 (see commentary on those verses). Those prophecies would further identify his ministry, and most likely give him encouragement and direction in his life. By those prophecies he is to war the good warfare. There is a huge lesson in this. God has called each person to a specific “ministry,” that is, a way of serving in the Body (“ministry” means “service”). As the illustration of the human body shows (1 Cor. 12:12-27), each part of the Body serves a different function. This makes perfect sense. If a person in the Body of Christ did not have a ministry, it would be the same as saying God had no way for that person to serve, which is absurd; everyone has a way of serving in the Body of Christ. Timothy must war the good warfare by serving in the area where he was called, not by trying to serve in areas where he was not called.

1:20. “whom I delivered to the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανάς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

One of the uses of “the Adversary” in the early Christian world was the same as the Moslems today use “the Great Satan,” meaning things outside their religion that are considered evil. Thus to “deliver someone to the Adversary” was to kick that person out of the Church, to excommunicate the person (Cp. Robertson on 1 Cor. 5:5; Lenski). Then, in the “world” (the realm of the Adversary”) the person would be badly treated and not loved, and thus would “learn” not to speak injuriously, or defame, others. When he learned his lesson, he would be allowed back in the congregation.

“speak injuriously.” The Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].
Chapter 2

2:5. “mankind, a man.” This is one of the great and clear texts in the debate as to who Jesus really is. If Jesus were God, this would have been a wonderful place to say it. Instead, Jesus is clearly called “a person” using the Greek word anthropos, “person, human, man.” The lexicons state that it is “man” in contract with animals, plants, angels, and of course, God. The Greek text reads that there is one mediator between God and “mankind,” or “people” (anthrōpōn, ἄνθρωποι; the noun is plural), “a person” or “a man” (anthropos, ἄνθρωπος; the noun is singular), Jesus Christ. Although Trinitarians say that this refers only to his human nature, that is an interpolation, not the text of Scripture. If Jesus were a God-man, this would be one of the many places to say it, but Scripture never says it, ever. Instead, Jesus is stated to be a member of the human race, just as the Old Testament prophecies foretold he would be.

This verse is commonly translated, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus,” but there is no definite article, no “the” in the Greek text before “man, Christ Jesus.” Adding the “the” before “man” distorts the verse a little, as if it were saying that Jesus was “the man.” This verse is not pointing out that Jesus is “the” man, it is pointing out that he is “a man,” “a person,” a human being. Romans 5 shows that it was a person who sinned and got mankind into the mess it is in, and it was a person, Jesus, who got us out of that mess.

Because the word anthropos has some latitude in translation, we should know that if we were to translate anthropos as “human being,” then the verse would read, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and human beings, a human being, Christ Jesus.” Similarly, if we were going to translated anthropos as “man,” then the verse would read that there is “one mediator between God and men, a man, Christ Jesus.

2:6. “proper time.” Technically, “its own” time, but the meaning of the phrase is the proper or right time.

2:9. “modesty.” The Greek is aidōs (#127 αἰδός; pronounced “eye-dōs”). It is used only here in the NT, and it means “modesty,” and “a sense of shame.” If a woman has a “sense of shame,” it should prevent her from acting in a shameful, or immodest, way. There have always been women who refuse to be modest and flaunt their bodies to get attention. Over seven hundred years before Christ, Isaiah rebuked the immodest women of his generation, stating, “...the daughters of Zion are haughty, walking with heads held high and seductive eyes, going along with prancing steps, jingling their ankle bracelets” (Isa. 3:16 HCSB). It was common for women who had the means to do so to wear necklaces, bracelets, etc., but a modest woman would be careful not to draw attention to herself by jingling her ankle bracelet.

“good judgment.” The Greek is sōphrosunē (#4997 σοφροσύνη), which generally means “soundness of mind, reasonableness, rationality,” but when this clear thinking is applied to circumstances it comes to signify the “practice of prudence, good judgment, moderation, self-control” (BDAG). Here Paul is declaring that women must be reasonable about their dress, they must exercise good judgment when deciding what to wear. The word does not simply emphasize the action of being proper (“propriety” [NIV]); rather it points to the underlying wisdom that causes one to implement such discretion. Cp. Holman Christian Standard Bible, “with decency and good sense.”
“pearls.” Pearls were very expensive in the ancient world, and very highly valued. [For more on pearls, see commentary on Revelation 18:12].

2:11. “A woman.” The Greek is γυνή (#1135 γυνή; pronounced “goo-nay’”). It is the feminine singular noun for woman or wife. The Greek word for woman and wife were the same. Here the context shows the meaning is “woman.”

“must learn, and be learning.” The Greek verb translated “learn” is μανθάνω (#3129 μανθάνω), and it means “learn, be instructed.” It is in the imperative mood, active voice, present tense, which are all important to its meaning here. The imperative mood is the mood of command (or exhortation; hence the number of versions that read, “Let a woman learn”). We pick up the imperative mood by “must,” since in English, “let” comes across more as a permission, like “allow,” than a command and exhortation. Women are to learn, they are not to remain ignorant about the things of God. This verse was very important in light of the first century culture, both Semitic and Greco-Roman, because women were very limited when it came to education. Although there was some encouragement for women to get a limited education in the Jewish culture, most women, whether Jewish or Greco-Roman, had either a very limited education or none at all. It was not at all like the men, particularly the men from more well-to-do families, who got an advanced education (thus the need for the paidagōgos (#3807 παιδαγωγός) the trusted slave who escorted boys safely to and from school; Gal. 3:24).

In this verse Paul shakes his culture to the core and writes that women are to learn! Of course they are to learn in quietness and submission, but that is how the men learned too. The verse is not saying that somehow men can learn and be raucous and aggressive in the classroom, but women have to be quiet and in subjection. Paul’s point is that the women were to learn just like the men. The present tense active voice emphasizes that the women are to “be learning.” The women are to “be learning” just as every Christian is to be constantly learning and growing in the things of God. Education in the things of God is not to be like it often was in the culture—study for a few years and then stop. We all, men and women, must press ourselves to continually grow in our knowledge of God. It is true that in the Greek text the verb μανθάνω (“learn”) only occurs once, and we place it twice in the REV, but given the importance of capturing the meaning of the verb in its full conjugation, and given the fact that this verse has been misread and misunderstood for generations, we felt the doubling of the verb was justified. It is a common Christian myth that Paul was somehow against women. Of course, given the way his writings have been mistranslated and misinterpreted, it certainly could seem Paul was against women. However, when we properly translate this verse and others like it, we can see that the New Testament was a Magna Carta for women, giving them rights and privileges they had never had before. [For other verses in the NT that elevate women’s position in the culture, see commentary on 1 Cor. 7:2; 14:34, 35; 1 Tim. 2:12; 3:2; 5:14; and 1 Pet. 3:7].

“without causing a disturbance.” In this context, the Greek phrase, ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ (ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ; #2271), does not mean “without noise; being quiet; being silent;” it means without causing a disturbance, or “making a fuss” (A. Nyland, The Source NT; cp. Richard & Catherine Clark Kroeger, I Suffer Not A Woman). The Greek word ἡσυχία (#2271 ἡσυχία; pronounced “hay-soo-key’-ah”), has two different meanings, and the usual meaning that has been assigned in this verse is not the product of scholarship, but

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rather the product of the traditional orthodox Christian position when it comes to women. The two meanings of ἡσῳχία are presented well in the BDAG Greek-English lexicon:

1) A state of quietness without disturbance, without any fanfare; of a quiet scholar’s life with implied contrast of being engaged in public affairs; harmonious peace; living in a way that does not cause disturbance.
2) A state of saying nothing or very little.

Anyone who really understands the learning process knows that students learn best when they are fully engaged in the lesson and there is dialogue and interaction between the students and teachers, and among the students themselves. That kind of “active classroom” is every teacher’s dream. In contrast, no teacher wants a classroom where there are constant interruptions and disturbances by unruly students, or the opposite; a classroom where all the students just sit and say nothing and never interact with the teacher.

Due to the long-standing Christian tradition that women are inferior to men (and thus supposedly cannot be clergy or teach; cp commentary on 1 Pet. 3:7), translators of most English versions have chosen definition #2 above, and thus English Bibles have read that women, if they do learn, must be “silent” during the process. Any teacher will attest that making the student be silent during the lesson only retards the learning process, so if that is the case, why would Paul write the women “must” (imperative!) learn, but be silent while doing so? That inconsistency has been ignored by the Church. The phrase “without causing a disturbance” (ἐν ἡσῳχία; ἐν ἰσχύω) is defined by “in subjection,” which is not about being silent, it is about being in control of oneself (see commentary on “in all subjection”). The woman who is learning is to be under control and not cause a disturbance. If the text were trying to say that women should be silent, the word σιγή (#4602 σιγή; pronounced sī-gay), which means “silent, without any noise,” would have been a better choice than ἡσῳχία (cp. Acts 21:40; Rev. 8:1).

Women make up at least one-half of almost every Church congregation, and it is a real victory on the part of the Devil to establish a tradition that disqualifies that half of the congregation from learning the deep truths of God or presenting those truths from a woman’s perspective and with her insights. The Christian world, and Christian women, need to become aggressive in learning about God and not worry about not asking questions and/or speaking up in the process.

Since the Greek phrase is ἐν ἡσῳχία, other translations could be considered, translations such as “in a non-disturbing way;” or “in a harmonious way.” However, due to the difficult nature of the subject and the general misunderstanding of the verse in Bible versions and commentaries, we felt that “without causing a disturbance” captured the sense of the Greek very well.

“In all subjection.” The word “subjection” is the Greek noun ὑποταγή (#5292 ὑποταγή), and it means to be in subjection, be in submission to. It is used in 1 Timothy 3:4 of a man having his children in subjection, which many versions translate as “under control.” The phrase “in all subjection” defines “without causing a disturbance” (ἐν ἡσῳχία) and is a reason we know that ἡσῳχία refers, not to being “silent,” but to not cause a disturbance. The woman who is learning is to be under control and not cause a disturbance.

2:12. “I do not.” In explaining this verse, it is important to note that more literature has been written on verses 11 and 12 in recent years than on any other passage in the Pauline Epistles.
If anything, this should alert us to the fact that the standard orthodox translation, that women should not teach men and should be silent in the Church, is not something the Greek text clearly says. There are well known and highly educated scholars who take totally different positions on how these verses are to be translated and interpreted. Also, the fact that there is so much disagreement about these verses shows us that no interpretation is free of problems: there is no “easy translation and clear meaning” of this passage of Scripture. There is no interpretation posited by any scholar that has not been criticized by other scholars who take opposing viewpoints, and we realize that not everyone will agree with our interpretation of this verse, but we set it forth as the best explanation we know.

The best answer we have found to the difficult grammar and the difficult context of 1 Timothy 2:12 are solutions set forth in works such as I Suffer Not a Woman by Richard and Catherine Clark Kroeger, and The Source New Testament (text and notes) by Dr. A. Nyland. Although the Clark Kroegers offer several translations (pp. 103, 191, 192), and these differ from Nyland’s translation, the gist is the same. Paul was writing to Timothy, who was based in Ephesus. Between some types of Gnostic doctrine, and some of the types of the “mother goddess” worship of Asia Minor, it was being taught in the culture surrounding Timothy that a female god created Eve before Adam, or that God created Eve before Adam. It is typical of converts to Christianity that they blend Christian beliefs with their past pagan beliefs (this is referred to by scholars as syncretism, and is how orthodox Christianity picked up many of its modern beliefs and practices, such as “Easter Sunday”). Syncretism could have certainly been occurring in Ephesus, and would have been a very important reason why Paul would tell the women to learn, but forbid them from teaching things from their pagan past such as that a woman was the origin of men.

Added to the above historical context is that authenteō can mean “originator” or “author,” and when linked to the word “teach,” can refer to a person teaching that woman is the originator of man. The translation given by the Clark Kroegers that they feel is the most likely is: “I do not allow a woman to teach nor to proclaim herself author of man” (p. 103, 192). However, they also say the verse could be translated: “I do not permit a woman to teach that she is the originator of man...” (p. 191), or “I categorically forbid a woman to teach [anyone] to maintain that she is responsible for the origin of man” (p. 192). Nyland translates the verse: “I most certainly do not grant authority to a woman to teach that she is the originator of man....”

Given the historical context of 1 Timothy, the difficult vocabulary and grammar of the verse, and the “reason” for the verse in the first place, which is verses 13 and 14, we felt that the best understanding of 1 Timothy 2:12 was the general understanding of Nyland and the Clark Kroegers, that Paul was forbidding women to claim feminine origin of man [For more information and full commentary on this verse, see Appendix 12: “The Role of Women In The Church”].

2:13. “For Adam was first formed, then Eve.” This is a wonderful and logical explanation of why women should not claim to be the originators of men (see commentary on verse 12). It is certainly what Genesis teaches. The orthodox conservative teaching that this is the reason women cannot teach men in “formal church settings” does not make sense. For one thing, since women not teaching men would be linked to their creation (thus, a “creation ordinance”), then women not teaching men should be the standard for all teaching situations, not just in the Church. Why would the fact that women were created after men only restrict women from teaching men in formal church settings? If being created last restricted them in one setting, it
should restrict them in every setting, including schools and universities, in work related situations, etc.

Another reason the standard orthodox explanation falls short is that the New Testament is clear that there is neither male nor female in Christ (Gal. 3:28). Men and women are “one” in Christ, and that means that they must be “one” in the Church. We should pay careful attention to the fact that, due to the differences in the sexes, God has placed the man as the head of his wife (Eph. 5:23), and the woman as ruler of the home (1 Tim. 5:14; see commentary), but that relationship exists in the marriage, not in the Church. No man in the Church is head over my wife, and similarly, my wife does not rule in any home but her own.

When it comes to primacy in the Church and who is to teach whom, the Bible does not direct us to who was created first. There are several biblical standards for who should be teaching others in the Church. For one thing, the Bible says that Christ appointed equipping ministries in the Church (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers; Eph. 4:11-13), and these ministries, which are given to both men and women, are to do their job and equip the believers, and that includes teaching them. Also, the Bible tells us, “And God has set some in the congregation, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, various kinds of tongues” (1 Cor. 12:28). Again we see no mention that being a man or woman makes a person “first” or “second,” but rather if a person has a gifting, particularly a gifting that elevates the person in the function of the Church, he or she must do what it takes to fulfill that gifting. Another order of primacy in the Church is that the wise and knowledgeable are to teach those who are inexperienced. This often shows up as the elders are to teach those who are younger, because generally the younger ones need the instruction, but there are exceptions. For example, Timothy was a powerful and experienced man of God in spite of his youth, so Paul wrote, “Let no one look down upon you because you are young.” Paul also told Timothy to set a good example to the believers, read the Scripture publicly, encourage, and teach (1 Tim. 4:12, 13).

The biblical mandate is that each Christian is to fulfill his or her ministry and make disciples, and that has nothing to do with whether or not Adam or Eve was created first. There is also a biblical mandate to teach the truth and refute error. In that light, it is important that Paul did not ignore the erroneous teaching that women created men, but instead he directly confronted it. This sets a good example for us. There are some things we are unsure of biblically that get discussed and argued back and forth in churches. But when the Bible is clear about something, then especially leaders are called to support that truth and stand against error, and this section of Scripture in Timothy is a good example of Paul doing that very thing.

2:14. “and Adam was not deceived.” Adam was not deceived by the serpent [the Devil]. Eve was deceived, and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil before Adam did (Gen. 3:6). The fact that Adam knew exactly what he was doing—breaking a command of God—and did it anyway, meant that Adam sinned deliberately. That is surely one reason the Bible attributes the Fall of mankind to Adam, not to Eve or even to Adam and Eve (Rom. 5:12-15).

The conservative orthodox Church gives this verse as part of the reason that women cannot teach men, but that cannot be correct. While it is bad for Eve or anyone else to be so misinformed or confused that they can be deceived into sinning, it is much worse to sin intentionally. We never hold gullible children who get talked into sinning as responsible as the evil people who convince them to do wrong. Similarly, if we are considering a man for service in a church, we never hold someone who unknowingly made a mistake in his past as guilty as someone who knowingly sinned against God. If this verse is indeed part of a reason about who
should teach whom, in light of the scope of Scripture about doing wrong, we would ordinarily conclude that women would be allowed to teach and men would not.

It seems clear that verse 12 is about women teaching what they had learned in their culture, that a female god created Eve first (and the man sinned), and that verses 13 and 14 are part of the refutation of that error.

“deceived… thoroughly deceived.” There are two different Greek words for “deceive” in this verse, and most versions translate them both as simply “deceived.” However, this covers up the interesting fact that Eve’s word has the intensifier ex as a prefix, indicating that she was thoroughly deceived. Adam is said to have not been “deceived,” apataō (#538 ἀπατάω), while Eve was “deceived wholly,” “thoroughly deceived,” exapataō (#1818 ἐξαπατάω). There is a variant reading within the Western textual tradition that has apataō twice, however the most favorable manuscripts include exapataō (Tischendorf, Critical Apparatus). Eve was confused and thoroughly tricked by the Devil. In contrast, Adam sinned knowingly.

“fell into transgression.” The Greek literally reads, “has come to be in transgression.” This emphasizes that Eve changed states of being; it portrays her coming into a fallen state, into the sphere of transgression, as this is most likely a dative of sphere (cp. Wallace, Greek Grammar, pg. 153).

2:15. “but she will be saved through the birth of the Child.” That this verse refers to “the” birth of the Child, i.e., Jesus Christ, has been set forth as a possible interpretation of this verse for many years by an impressive list of scholars (cp. Word Biblical Commentary, p. 145). In her book God’s Word to Women (1916), Katherine Bushnell translated the verse: “And she will be saved by the Child-bearing [i.e., the bearing of Jesus Christ],...” Since that time various translators have followed suit. In 2004, Ann Nyland (The Source New Testament), translated the verse, “and she will be saved by means of the Birth of the Child....” The New English Bible gives “saved through the Birth of the Child” as a marginal reading and thus a possible translation of the text.

It has been argued that the noun translated “childbearing,” teknogonia (#5042 τεκνογονία) is the act of childbearing, not the product of childbearing, but the word is rare and unclear enough that that claim cannot be clearly substantiated, thus the many scholars who think it does refer to the birth of the child.”

The text note on this verse in the “First Edition” NET version says, “This verse is notoriously difficult to interpret....” There are several reasons for that, the obvious one being that women are not saved through childbearing, they are saved through faith in Christ. This difficulty becomes even more obvious in light of the scope of the New Testament, because in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul writes that he wished every person was unmarried, like he was (v. 8), and he says that because the woman who is unmarried cares about the things of the Lord, while a married woman cares about how to please her husband (v. 34). God cannot contradict Himself and is not the author of confusion, and He would not tell women that it would be good to stay unmarried in one place in the New Testament but then say that they would somehow be “saved” through childbearing in another place.

Most orthodox commentators agree that the “salvation” being referred to in this verse cannot be eternal life salvation because that salvation does not come through giving birth. However, although they word it differently, the essence of their argument almost always somehow gets around to an assertion that the “salvation” the woman experiences refers to, or is closely tied with, “daily sanctification,” i.e., the fact that on a day to day basis, having children helps with a woman’s holiness or helps her understand her true place in society and the Church
Schreiner writes: “Childbearing, then, is probably selected by synecdoche as representing the appropriate role for women” (Women in the Church, p. 151.) But explanations such as these cannot be right, because, as we just saw above, Paul said it was easier for a woman to care for the Lord if she were unmarried. The Bible cannot contradict itself. 1 Timothy 2:15 cannot say that a woman is somehow more godly, more balanced in life, more fulfilled, or fulfilling her role in a more natural way if she has children than if she does not, when 1 Corinthians 7:34 says that an unmarried woman is in a better position to concentrate on how to please the Lord than a married woman is. There must be another explanation for the verse.

To properly understand the verse, we must once again realize, as we have for this whole section, that the context and historical context are vital to the proper interpretation of the verse. For one thing, the word translated, “she will be saved” σωθησεται (σωθήσεται; from the root σῶζω #4982; to be saved or rescued) is singular, and normally would refer back to Eve, the subject of the sentence from verse 14. We can clearly see that if we remember that the original text had no punctuation, and read it in versions such as the REV: “Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being thoroughly deceived, fell into transgression, but she will be saved through the birth of the Child...” Eve, like everyone else, will be saved through the birth of the Christ. Furthermore, although this is not a conclusive argument, it is noteworthy that as it is used in the Pastoral Epistles, σῶζω (“saved”) always refers to everlasting life salvation, not some kind of earthly wholeness or holiness. This adds to the evidence that this verse is speaking of Eve and her everlasting salvation.

Some commentators have taken issue with the tense of “saved,” saying that if the verb referred to Eve it would not be, “she will be saved.” However, in fact no person is “saved” at this time (see commentary on Eph. 2:8). Everyone’s salvation will occur at the time Christ raises us from the dead and gives us new, everlasting bodies. Until then, what people have is the hope of salvation.

In light of understanding this verse in the context and historical setting, it has been postulated by the Clark Kroegers that some of the Gnostic teaching of the culture where Timothy lived had to do with women not being able to be saved if they did not give up their femininity and “choose the salvation of masculinity” (I Suffer Not a Woman; p. 176). Although this is possible, it is less likely because the verse opens with the singular verb, which naturally refers back to Eve. Nevertheless, the verse is difficult to interpret, and this must be allowed as a possible interpretation.

In summary, we agree with the conclusion of Charles Ellicott, who concluded that the “child bearing” referred to the birth of Christ. He wrote in 1864: “...when however we consider its extreme appropriateness, and the high probability that the Apostle, in speaking of woman’s [Eve’s] transgression, would not fail to specify the sustaining prophecy which even preceded her sentence; –when we add to this the satisfactory meaning which δια thus bears—the uncircumscribed reference of σωθησεται [“will be saved”]—the force of the article (passed over by most expositors),--and, lastly, observe the coldness and jejuneness of [the interpretation, “child bearing” referring to women’s natural birth of children], it seems difficult to avoid deciding in favor of [the interpretation “by the child-bearing,” i.e., by the relation in which woman stood to the Messiah”] (Ellicott; The Pastoral Epistles of St. Paul)

“if they continue.” At this point in the sentence the verb changes from singular to plural. The problem is that since earlier the text was speaking of Eve, there is no clear indication as to who the “they” are. Interpretations vary from “Adam and Eve” to women in general. The fact
that salvation in the verse is tied both to the birth of the child and continuing in faith, this seems to be a natural reference to Adam and Eve, since salvation in the Old Testament was not a one-time event based on the New Birth, as it is after the day of Pentecost, but rather in the Old Testament salvation was based on faith (Rom. 4:1-3), but that faith had to continue through the lifetime of the person (Ezek. 33:11-20).

“good judgment.” See commentary on 2:9.

Chapter 3

3:1. “this saying is trustworthy.” When the Bible says, “this statement is trustworthy,” sometimes it is referring to the statement that was made immediately before (1 Tim. 3:1; 4:9; Tit. 3:8), and sometime it refers to what is written next (1 Tim. 1:15; 2 Tim. 2:11). Because 3:1 naturally goes with the closing part of chapter two, we have broken the chapter with verse 2 in the REV. See commentary on 1 Timothy 1:15.

3:2. “It is necessary.” (For the translation, see Lenski; Wuest, An Expanded Translation.) It is not optional that ministers be of good character. All the attributes in the list that follow, with the exception of being skillful in teaching, are character issues. They, more than any other sector of Christianity, represent Christ both to other Christians and to the world. It is important that a minister be able to function well in his office, but if he does so without also taking on the character of Christ, at the Judgment he will be disappointed (see commentary, Matt. 7:23). This list is above and beyond the character and actions of all Christians, such as the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5, etc.

“above reproach.” The Greek word is anepileptos (νανεπιληπτος) literally, “That which cannot be taken hold of.” Anepileptos is used of a wrestler that is so completely prepared that he cannot be grabbed and thrown by his opponent. A leader is to exhibit positive qualities that set an example, and carefully avoid behaviors that can be used against him or the ministry. As well as sinful or illegal actions, reproachful behavior includes unwise behaviors that the Adversary can use against a person. God is holy, and wants to be in relationship with people who take holiness seriously. Furthermore, through the ages unbelievers have mocked God because His people have behaved badly (cp. Rom. 2:24). God wants Himself, His leaders and His ministry to have a good reputation so they are attractive to outsiders.

“the husband of one wife.” This character issue is also spoken of in Titus 1:6 (and in 1 Tim. 3:12 is mentioned in reference to deacons). In the first century, the Greco-Roman culture was monogamous. The Jews were usually monogamous due to their custom at the time, but polygamy still occurred. Thus, a primary meaning of the verse is “not a polygamist.” However, there are other cultural overtones that must be considered in the interpretation of this verse.

Not only must a minister not have more than one wife (see the commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:2), he must not have more than one “woman.” The Greek word for “wife” and “woman” are the same (gune #1135 γυν), so while the most proper interpretation of the verse is “husband of one wife,” it has overtones of a leader being a “man of one woman.” In the Greco-Roman culture, men usually had more than one “woman.” For example, any slave was the sexual property of the owner, and so for the men of the house to have sexual intercourse with the household slaves was not only accepted, it was more
or less expected. Furthermore, it was the common custom that if a family had the financial means to afford an extra bedroom in the house, in Roman society a man and his wife would usually sleep apart, giving the man ample opportunity to be with the slaves. Thus, Jerome Carcopino writes: “…slavery degrades and besmirches marriage if it does not wholly stamp it out” (Daily Life in Ancient Rome; 1968, p. 101; 164-166). Also, prostitution was common in the Roman world, and a man visiting prostitutes was not considered wrong in the society. Christianity introduced good sexual morality into the Roman world.

Thus from the culture of the time and from the scope of Scripture, it is clear that another primary meaning of this verse is that the Christian leader must be a “one woman man.” He must be faithful to his wife with his heart and eyes. Being an adulterer or have mental obsessions about other women is not acceptable behavior for a Christian leader, nor is ogling women and making inappropriate comments about their size or shape.

This verse is not forbidding singles, divorcees, or women from being leaders, even though it is written from the point of view of a man. When women are ordained, the application of this verse would be the “wife of but one husband.” Women leaders are not to be flirts, immodest dressers, teases, or sexually immoral.

Another thing that is clear from the grammar and the context is that the traits mentioned in this list refer to present behaviors, and do not include past behavior. To understand this, let us take the example of alcohol use, which comes up later in the list. A person is not disqualified from being a leader if he abused alcohol in his past. This is true for all the character traits in the list. The leader must be above reproach now, not violent now, not a novice now, and so on. It is well known that many of the best pastors are people who led troubled lives in the past. Paul was certainly violent at one time in his life, but that did not disqualify him from being an apostle and great leader. Thus, “the husband of one wife” is not forbidding a divorced person from being a minister, but rather is saying that he cannot be the husband of more than one wife now.

Many commentators disagree with that conclusion, asserting that the verse is saying that a divorced person is not eligible for leadership, a point they often substantiate by Church Fathers. However, there are Church Fathers who agree with our conclusion. Also, we must keep in mind that the later Church Fathers taught that women were inferior to men, and even believed that sexual intercourse with a woman had a deleterious effect on a man’s spirituality (which became a major reason that a few centuries after Christ the Roman Catholic Church decreed that priests must be celibate forbid them to marry). Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 7 gives examples when a divorced person can remarry, and there is no stipulation such as, “you can remarry, but you will not be able to be a leader if you do” (1 Cor. 7:15, 27, 28). Thus, Timothy and Titus are not forbidding divorcees from being in leadership.

God does make provision for divorce, although He does not like it, and would prefer that couples work out their problems. However, there are times that cannot happen and divorce occurs. Israel was so obstinate and set on sin that God finally had to divorce her and send her away (Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8). The Churches that assert that going through a divorce disqualifies a person for ministry cannot have God as their pastor! On the other hand, if anyone thinks that God is qualified to pastor a church even though He has gone through a divorce, then His ministers who go through divorce can also be qualified to minister.
This is one of the verses in the New Testament that elevated women in the family, Church, and society, and stood against the cultural degradation of women. It is a common Christian myth that Paul was somehow against women. Of course, given the way his writings have been mistranslated and misinterpreted, it certainly could seem Paul was against women. However, when we properly understand this verse and others in the NT about women, we can see that the NT was a Magna Carta for women, giving them rights and privileges they had never had before. By specifically saying that Christian leaders were to have only one woman in their life, it elevated the importance of women considerably. [For other verses in the NT that elevate women’s position in the culture, see the commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:2; 14:34, 35; 1 Timothy 2:12; 5:14; and 1 Peter 3:7].

In spite of the fact that verses such as 1 Timothy 3:2 elevated women, it produced significant challenges for both men and women. For the men, it clearly separated them from their non-Christian friends. The average man in the Greco-Roman culture would have thought it strange indeed not to fulfill one’s sexual desires by having sex with one’s slaves and also with prostitutes. For a Christian leader to be completely sexually monogamous caused a division, and some suspicion, between him and the non-Christian Romans around him. Christian leaders are expected to stand out from the rest, and stand against immorality even if it costs them “acceptance” in the society.

For Christian men to be monogamous in their marriages also placed the women in a difficult position. At the time of Paul, the average lifespan of a woman was in the low 30’s, around age 32. This was in large part to the fact that between 5 and 10 percent of the women died in childbirth (also, some died as a result of an attempted abortion, trying to avoid the risk of childbirth). This fact was not lost on the women of the time, and thus many of them preferred their husbands to have sex with their slaves or a prostitute rather than risk their lives in childbirth. Thus the demand that Christian leaders be completely monogamous required a lot of commitment on both the part of the husband and the wife.

“clear-minded.” (cp. also 1 Tim. 3:11). “Clear-minded” is the Greek word ἀφάλαλος (νήφαλαλος) and the base meaning is temperate concerning wine. That developed into the further meaning of temperate, watchful, vigilant (all which apply to leaders, and all of which tipsy people are not). The temperate person has a clear perspective, is watchful, and has a proper orientation in life. Because in English the word “clear-minded” can refer to general sober behavior as well as one’s relation to alcohol. Since the fundamental meaning of the Greek refers to being temperate in relation to wine, we felt that “clear-minded” was a good translation.

“sensible.” The Greek word is σωφρόν (σώφρων). It means sensible, self-controlled. “Sober” (KJV) or “sober-minded” (ESV) is too often taken as “serious,” as if the person could not laugh. That is not the meaning here. Sōphrōn is used of one who follows sound reason. Thus there is no arrogant elevation or pride about himself, and no unreasonable self-hate or self-degradation. It also involves the restraint of passions (Cp. Titus 1:8).

“respectable.” The Greek word is κόσμιος (κόσμιος), and means orderly, decent, and refers to one who is modest, well behaved, respectable, orderly in life. It refers to a person who quietly fulfills his duties and is not disorderly, rude, arrogant, or exhibiting other self-important behaviors.

“given to hospitality.” The Greek word is φιλοξένος (φιλοξένος), which literally means “love to strangers.” We felt “given to hospitality” (REV) was a better
translation than “hospitable” (NIV) which seems too much like “friendly.” It is more than “friendly,” because it involves opening your home and life to others. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon points out that the meaning includes being generous to guests, and Friberg’s lexicon says, “kind to strangers.”

The Roman world was vulgar and dangerous, and it was important for Christians to open their homes and lives to one another for mutual support, protection, and even outreach. Every Christian is an ambassador for the Lord (2 Cor. 5:20), and one of the ways we win people is by being “given to hospitality.” For more on hospitality, see commentary on Romans 12:13.

“skillful in teaching.” The Greek word is *didaktikos* (#1317 διδακτικός), and means “skillful in teaching.” It is important to note that this is the only thing on the list of qualifications for an overseer that is a skill or ability. Everything else on the list involves one’s personal character. Character counts with God! However, it is important for those who are going to oversee others that they learn to teach well. This requires meekness, because teaching does not always come easy to people, and many people think they are far better at it than they are. It is very important that teachers receive feedback about their teachings to be the best teachers possible. Being skilled in teaching also requires grounding in the Word of God. The overseer must be grounded in Scripture to the end that he or she can teach the truth and refute error (Titus 1:9).

3:3. “not an excessive drinker.” The Greek is *me paroinos*, (me is “not,” and #3943 πάροινος, addicted to wine, a drunkard), which means not an excessive drinker or drunk (cp. 1 Tim. 3:8; Titus 1:7). Thus, not an excessive drinker. Since Ephesians says not to get drunk, drunkenness is wrong for any Christian. Thus this does not specifically refer to drunkenness. There are times when drinking in any amount causes behavior to become less godly, more sarcastic and quick tempered, etc., or it may just be a bad example at the time. Especially among leaders, all alcoholic consumption should be watched closely. One reason for this is that Christian leaders can be called upon in a moment’s notice to pray, prophesy, heal, witness, etc. (cp. Proverbs 31:4-7). This requirement should be taken in the “wider” sense as well as the “narrower” sense. God mentions alcohol here, but surely no one would suggest that because other “mind effecting” substances were not mentioned that they are okay with God. Since the Christian minister is to be available to serve at any time, in the larger scope of Scripture this directive applies to any “mind effecting” substance. For example, a Christian leader would not get “high” on drugs just because God did not specifically mention it in Timothy or Titus.

“Not violent.” The Greek is *me plektes* (me is “not” and #4131 πλήκτης), and it means “not ready with a blow,” i.e., not contentious or quarrelsome. The leader is not one who puts others down with words or fists. A leader is not a bully or “hard” leader, and does not have a belligerent attitude because of his or her position.

“reasonable.” The Greek word is *epieikes* (#1933 ἐπιεικής), which is an adjective, (occurs Phil. 4:5; 1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 3:2; James 3:17; 1 Pet. 2:18). The noun is *epieikeia* (#1932 ἐπιείκεια; occurring Acts 24:4; 2 Cor. 10:1). R. C. H. Lenski writes, “[I wish] that we had a good English equivalent for this noble term!” (Cp. his note on Philippians 4:5). The concepts of “moderation, forbearance, gentleness, “sweet reasonableness” all touch a side of the full meaning of this word. The meaning is yielding, not insisting on one’s legal rights to the end that the legal rights become moral wrongs.
R. Trench (Synonyms of the New Testament) writes: “Epieikeia refers to the sort of moderation that recognizes that it is impossible for formal laws to anticipate and provide for all possible cases and that the asserting of legal rights can be pushed into moral wrongs, so the highest right can in practice prove to be the greatest injustice.” As to the accusation that someone would be overly “reasonable” or yielding to evil, Lenski writes, “Only perverted reason would think that “yieldingness” might include a yielding of truth to error, of right to wrong, of virtue to vice and crime” (Lenski: note on Philippians 4:5).

There are times when the “rules” obviously need to be bent to minister the grace of God effectively. This word covers exactly that situation—the true leader is “reasonable,” not rigid.

“not quarrelsome.” The Greek word is amachos (#269 ἀμαχος), meaning not always wanting to pick a fight. Leaders must be positive and constructive in their thoughts and actions. The world wants to set Christians against each other and divide us. Yes, there are Christians who are wrong in what they do or teach, but the true minister of God point that out without unduly dwelling on it or unnecessarily denigrating someone.

“not a lover of money.” The Greek is aphilarguros (#866 ἀφιλάργυρος) from “a” which is “not;” philos, which is “like or love,” and arguros “silver.” It is not loving money. The godly overseer has a good perspective on money. God is his sufficiency, not money. It can be easy for the shrewd overseer to “pump” people for money, and a godly overseer never does this.

3:4. “one who is leading his own house well.” The minister’s family is always to be his or her primary responsibility. Running a family is difficult, and requires a lot of time and energy. Running the church is not to be an escape from family responsibilities, or an excuse to put them on a back burner. The minister is attentive to his own family such that things are not out of control in his household. A leader will generally lead people the way he leads the people in his house. If he is a dictator in his house, he will usually eventually be one in his ministry, and if he provides no effective leadership in his house then that will probably show up in his ministry also.

“having his children in subjection.” This point is made about the children of leaders here and in Titus 1:6. Children that are disobedient, disrespectful, or generally out of control reflect on any person’s ministry. The way a person deals with his children will almost certainly be the way he deals with people in the Church. However, care must be taken not to go overboard with this with older children. In the Bible times a girl was usually married and on her own by her mid-teens and a boy by the late teens. It is common to see children who were well behaved until 14 or 15 become rebellious at 17 or 18. Just because an older teen is rebelling against parental authority does not mean the parents are disqualified for the ministry, although it might, depending on the circumstances. On the other hand, there are men and women who just cannot seem to handle their smaller children, and the chances are that if they allow themselves to be pushed around by a self-willed child, they will be pushed around by strong willed people in the Church.

3:5. “indeed.” The Greek word is de. In this context, “indeed” is a good translation, as it is in K. Wuest, An Expanded Translation. Many versions translate it as “for,” and a couple do not translate it at all (cp. HCSB; NIV).

3:6. “not a novice.” The Greek is me neophutos (me is “not,” and #3504 νεόφυτος) and it means not newly planted, not a neophyte. There are many temptations and hardships in
Christianity, and even more so in Christian leadership. A leader should be one who has been tested and stayed faithful over a period of time, and in hard times. There is just no effective way to do this quickly. Many prospective leaders do well as long as they are contributing and not leading, but begin to abuse their authority or do not stand up to the pressure when given leadership. Other people lead well for a short time, but have no longevity. There is simply no way to tell how a person is going to do over time except that he is tested over time. Thus ministers are not ordained when their ministries are first noticed in the Body, but rather after they have been functioning in their ministry for a period of time.

“the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer,” the one who slaughters others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

3:7. “he must have good reputation among those who are outside.” Sometimes a minister will treat one group of people well, but others with disdain or disrespect. Ministers need to be people who manifest the fruit of the spirit (cp. Gal. 5:22, 23), such that they are well thought of by people outside their immediate “group.” This discourages “cult” mentality, and encourages evangelism.


“not eager for dishonorable gain.” This also appears in Titus 1:7 of overseers. The Greek is me aischrokerdes (me is “not,” and #146 αἰσχροκερδής) and means, “not eager for dishonorable gain.” This refers to all kinds of gain, not just money. Of course it does refer to money, and historically there have been many ministers who have laid guilt trips on people, or bullied them, or threatened them, to get money. However, the phrase also refers to other dishonorable gain, such as gaining popularity by adulterating the Gospel to attract more people to the congregation (Word Study Dictionary—Zodhiates). Greed for money, power, recognition, etc., can cloud the mind and ruin the ministries of Christian leaders.

3:9. “holding the sacred secret of the faith.” The Administration of Grace (Eph. 3:2), God’s Sacred Secret (Eph. 3:9 Rotherham), is one of the greatest things God has ever done for mankind. God sent His son to die so that over and above the gift of everlasting life available to all mankind, we in the Church can be part of Christ’s very Body. We Christians have the gift of holy spirit sealed in us, permanent salvation, nine manifestations, are joint heirs with Israel, and more. What we have is so awesome and amazing that had Satan known it, he would not have crucified Jesus (1 Cor. 2:8). Yet today the Sacred Secret is practically unknown. The NIV does not even hint at the fact that ministers are to hold the Sacred Secret, translating it by the phrase “deep truths.”

The administration of the sacred secret is very important to the Lord, and leaders are charged to keep hold of it. To be “holding” it means more than just knowing about it. “Holding” is the common Greek word, echo (#2192 ἔχω), and it means to have or to hold. Here, as in Philippians 1:7 and John 14:21, it means “to have in one’s heart, to keep in mind” (see Thayer). Leaders are to teach about it, and should also hold the Sacred Secret
by walking in the power available to them and setting an example by boldly operating the manifestations of the spirit. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

3:10. “blameless.” The Greek is anegkletos (#410 ἀνέγκλητος), which means “without legal charge.” It is very important that a minister live according to the laws of the land. A minister is not to risk getting caught breaking the law and thus bringing a charge against himself and also besmirching Christianity.


3:13. “that is rooted in Christ Jesus.” The Greek texts reads, “the faith in Christ Jesus,” and the word “in” (en; #1722 ἐν) here refers to a relationship. The phrase could be translated, “the faith in connection with Christ Jesus,” or “the faith connected with Christ Jesus,” or something similar. The point is that it is the Faith [the Christian Faith], the Faith that is connected with Christ, not some other Faith, like the worship of the Roman gods. For more on en, see commentary on Ephesians 1:3.

3:16. “by common confession” (NASB; Frieberg). Because the thing in question is agreed upon by all, it becomes, by extension, “unquestionable” or “undeniable,” but the root idea is that it is by agreement of all. In this case, the facts about Jesus were, in the first century Christian world, by consent of all. It is possible, and believed by many scholars, that there was a well known hymn with these lyrics.

“sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

“he.” There are some Greek manuscripts that read, “God appeared in the flesh.” This reading of some Greek manuscripts has passed into some English versions, and the King James Version is one of them. Trinitarian scholars admit, however, that these Greek texts were altered by scribes in favor of the Trinitarian position. The reading of the earliest and best manuscripts is not “God” but rather “he who.” Almost all the modern versions have the verse as “the mystery of godliness is great, which was manifest in the flesh,” or some close equivalent.

Bruce Metzger writes, quite technically, about the change from “which” to “God” in some Greek manuscripts:

The reading which, on the basis of external evidence and transcriptional probability, best explains the rise of the others is ὃς [“who,” “which”]. It is supported by the earliest and best uncials (نسخَ أَسْمَرِيْدُ رِسْمُ G) as well as by 33 365 442 2127 syr<sup>hmg, pal</sup> goth<sup>pp</sup> Origen<sup>lat</sup> Epiphanius Jerome Theodore Eutherius<sup>acc. to Theodoret</sup> Cyril Cyril<sup>acc. to Pseudo-Didymus</sup> Liberatus.

Furthermore, since the neuter relative pronoun ὃ must have arisen as a scribal correction of ὃς (to bring the relative into concord with μυστήριον [mystery]), the witnesses that read ὃ (D* ἡ, d, g, 61, 86 vg Ambrosiaster Marius Victorinus Hilary Pelagius Augustine) also indirectly presuppose ὃς as the earlier reading. The Textus Receptus reads θεός ὃς [God], withنسخ<sup>e</sup> (this corrector is of the twelfth century) A<sup>ε</sup> C<sup>2</sup> D<sup>ε</sup> K L Ψ 81 330 614 1739 Byz Lect Gregory-Nyssa Didymus Chrysostom Theodoret Euthalius and later Fathers. Thus, no uncial (in the first hand) earlier than the eighth
or ninth century (Ψ) supports θεός [God]; all ancient versions presuppose ὁς or ὅ; and no patristic writer prior to the last third of the fourth century testifies to the reading θεός. The reading θεός arose either (a) accidentally, through the misreading of ο możliwoς as ὅ成功举办, or (b) deliberately, either to supply a substantive for the following six verbs, or, with less probability, to provide greater dogmatic precision” [in other words, to more directly support the doctrine of the Trinity]. (Bruce Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament).

When properly translated, 1 Timothy 3:16 actually argues against the Trinity. It all fits with what we know of the man, Jesus Christ. If Jesus were God, this section of Scripture would have been the perfect place to say so. Instead of saying that “he was made known in the flesh,” we would expect to see some phrase such as, “God was incarnate,” or “God came in the flesh,” or “he came as true God and true man,” etc. But nothing like that occurs. Instead, the section testifies to what non-Trinitarians believe—that Jesus was a man, begotten by the Father, and that he was taken up into glory.

“Made known.” The Greek verb is phanerōo (#5319 φανερῶ), and it is in the passive voice. It means, “to become manifest, to become known, to be made known, to appear: to be plainly recognized, to be thoroughly understood (see Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon). Jesus Christ was the plan of God, and he “became flesh” at his conception. Until then, what people knew about Jesus was what they read about the promised Messiah in the Bible, and frankly, they misunderstood a lot. They did not know there would be a virgin birth (see commentary on Luke 1:34). They did not understand how his ministry would unfold, so his mother and relatives thought he was out of his mind (Mark 3:21). Whenever Jesus spoke of his death or resurrection, even the apostles and disciples who were close to him were confused and did not know what he meant (see commentary on Luke 18:34). Similarly, they did not understand what Jesus was talking about when he spoke of his ascension into heaven (John 14:5; 16:17-19).

It was when Jesus was “in the flesh” that he was finally made known and more clearly understood, and even more so after his resurrection. The meaning of phanerōo includes his appearing in the flesh, that is, his going from the plan of God to actually existing as a person, and it also includes his “becoming known” for who he really was, instead of there being a lot of vague and even false ideas of who he would be as the Messiah.

Trinitarians teach that Jesus’ appearing in the flesh refers to the incarnation, but the word phanerōo does not have to refer to that. It can simply mean that Jesus was unknown before, and then appeared (via divine conception) and became known.

“Declared righteous in spirit” (cp. Young’s Literal Translation). Jesus was pronounced righteous as to his spirit, his attitude, his emotions, and the life they produced.

Chapter 4

4:1. “Paying attention.” The participle can also be causal, so many versions translate it by the word “by” (cp. NRSV, “by paying attention;” cp. CJB; ESV; RSV). The point is
that the people’s involvement with evil draws them away from the faith, and as they are
drawn from the faith, the “dark side” becomes more and more attractive.

“things taught.” The Greek word is didaskalia (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it
has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a
verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was
presented. In this verse we felt bringing didaskalia into English as “things taught” was
better than either “teachings” or “doctrines.” We felt the phrase “things taught” included
anything taught by demons, while “doctrines” was too limiting. [For more on didaskalia
see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13].

4:2. “liars.” The Greek noun is pseudologos (#5573 ψευδολόγος), those who speak
(logos) lies (pseudo). It is important that we understand that these people are “liars” from
God’s perspective, that is, they are not speaking what is actually true. This verse is not
saying that the people themselves know they are lying. Many of them are very sincere
and believe what they say is the truth, but it is not. It is because people often speak “lies,”
falsehood, without knowing it, that Christians must be so schooled in the truth of God.
Sincerity is no guarantee for truth, and Christians must not be deceived by sincerity.

4:6. “teaching.” The Greek word is didaskalia (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has
two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb),
and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In
this verse we felt bringing didaskalia into English as “teaching” was better than
“doctrines,” because the subjects the verse is speaking about need to be covered by more
than just “doctrines,” i.e., more than just is written down as commands, but “sound
teaching,” which involves logic and logical deductions from all God has given us. Of
course, sound “doctrine” is the fundamental basis for sound teaching. [For more on didaskalia
see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13].

4:7. “But refuse profane and old wives’ myths.” In Christian culture, the women hold
together the social fabric of the church. In the Greek culture, there were “old women”
who kept many of the myths alive by passing them down (Cp. Robertson).

“in godliness.” This phrase can have two different meanings, both of them important.
The first and most basic is that we need to train ourselves to be godly (cp. NIV). We do
not “just become” godly. We have to work at it, one thing at a time. The phrase also
means, train ourselves “in” godliness, that is, even when we are godly in some aspect of
our lives, our training to be like Christ goes on. We are never totally where we want to
be.

4:8. “bodily training is profitable for a little while.” Bodily exercise is of some good,
and that is correct. In the biblical culture, most people got plenty of exercise, and many
were actually hungry or even starving. In the Greek culture, those who exercised did so to
excel in some area, such as running, wrestling, javelin throw, etc., or they exercised as a
form of religious asceticism, to purify themselves in some way (Cp. Col. 2:23). In any
case, bodily training was profitable for a little while, and it is contrasted with godliness,
which profits in all things, both in this life (for a little while), and in the life to come.

4:9. “This statement is trustworthy.” See commentary on 1 Timothy 1:15.

4:10. “who is the savior of all people, especially of those who believe.” God is the
ultimate savior of all people. He is the Author of the plan of salvation, and He sent the
Christ and then later raised him from the dead. This verse in Timothy has caused some
confusion because people have taken it to mean that God saves everyone, which it does
not say. It simply says God is the savior for everyone, meaning that if anyone is going to be saved, then God is going to be the one to save them, which He does via His Son, Jesus Christ. The second part of the verse, “especially of those who believe,” is added because believers are the ones who have accepted the offer of salvation from the God their ultimate savior, and thus will actually be saved. It helps to keep in mind that biblically, we are not “saved” yet. We are said to be saved (cp. Eph. 2:8) because it is promised and guaranteed to those who believe. But in fact what we have now is only the promise of salvation. That is why Romans 13:11 says our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed, and why the helmet is called the “hope of salvation” (1 Thess. 5:8). It is why Romans 10:9 says that if you confess and believe [aorist tense, indicating a one time even, usually in the past), you “will be saved” (future tense). If you have confessed and believed, you “will be saved” when God saves people in the future and we get our new bodies and sickness and death are no more.

4:13. “to public reading.” The context of this verse indicates that Paul meant public reading. At a time when often only a small percentage of the people could read (perhaps 10%), it was very important to read the Bible to the people in the congregation. This was why there was public reading of the Scriptures in the synagogue, as Jesus did in Nazareth (Luke 4:16ff). Several Scriptures mention public reading: Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27. Revelation 1:3 says “he who reads and those who hear” are blessed. “He” would read, because one person would read, and “those” would hear because usually more than one person would be being read to. This is an example of how a strictly literal translation of the Bible can be misleading. When the average modern Christian reads the phrase, “give yourself to reading,” he does not think of public reading out loud, because almost no one does that today. Instead he thinks of dedicating himself to his own personal study. Of course we have to study the Bible to understand it, so personal study is very important, but it is not what this verse is talking about.

“teaching.” The Greek word is didaskalia (διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. Interestingly, we use “teaching” in English in the same way. If, in the middle of the day, someone calls a friend who is a schoolteacher, she may hear, “I can’t talk now, I’m teaching.” In that context, “teaching” is being used as a verb” the teacher is in the act of teaching. If, on the other hand, the two are walking out of church, one might say to the other, “What did you think of the teaching?” In that context she is using “teaching” as a noun, and what she means is, “What did you think about what we were taught?” It is the context that determines whether didaskalia is the act of teaching or the subject matter that was taught.

Didaskalia is used 21 times in the NT. One of the problems we have in translating from the Greek to the English is that in almost every use of didaskalia, we have to separate the act of teaching from what is taught (the doctrine). Most English versions use “teaching” for the act of teaching, and “doctrine” or “what is taught” for the subject matter that is taught. But in Greek there are times when the Scripture verse can easily refer to both the teaching and what is taught, (this is a kind of amphibologia (cp. Bullinger, Figures of Speech. An amphibologia occurs when a word means two things, and both are meant in the passage). A good example is Titus 1:9, where we encourage with “sound didaskalia.” In that verse, both “teaching” and “doctrine” fit perfectly,
because we encourage with sound teaching (not all teaching is “doctrine”), and we encourage with sound “doctrine.” The Greek reader instinctively sees both meanings in the word, but that is not true of English, where we usually have to make a distinction.

In this verse we felt “teaching” was better than “doctrine” because “teaching” fit better in the list of the active things: public reading and exhortation.

4:14. “by prophecy.” The word “by” is from the Greek preposition dia (διά) which has many different meanings according to the context, one referring to attendant circumstances (cp. BDAG Greek-English lexicon). In this case it seems clear that the prophecies did not confer the ministry, but were a public recognition due to the ministry that Timothy had already demonstrated in his life. [For more information on Timothy’s ordination, see commentary on 2 Timothy 1:6].

4:16. “teaching.” The Greek word is didaskalia (διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse we felt bringing didaskalia into English as “teaching” was better than “doctrine,” because the subjects the verse is speaking about need to be covered by more than just “doctrine,” i.e., more than just is written down as commands, but “sound teaching,” which involves logic and logical deductions from all God has given us. Of course, sound “doctrine” is the fundamental basis for sound teaching. [For more on didaskalia see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13]. In this verse, Paul writes about “the teaching.” Some versions translate the verse as if the Greek text said, “your teaching,” but that is not what it says. Of course Timothy is supposed to pay close attention to what he teaches, but this verse is also commanding him to pay attention to what is being taught in all the churches he oversees. A leader is not just responsible to God for what he teaches in his church, but what everyone teaches in his church.

Chapter 5

5:10. “hospitality.” The Greek word here is xenodocheō (ξενοδοχέω). It is partially comprised of the Greek word for “stranger or guest friend,” xenos (ξένος). The word designates hospitality particularly to those who are not immediately within one’s private circle: “to receive and show hospitality to a stranger, that is, someone who is not regarded as a member of the extended family or a close friend” (Louw-Nida). However, this does not necessarily refer to “total strangers,” as a xenos could very well be an acquaintance.

“diligently pursued.” The Greek is epakolouthēō (ἐπακολουθέω), and it can mean to follow after, or follow closely after (if it is used that way here, it would be idiomatic, like a disciple following closely after the teacher), however, it is more likely that in this case it takes on the meaning of “devote yourself to” or “diligently pursue.”

5:14. “rule the household.” The Greek word is oikodespoteō (#3616 οἰκοδέσποτεω). It is a compound word built from oikós (house, household), and despôtēs (#1203 δеспότης), which means, “lord, master, owner.” God is referred to as a despôtēs in Luke 2:29 and Acts 4:24, and Jesus is in 2 Peter 2:1; Jude 1:4; Revelation 6:10, and likely in 2 Timothy 2:21. In 1 Timothy 6:1 and 2; Titus 2:9; 1 Peter 2:18; a despôtēs is a slave owner. When oikós and despôtēs are combined into oikodespoteō, the word refers to one who is to rule
a household or manage family affairs. This is a very powerful word, and it has been largely ignored by the Church, which has historically been committed to the teaching that the man is the head of the house, and the woman must obey him unconditionally.

To get the truth on any subject, we must be careful to listen to what God is teaching us in the Scripture, because Scripture does not contradict itself. The Word of God does say that the husband is to be the head of the wife (Eph. 5:23; 1 Cor. 11:3). However, it also says that there is neither male nor female in Christ (Gal. 3:28), and that we are to submit to each other (Eph. 5:21), which indicates that there must be spheres of responsibility in the Church and in the family. 1 Timothy 5:14 lays out part of the sphere of responsibility of the woman, in that she is to rule the house. The man has responsibilities, among other things, to provide and protect the family, and to lead it spiritually. A man who lets his wife or family go without spiritual leadership is not acting as head of the woman and family.

In most ancient societies, the men were outside the house working during the day, while the woman was at home with the children, taking care of them and the house. In that context, it was clear the woman was to “rule the house.” However, this verse does not say “rule the house while the man is at work” or otherwise gone. God has placed it in the hearts of women to care about and oversee the house in a way that most men do not (there are exceptions), and God has given women the authority to rule that matches their desire to have their house a certain way. Thus, it is not unusual for women to want certain furniture, certain colors, and specific ways for things to be done in the house. It is godly for the members of the house, including the husband, to submit to those desires. Of course, the authority to rule the house comes with responsibilities. Just as God and Christ are also despotēs, and have a responsibility to do things in a way that provides for the welfare of those in their care, so the woman has the responsibility to run the household in a way that cares for those who live in the house, and interweaves graciously with the responsibility of the husband to be the family head.

It is worth noting that the full impact of this verse has sometimes not been seen due to the way that oikodespoteō is translated. Translations in some of the English versions such as “guide the house,” “keep house,” or “be the mistress of the house,” do not really communicate forcefully enough the authority and responsibility of the wife when it comes to her house. “the Opposer.” This is one of the many names for the Slanderer (the Devil). God uses many different names to describe His arch enemy, the Slanderer. The very next verse, 5:15, uses a different name, the Adversary. The Opposer is a very good name for the Slanderer because he always opposes God. [For more on the names of the Slanderer, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”]

5:15. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanās (Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. See commentary at 1:20.

5:17. “teaching.” The Greek word is didaskalia (διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse we felt bringing didaskalia into English as “teaching” was better than “doctrine,” because the subjects the verse is speaking about need to be covered by more than just “doctrine,” i.e., more than just is written down as commands, but “sound
teaching,” which involves logic and logical deductions from all God has given us. Of course, sound “doctrine” is the fundamental basis for sound teaching. [For more on didaskalia see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13]. Good teaching does not just happen. It is the result of diligent study and prayer. It is a “labor of love.”


5:19. “except on the basis of two or three witnesses.” There are two primary ways this verse has been interpreted. The first, but least accepted, is that an accusation should not be received against an elder except “in the presence of” two or three witnesses. In other words, before Timothy (or any other leader), could hear an accusation against an elder, he would have to gather two or more witnesses to make sure the case was heard accurately. This does not seem to be what the verse is saying. The issue does not seem to be how clearly the case is heard, but rather, how decisively the case is made, which leads us to the second and far more prevalent translation of the verse, including the REV. It was standard practice in Jewish law that there had to be two witnesses to any act before it could be conclusively adjudicated on (Nu. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1; Heb. 10:28).

This is to prevent malicious accusers from tearing the Church apart. If an elder does something offensive, the individual wronged is to go to the person and work out the problem. If there is no solution, he or she is to take others (Matthew 18:15-17). At that point there would be witnesses. This is to be a general practice. It is not to be a law that allows for unrighteousness to continue. The Bible is not against common sense, and one of the requirements of leaders is that they are to be “reasonable,” and we write in the note on 1 Timothy 3:3 above:

“The concepts of “moderation, forbearance, gentleness, sweet reasonableness” all touch a side of the full meaning of this word. The meaning is yielding, not insisting on one’s legal rights to the end that the legal rights become moral wrongs.”

If a leader had case after case where usually credible people said that they were spoken or acted against one on one by a certain individual in leadership, but that the leader had denied what he had done when the wronged person went to him to rectify the situation, and again when the individual went back to the leader with witnesses about both the original problem and the denial, then “reason” would dictate that the accused leader must be doing something wrong, or so many people would not witness to the same fault in his life. Leaders are to have a good report among the people, and when that ceases to be the case, the leader will cease to be effective and should step out of leadership, or be removed by others.

5:21. “out of.” This is not the Greek word 

5:22. “and thus share in the sins of others.” Compare NASB and NET translations. The laying on of hands describes the implementing of a leadership position in the Church; this verse falls in the context of eldership and moral requirements for leaders (see entry on
5:24). We are instructed not to lay hands on anyone too hastily, lest we share in the responsibility for their sins (cp. NASB’s translation); that is, if we establish a morally corrupt leader by neglecting the requirements laid out in chapter 3 or not first testing them to be proved beyond reproach (1 Tim. 3:10), then we heap upon ourselves a portion of the responsibility for the damage they will cause the people of God and the name of Christ. This is reminiscent of the spiritual Watchman God speaks of in Ezekiel 3:17-21; 33:2-9. In order for a watchman to “keep pure” and not share in the other man’s transgression, he had to speak what God had commanded him to say to the one in sin. If he did not speak against their sin, but let them go merrily on their way, then God charged the Watchmen also with the blame. So it is with elders who lay hands on those to put them into leadership positions. If they do not hold to the requirements of 1 Timothy 3 and rebuke those who sin (5:20), they share in the sins of that leader.

5:23. “No longer drink only water.” It was customary to drink wine in the Roman world, so it is worth asking why Timothy apparently did not drink it, particularly when the water-only diet was obviously hurting his health. The answer seems to be apparent from reading Ephesians. Timothy was in Ephesus, and the Ephesian church had a problem with drinking. Of the seven Church Epistles, Ephesians is the only one that mentions being drunk: “And do not be drunk with wine, which leads to reckless actions…”

Timothy had apparently tried to set a good example to the Ephesians by not drinking wine at all, in spite of the ill effects it had on him. Paul corrects him, and tells him to go back to drinking some wine. This should be a good lesson for leaders. It often happens that leaders want so badly for their congregation to live righteous lives that they abstain from things that never needed to be abstained from in the first place, but so many people were being abusive that the leader thought abstinence was the best course. While there are situations in which that is the case, it is usually better to teach people to obey God, which includes moderation in most things, and allow them to be responsible before the Lord for their own lives. It is often better to set the example that moderation is both godly and possible than to simply abstain.

5:24. “[their sins] follow after them.” This verse teaches a great truth especially helpful for leaders in the Body of Christ to understand—for this is in the context of eldership (5:17-25). Paul is talking about the administering of leadership roles in the church. He has already laid out the moral requirements for leadership positions (3:1-14). Here in chapter five he is addressing the protocol for when a practicing elder fails to meet the mark (5:19-21) and what to look for when admitting new people into leadership by the “laying on of hands” (v. 22). All leaders are to be held accountable to the same moral standard: “observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing out of partiality” (v. 21). Thus, the word “judgment” here in verse 24 does not refer to God’s Day of Judgment but rather the judgment we must make about others when considering their qualifications. R. C. H. Lenski points out that, as with any leader who picks others to serve, “Timothy is obliged to render [judgments] when he is accepting or rejecting applicants for the eldership.” Only with all this context in mind can we see the application of this verse for leaders. Some people’s sins go out before them, like a trumpet declaring them unfit for representing the Church in a leadership role, but with others, their sins follow after them into their office of leadership, and like good works (v. 25) they cannot remain hidden forever. In such a case we must “reprove them in the sight of all” (v. 20).
It is essential for the health and growth of the Christian Church that when leaders are chosen to lead the flock of God, these men and women are well qualified, spiritual, Christ-like people. Weak, self-willed, and sinful leaders hurt the Church both directly, by hurting God’s people, and indirectly, by making Christianity a laughingstock or object of ridicule to others. Leaders have such a huge impact on the Church that it is irresponsible for one leader to bring another person into leadership in the Church too quickly, without doing due diligence about the person. Thus the Word of God exhorts leaders to not lay hands hastily on anyone, because if a leader does that he is partly responsible (he “partakes of”) the sins of the other (v. 22).

Chapter 6

6:1. “masters.” The Greek is despotēs (#1203 δεσπότης) means master or lord, and it refers to someone who has legal control and authority over others, such as subjects or slaves (cp. 1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:9). It is used both as a title for God (Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24), and a title for Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 1:4). See commentary on Luke 2:29.

“doctrine.” The Greek word is didaskalia (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse we felt “doctrine” was better than “teaching,” because the subject is about what is taught, not the way it is taught. Unbelievers mock Christians because of their beliefs and doctrine. For more on didaskalia see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13).

“defamed.” The Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. This verse is an example of how not only God, but right doctrine, can be defamed. [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].


6:4. “defamimg speech.” The Greek noun is blasphēmia (#988 βλασφημία; pronounced blas-fay-me'-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmia, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

6:9. “are determined.” The Greek is boulomai (#1014 βούλομαι; pronounced boo-lo-may), and it means to have a purpose, an intent; to plan, to desire something. It means more than thelō, “want,” but to combine that desire with purpose. Thus here it refers to people who are determined to be rich.

“ruin.” See commentary on “ruin” in 1 Corinthians 5:5.

6:12. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].

6:15. “He will bring about.” God is the “he.” God will bring about the return of Christ at its proper time.

6:18. “fellowshipping.” The Greek is koinōnikos (#2843 κοινωνικός), it is the adjective of the noun koinonia, and occurs only here. Lenski is right-on when he writes: “Many
regard this as a synonym of the preceding [generous]. …Others find some difference and include in the giving also friendliness, inclination, and the like. We are pleased to note that Wohlenberg has presented a more accurate meaning of the word. The word means “fellowshipping,” ready to fellowship and actually doing so. The adjective, the noun, and the verb have the same meaning. …The Christian man is to be in fellowship with all his Christian brethren,…. ”
2 Timothy

Chapter 1

1:3. “ancestors.” This tells us that Paul came from a long line of devout Jews. By “my ancestors” he would mean his personal family line. As a whole, the nation of the Jews had not been particularly devout, as any study of Jewish history will show. It can be a great advantage to come from a truly godly family. Many important lessons can be learned and wonderful habits established while a youth.

1:6. “For this reason.” The Greek phrase, δι ἐν αἰτίαν (Δι’ ἡν αἰτίαν; the lemma: διά δς αἰτία) means “for this reason,” and encompasses everything in the long sentence that precedes it (Verses 3-5 are one sentence in the Greek). Because of Paul’s prayers, and because of the sincere faith that lives inside Timothy, the kind of faith that both his grandmother and mother had, Timothy should not let the gift of God, his ministry, go dormant, but rather should fan it into flames. Yes, Paul was in jail and about to be executed. Yes, the people in Asia (where Timothy was) had turned away from Paul (and thus Timothy also). Yes, times were tough and dangerous. Nevertheless, God gave us His holy spirit, and with it power, love, and self-control. Therefore Timothy should not be timid or cowardly, but should fan his gift into flames and do the work of an evangelist and see if anyone was still willing to hear and obey the message.

This verse shows us that it is our responsibility, not God’s, to get ourselves excited about the things of God. The difficulties of life can cool us off concerning the Good News, but it is our responsibility to take those coals and fan them back into a burning flame for the Lord.

1:6. “that is in you through the laying on of my hands.” This verse is very easy to misunderstand, because many people think that it is referring to a gift ministry (charisma; #5486 χάρισμα) being somehow conferred by Paul laying on his hands. But in this case, it is not the gift that is being given, but it would be understood in the culture that it is the authority and recognition to publicly minister, along with a blessing, that is being given. This then subsequently led to the person being in charge of a church or churches.

The Bible makes it clear that each person has a gift from God (Rom. 12:6; Eph. 4:7, 8). No one needs to have a person or a group to lay hands on him or her in order to confer a ministry. In fact, and ministry cannot be conferred that way; they are given by God, not conferred by people. The laying on of hands by the elders is a public recognition of a ministry in operation in the Body of Christ, and it is important for the proper order and continuation of the Church. The public ceremony of laying on of hands lets all the people know that a group of elders whom they trust and follow put their trust in this new and upcoming leader. William Mounce writes: “There is nothing in the context of these three passages [1 Tim. 1:18; 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6] to suggest that we have here a sacramental act whereby ‘the grace of the office is transferred’…The Spirit showed that Timothy was equipped for ministry, and in accordance with custom this fact was publicly recognized by the leadership of the community. The predominant note is not one of authority
transferred or of the importation of an official status, but of a blessing given.” (Word Biblical Commentary: Pastoral Epistles. Excursus: Prophecies about Timothy, p. 72).

At some point in his life, Timothy was ordained to ministry by Paul and other elders (1 Tim. 4:14), and Paul exhorted him to live his life and war his warfare according to his calling in the Body of Christ (1 Tim. 1:18).

1:7. “timidity.” The Greek is deilia, which means lack of mental or moral strength, cowardice, timidity. It is not the standard word for “fear,” which is phobos.

1:8. “do not be ashamed.” The aorist subjunctive verb shows us that this is an exhortation due to the difficulty of the times. Timothy has not become ashamed, as a few commentators suggest. Paul was simply speaking words of encouragement, as we are all inclined to do when in battle. One warrior shouts to another, “Keep fighting,” not because the other has given up, but simply as words of continued encouragement. Lenski has an excellent discussion on this; also see The Expositor’s Greek Testament by W. R. Nicoll.

“relying on.” The Greek preposition kata is best understood in this context as it is in the NRSV. “according to” makes it seem as if the power of God somehow dictated or controlled the suffering.

1:10. “brought life and immortality to light.” The Old Testament, particularly prophets such as Ezekiel and Daniel, contain some seemingly clear verses on the resurrection from the dead. Nevertheless, there was almost no clear understanding of it at the time of Christ (and very little today since there has been more than 1500 years of “orthodoxy” teaching the doctrinal error of “the immortal soul”). The teaching of Jesus Christ (and then his death and resurrection), brought “life” and immortality to light for all to see.

In this verse the word “life” is being used in its fuller sense. While it does refer to a fulfilled life now, that is its lesser meaning; the greater meaning is that “life” refers to “everlasting life.” [For “life,” meaning “everlasting life,” see commentary on Luke 10:28, and cp. Matt. 7:14; 18:8, 9; 19:17; Mark 9:43, 45; John 3:36; 5:40; 20:31; Acts 11:18; Rom. 5:18; Gal. 3:21; 2 Tim. 1:1; 1 John 3:14; 5:12]. [For more information on the soul and the phrase “immortal soul,” see Appendix 7, “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

1:12. “he is able to guard that which he has entrusted to me.” The Greek words parathēkē phulassō (παραθήκη φυλάσσω) occur in verse 14 and 1 Timothy 6:20 where they refer to something committed to someone, and Lenski convincingly argues that they should be taken the same way here. It was the Lord who entrusted to Paul a great deposit (1 Cor. 9:17), and now Paul was about to be executed (2 Tim. 4:6). Yet Paul was convinced that the Lord was able to guard that wonderful deposit and that it would not be lost. This interpretation also fits the context well, his appointment as a minister (v. 11) and why he told Timothy to hold to the pattern of sound words he had heard (v. 13) and guard the deposit entrusted to him (v. 14). Cp. The ESV translation, which is very good.

1:14. “The good deposit that was committed to you, guard through holy spirit which dwells in us.” This follows the literal reading of the Greek (see Young’s Literal Translation) very closely. This verse has been misunderstood by many translators, primarily because they do not understand the holy spirit field.

We understand the holy spirit to be the gift of God—the power of God sealed within each Christian. A Christian guards the treasure of the Word (2 Cor. 4:7: we have the “treasure,” the “knowledge” (v. 6), in earthen vessels) and the knowledge of the Truth within him by, among other things, operating the power of the holy spirit. The extent of that power is part of the Sacred Secret (Christ in you—Col. 1:27). If the holy spirit is the
third person of the Trinity as most translators believe, then the verse means something totally different—we have to enlist its help in guarding the treasure as per the NIV, ESV, NASB, etc. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]

1:18. “the Lord...of the Lord.” The commentators are divided about this phrase, as to whether it means “Jesus...Jesus,” “God...God,” “Jesus...God,” or “God...Jesus.” Since God and Jesus always work in harmony, the best choice seems to leave it “Lord...Lord.”

Chapter 2

2:2. “entrust.” The Greek is paratithēmi (#3908 παρατίθημι), and it means to place beside or near or set before, to set forth, to deposit, to entrust, to commit to one’s charge.

2:7. “all this.” The Greek adjective pasin without the definite article is all of something. The adjective should modify a noun, pronoun, etc. In this context, it would be “all” of “this,” i.e., the subject that Paul is referring to. It is not true that the Lord will give understanding in “everything” as many versions have, even though the Lord gives understanding in many things.

2:8. “out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among the dead.”

2:10. “elect” or “chosen.” From the Greek adjective, eklektos (#1588 ἐκλεκτός). We chose God (through) Roman’s 10:9 then He chooses us and saves us. This verse is not saying that God chooses apart from our will as some teach. Quite the contrary. If God could choose us apart from our will, why would Paul have to endure anything at all? He could live a good life and God would choose who He willed. No, we must strive to reach out with the Good News so that people can hear and then choose God—and our striving may mean hardship.

“everlasting glory.” The term “glory” is described by the adjective aiōnios (#166 αἰώνιος), which most versions render “eternal.” See commentary on John 3:16. Aiōnios can mean “age” as in the messianic age, or it can have a strictly temporal meaning of “everlasting.” Here the meaning is probably both—it refers to the glory of the age to come, glory that is everlasting. We prefer to stay away from “eternal” in this verse. Technically, “eternal” is something with no beginning and no end, whereas “everlasting” refers to something that, once it starts, never ends. As English has become less precisely used over the years, the word “eternal” has very often been used when the actual meaning is “everlasting.” The loss of clarity can be confusing in some contexts. God is truly eternal, but the Kingdom is not.

2:11. “this statement is trustworthy.” See commentary on 1 Timothy 1:15.

“died with him...live with him.” 2 Timothy 2:11-13 is one of the great sections of Scripture that shows us the difference between “salvation” and “rewards.” It shows that when a person is born again, his salvation is assured—his salvation is never in doubt no matter what he does. We die with Christ when we take him as Lord (see commentary on Rom. 6:3, 8). However, even as children of God we still live in flesh bodies and make mistakes, sometimes horrible mistakes, including denying him. If we deny him in this life, then he will deny giving us rewards in his kingdom. However, even after saying he will deny us if we deny him, verse 13 says that he still remains faithful, and he cannot deny “himself.” Christians, whether model citizens or big sinners, are still part of the
Body of Christ and guaranteed salvation. Christ will never deny his own Body! [For the permanence of our salvation, see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:23. For rewards in the kingdom see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10].


2:13. “unfaithful.” The Greek word is ἀπίστεω (#569 ἀπίστεω), and it means to have no belief or trust, thus to disbelieve; to betray a trust, or to be unfaithful. In this context in which it is in juxtaposition to the Lord, who is “faithful,” it means “unfaithful.”

2:15. “Make a diligent effort.” The Greek is σπουδάζω (#4704 σπουδάζω) and it means to make a diligent effort, or be diligent at something. The NIV’s “do your best” is an attempt to bring out this meaning in an easily understood manner. The “study” of the KJV is a good example of how the meaning of words changes over the years. In 1611, only something like ten percent of the population could read, and the word “study” meant to make a diligent effort to learn something, almost the way we today use “understudy.”

In 1611, a person “studying” to be a silversmith, for example, did not read anything at all, but rather went and worked for the silversmith. The student would start with the menial tasks, and then as the master smith saw him applying himself, would give him increased responsibility. Sadly, many modern readers see “study to show thyself approved” in the KJV and think that approval before God relates only to the mental activity of learning. Being approved before God requires us making a diligent effort in all that we do in our walk before Him.

“rightly handling.” The Greek word is ὀρθοτομεῖο (#3718 ὀρθοτομεῖο), and there has been no small amount of discussion about how to translate it. It is a composite verb and only found here in the NT. The well-known meaning “rightly divide” (cp. KJV) is built from the two base verbs, but it is well known in linguistics, including Greek, that compound verbs are often not closely related to the base verbs. The base verb ὁμοίω means “to cut,” but “cutting” was such a fundamental part of ancient life that it became used for many things that were not literally cut. The common Hebrew expression for making a covenant was “to cut the covenant,” and that phrase continued even when nothing was cut, such as in a covenant of salt or a marriage covenant. Proverbs 11:5 (LXX) says that the righteousness of the person “cuts his way straight,” even though nothing is literally cut. The Greeks (and we today) speak of “cutting” a liquid, when we mean “dilute” it.

The context, both before and after 2 Timothy 2:15, is about unprofitable use of words and worldly chatter. In contrast to that, God’s people are to “rightly handle,” the Word and the words in it, and not wage useless word battles with them. Clearly implied in the meaning of ὀρθοτομεῖο is that we can “rightly handle” the Bible in the way we understand it and explain it, and we can “rightly handle” it in the way we deal with it in relation to others. The Bible can be wrongly believed and taught, and it can also be wrongly used as a weapon against other people.

2:16. “lead to further ungodliness.” Disobeying and defying God only leads to more disobedience (cp. commentary on 2 Tim. 3:13).

2:19. “The Lord knows.” This is not a specific quotation from the Old Testament, but may be an allusion to Numbers 16:5. In any case, it would have been, and continues to be, a commonly expressed sentiment among believers.
“Everyone who names.” This is not a specific quotation from the Old Testament, but may be an allusion to Numbers 16:26. In any case, the admonition for the righteous to depart from evil is a very common biblical admonition.

“the name of the Lord.” The textual evidence for “the Lord” is early and overwhelming. Even the majority text family, which often favors the reading of the Byzantine text family that is reflected in the King James Version, has the reading “Lord” and not “Christ” (Hodges and Farstad, The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text). The note in the Expositors Greek Testament says that the reading “Christ” is in a few cursive manuscripts. It is possible that a scribe made a note in the margin of his manuscript that he thought the word “Lord” referred to Christ, and that a later scribe then copied “Christ” into his manuscript.

“must depart.” In Greek the imperative mood can be an invitation “Let everyone,” or a command (Everyone must!). In this case the context calls for the word “must.” God never forces anyone to use the name of the Lord, but anyone who does “name the name of the Lord,” that is, use it for personal identification (“I am the Lord’s”) and for power (“In the name of Jesus Christ…”) must depart from unrighteous behavior. It does great harm to Christianity when professing Christians act like unbelievers and participate in evil and ungodly behavior. Christians who act like that will suffer consequences (see commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:10).

2:21. “master.” The Greek is despotēs (#1203 δεσπότης) means master, lord, or owner, and it refers to someone who has legal control and authority over others, such as subjects or slaves (cp. 1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:9), or over things. It is used both as a title for God (Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24), and a title for Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 1:4). See commentary on Luke 2:29.

2:22. “call on the Lord.” This is a prayer formula, and refers to prayer to Jesus Christ (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:2).

2:25. “get to give.” The Greek verb “give” is didomi (#1325 δίδωμι) in the aorist tense, which in this case means “get to give,” not just “give.” The verse, and certainly not the scope of Scripture, does not ever portray God withholding forgiveness or people’s repentance. Quite the contrary! Like the forgiving father in the “Parable of the Prodigal Son” (Luke 15), The Father is watching and waiting for anyone to come to repentance, and when someone does, there is “more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent” (Luke 15:7).

“full knowledge.” This word, epignōsis (#1922 ἐπίγνωσις), is the usual term for “knowledge” with the prefix epi added as an intensifier. It thus becomes full knowledge, an intense experiential knowing of the truth as the result of their repentance. We hold that it is ultimately up to the person’s free will to decide to repent or not; God does not give repentance in this sense. Rather, it is hoped that God will grant the man’s repentance to result in full knowledge of the truth. The pressure in this verse is upon God’s giving the result of the repentance, not the repentance itself. Further, the context of this verse is not salvation but controversies and quarrels over words—it is not eternal salvation that is needed to be granted here, but a fuller knowledge of the truth.

2:26. “return to clear-thinking.” This means that these people had once thought properly and now they must return to clear-thinking. The Greek word is ananēphō (#366 ἀνανήφω), to “come to one’s senses again” (BDAG). This verse is very enlightening, for it connects the devil’s snare with muddled thinking. Satan captures us to do his will by
confusing our thinking. Like he did with Eve, he mixes in lies with truth to confuse us and cause us to not think clearly. When our thoughts are off track we will behave in the wrongheaded fashion he wants us to.

**“the Slanderer.”** This is “the Devil.” The Greek is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word *diabolos* means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

### Chapter 3

3:2. **“self-centered.”** The Greek is *philautos* (#5367 φιλαυτος) from the word *philos*, “friend.” It means to be fond of oneself, concerned about oneself, and thus selfish or self-centered.

3:3. **“not interested in doing good.”** The Greek is *aphilagathos* (#865 ἀφιλάγαθος) from the word *philos*, “friend” and *agathos*, “good,” with the alpha privative to mean “not.” BDAG says “without interest in the (public) good” (cp. *The Source New Testament* by A. Nyland). This is the opposite of the quality expected in elders, who are to like what is good (Titus 1:8). It should be noted that this can be “not interested in doing good,” or it can also mean “opposed to good.” Of the two choices, both apply, and the people in the last days will not only not be interested in doing good (that is, “good” by God’s standards), they will actually be opposed to good, but for the purposes of translation, we felt that “not interested in doing good” was more generally applicable. Some people who are not interested in doing good personally will not be opposed to someone else doing good.

**“family affection.”** See commentary on Romans 1:31; 12:10; and John 21:15.

3:4. **“friends of pleasure.”** The Greek is the adjective *philēdonos* (#5369 φιλήδονος), a compound word made up of *philos* (friendship, the noun form of *phileō*, which many translate as “love.”) and *hēdonē* (ἡδονή), pleasure. For the difference between *agapaō* and *phileō*, see the note on John 21:15.

**“friends of God.”** The Greek is *philotheos* (#5377 φιλόθεος), a compound word made up of *philos* (friendship), and *theos*, (God). For the difference between *agapaō* and *phileō*, see the note on John 21:15.

3:8. **“disqualified.”** The Greek word is *adokimos* (#96 ἀδόκιμος). It referred to something that was tested and failed the test (in contrast to *dokimazō*, #1381 δοκιμάζω; “to test;” and “to be approved or proven genuine after being tested;” Rom. 12:2). So *adokimos* means to be “unfit,” “not approved,” “failed,” “unfit.”

3:10. **“closely followed.”** The Greek is *parakoloutheō* (#3877 παρακολουθέω), which means “to conform to someone’s belief or practice by paying special attention; ‘follow faithfully,’ ‘follow as a rule’” (BDAG). Timothy closely followed Paul in many ways. Culturally, as a disciple, Timothy “followed” his rabbi (teacher), Paul and learned from him. He was there with Paul as his knowledge and experience grew, and as he received deeper and deeper revelations from God. Timothy also “followed” Paul in the sense that he “came after” him and ended up experiencing many of the problems that Paul himself
experienced. There are versions that say, “fully known,” and although that is true, it is because Timothy closely followed Paul that he knew all about Paul.

“teaching.” The Greek word is didaskalia (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse we felt bringing didaskalia into English as “teaching” was better than “doctrine,” because the wording of the English with “teaching” implies both the way Paul taught and the subject matter that Paul taught. [For more on didaskalia see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13].

3:13. “from bad to worse.” Evil thoughts and deeds originate in the heart (Mark 7:20-23), and the posture of the heart is always changing. As we obey God and believe our hearts become more and more pure, but if we disobey and defy God, our hearts become darker and darker (Matt. 13:15; Eph. 4:17-19; 1 Tim. 4:1, 2). It is clearly in Scripture, and has been seen in the world over and over again with all kinds of sin—sexual, drug related, abuse, murder, etc.—that the sins a person commits become worse over time. This is clearly set forth in many verses of Scripture (cp. 2 Tim. 2:16; Rom. 6:16, 19; Jude 1:13).

3:15. “wisdom for salvation.” This is not just “being saved,” because Timothy was already saved. First, it is a general statement about the Scripture, that it is able to make a person wise eis sotēria (εἰς σωτηρία) “unto salvation.” Often the preposition eis introduces a result, thus, “wisdom leading to salvation.” In this case the “wisdom for salvation” is a broad phrase that can apply in many senses. As pertaining to Timothy himself, the “salvation” would not be referring to his receiving everlasting life, because he already had everlasting life through faith in Christ, so rather it would be referring to the depth of understanding about salvation and the full outworking of salvation in his life. However the broad way the statement is worded opens the door for Timothy to have wisdom for everlasting life salvation as it would apply to and help others.

“faith in Christ Jesus.” The text reads, “The faith, the one in Christ Jesus.” This is a Greek way of speaking that emphasizes the word faith and shows that the faith is to be in Christ. This idiom comes across poorly in terms of English readability, however. We have left out the article (“the one”) and preserved the base meaning of the Greek, that the faith is to be “in Christ Jesus.”

3:16. “All Scripture.” The context defines this as “the sacred writings” (verse 15), so it includes both the Old and New Testament (although the New Testament was not completed by this time). We know the Old Testament is included because it was all that was available when Timothy was a baby and being taught by his mother and grandmother. It is a testimony to the good parenting that Timothy had that his mother had taught him the sacred writings from the time he was a baby. By the time Paul was writing 2 Timothy, “all Scripture” included the New Testament books that had been written by that point.

“God-breathed.” The Greek word translated “God-breathed” is theopneustos (#2315 θεόπνευστος), a compound word from theos (God) and pneuō (to breath). Therefore, as Friberg’s Greek-English lexicon says, strictly it means “God-breathed,” but what does that mean? We believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible, meaning the original text was actually given by God to the person who wrote it down. This is logical and fits the facts.
That God gave the text of the Bible to the people who wrote it agrees with the testimony in the Scripture itself. For example, dozens of verses say God spoke to the prophets to tell them what to write or what to say (cp. Exod. 6:29; 34:27; Isa. 8:1; Jer. 22:30; 36:1, 2, 27, 28; Hab. 2:2, etc.). Similarly, Paul said that what he taught he got by revelation from Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:12), and Jesus also told the Apostle John what to write (Rev. 1:10, 11). Also, there are verses such as 2 Peter 1:21 that tell us that the Bible came from God: “for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (NASB). If the Bible was not given by God to the person who wrote it down, then all the verses that say it is are wrong, and the Bible’s testimony of itself is wrong.

The prophecies in the Bible show that it was authored by God. Man does not have the ability to tell the future, but God does, and He says that His telling the future is proof that He is God. In Isaiah 41:22, 23, and 48:3-5, God points out that idols cannot tell the future, but He is God and He can. The dozens of fulfilled historically verifiable prophecies in the Bible are substantial proof that God authored it.

The historical accuracy of the Bible is another piece of evidence that God authored the Bible. The historical accuracy of the names of people and places, and the accuracy of the events recorded, is far beyond the level of accuracy that people in the ancient world could attain simply by passing information down by word of mouth. The accuracy of the Bible is possible only because it was authored by an “eyewitness” who was present at every event recorded in it, and that eyewitness is God.

Of course there are passages of the Scripture that are quotations from other writings, but we believe God could have told the writer to use those too, not just that the writer “thought it was a good idea” to include them. [For more on the trustworthiness of the Bible; John Schoenheit, The Bible: You Can Believe It].

“teaching.” The Greek word is didaskalia (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse we felt bringing didaskalia into English as “teaching” was better than “doctrine,” because the wording of the English with “teaching” implies both the fact that “all Scripture” is beneficial to use in teaching, and also that it is beneficial as “the teaching.” [For more on didaskalia see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13].

Chapter 4

4:1. “and in view of his appearing and his kingdom.” This is the more correct translation. The KJV, “at” his appearing does not fit the context and grammar nearly as well. The charge is a solemn one indeed: “I solemnly charge you in the sight of God, and of Christ Jesus, and by his appearing and his kingdom…”

4:2. “preach the word; be ready…reprove, rebuke, exhort.” All five verbs are in the imperative mood and are a command. The situation is dire: Paul was in prison about to lose his life and Nero’s persecution of Christians was severe. Worse, people were being hardened to the truth, as 4:3 tells us: “For the time will come when they will not put up with the sound teaching.” In these circumstances, Jesus commands us to always be ready, to preach, to reprove, to rebuke, and to exhort.
The five imperative verbs are in a string and are the figure of speech asyndeton, “no ands.” In asyndeton, there is no “and” between the final items in the list, and so the reader quickly moves to the conclusion: “with all longsuffering and teaching!” In this case the figure asyndeton fulfills two important functions. It lets us know that although there are five things in the list, more could be added. The list is not meant to be exhaustive, it is meant to give us pertinent examples. It also places an emphasis on the conclusion, and thus shows us that in trying to stand firm in the faith and in trying to reach others, we must be longsuffering toward others and try to reach them by teaching the truth. [For a more complete explanation of asyndeton, see commentary on Galatians 5:22].

“when it is convenient and when it is not convenient.” The Greek text has the figure of speech asyndeton, dropping the “and,” and making the phrase very punchy and attention grabbing. The Greek reads, eukairōs akairōs (εὐκαίρως ἀκαίρως). The Greek word kairos (#2540 καιρός) refers to a point of time, which can be past, present, or future; thus “time,” or “moment” (cp. Matt. 11:25), or it can refer to a fixed period of time marked by suitableness; thus favorable time, right time, opportune time, opportunity, or season (cp. 2 Cor. 6:2). It can also refer to a specific and decisive point, often a divinely allotted time or season (Mark 1:15). It is also used of a future period of time marked by some set of characteristic circumstances, as in the last times, the end times, the Messianic times (cp. Matt. 16:3; 1 Tim. 4:1) (Friberg’s Lexicon). In this verse, the essence is “when it is convenient and when it is inconvenient” (BDAG lexicon). The punchiness of the Greek, if brought into English might be: “Proclaim the word: convenient, inconvenient” or “opportunity, no opportunity,” or “right time, not the right time.”

4:3. “teaching.” The Greek word is didaskalia (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse we felt bringing didaskalia into English as “teaching” was better than “doctrine,” because “sound teaching” is more inclusive than just “doctrine,” and also because “sound teaching” is predicated upon sound doctrine. [For more on didaskalia see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13].

4:8. “longed for.” The Greek is agapaō (#25 ἁγαπάω), and literally grammatically is “have loved.” However, in this case it carries the sense of “have longed for.” It is a current state of longing, preceded by longing in the past.
Titus

Chapter 1

1:1. “that leads to godliness.” The Greek reads, (κατ᾽ εὐσεβείαν; the lemmas are κατα eusebeia; κατά εὐσεβεία) and it can either mean “in accord with godliness” (a descriptive phrase meaning the truth is godly), or the κατα can refer to the result, and thus the phrase could be saying that godliness is a result of truth, or more clearly, that the truth produces godliness or leads to godliness (for a good discussion of this, see The Word Biblical Commentary).

This is an example where we lose something when we translate from the Greek to the English. There is a double meaning in this verse, an amphibologia, because it is clear that truth is indeed godly, and that certainly is part of what Paul is communicating. However, the greater truth in this verse seems to be that the truth produces godliness in us. That truth and godly behavior are connected and the rejection of truth and evil are connected is a theme in the Epistles of Paul (1 Cor. 5:8; 13:6; Eph. 5:3, 4; 5:8-10; 2 Thess. 2:13; versus. Rom. 1:18, 2:8; Gal. 5:7; 2 Thess. 2:10, 12; 1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 2:18; 3:8).

Although many versions simply have the phrase, “the truth that is according to godliness,” that is not at all clear in English. The ordinary meaning of the English refers to the godly nature of truth, and in that case it seems it would be better to do what The Source New Testament does and simply use the phrase, “godly truth.”

1:2. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].

“long ages ago.” This phrase has been the subject of much discussion. The primary question is does the Greek refer to time before mankind, i.e., in the eternal purpose of God (Hendriksen/Kistemaker; Mounce; the HCSB “before time began”), or is it a way of referring to ages long ago but during the time of humanity; from Adam forward (Robertson; Lange; The RSV “ages ago”).

To us it makes more sense that this is referring to the time since Adam. The verse says that we are “in hope” of everlasting life in the Age to come. Why would we be? Because God, who never lies, promised it. But to say God promised it within himself, in His own purpose, seems to skirt the meaning of “promise.” It seems clear that the reason we can believe the promise for us is that God actually made the promise to people before us. The promise of the Messiah who would get rid of evil was first made to Adam, then further enlarged and clarified throughout the Old Testament. The alternate understanding would be that this does refer to a promise that God made within Himself, and if that is the case, in essence the phrase means, “before the Ages.”

1:3. “by the command of.” The Greek is a technical phrase that means “by the command of; by order of.” See commentary on 1 Timothy 1:1.

1:4. “with respect to our common faith.” Kata is here translated “with respect to,” see BDAG def. #6: “denoting relationship to something, with respect to, in relation to.” Titus is Paul’s true child in relation to the faith, which is their common faith. We have added
“our” in italics to best capture the meaning of the Greek phrase. Paul is not speaking of “a” common faith, or saying the Christian faith is “common,” rather he is saying it is common between him and Titus, it is “our” common faith. Cp. NIV; NRSV; HCSB; NAB; NJB.

1:6. “blameless.” The Greek word is anegklētos (ἀνέγκλητος), and it means without having a legal charge against you. It is very important that a minister live according to the laws of the land. A minister is not to risk getting caught breaking the law and thus bringing a charge against himself and also besmirching Christianity. This word occurs here and in Titus 1:7 and 1 Timothy 3:10.

“recklessness.” This word is translated in many different ways. It appears as “riot” (KJV), “wildness” (HCSB), “disorderly conduct” (NJB), “dissipation” (NASB), “debauchery” (ESV), etc. The Greek is asotia (ἀσωτία), referring to the sort of “behavior which shows lack of concern or thought for the consequences of an action—‘senseless deeds, reckless deeds, recklessness’” (Louw-Nida). The translation “recklessness” best denotes such an attitude of action without concern about the consequences.

1:7. See 1 Timothy 3:3.

“not self-pleasing.” The Greek is me authades (μὴ αὐθάδης), from autos, “self” and hedomai, “to satisfy or please.” It is translated “self-pleasing” in Young’s Literal Translation and “arrogant” in many other versions. It is to be not self-pleasing, assuming, or arrogant. The minister is not pleased with his own way, but is coachable and willing to defer to the judgment of others. He is not determined to get his own way.

“not quick tempered.” The Greek is me orgilos, “not prone to quick anger.” There are many pressures in Christian leadership and the leader must be one who does not have quick, violent outbursts.

“not eager for dishonorable gain.” The Greek is me aischrokerdes (μὴ αἰσχροκερδής) and means, “not eager for dishonorable gain.” This refers to all kinds of gain, not just money. Of course it does include money, and historically there have been many ministers who have laid guilt trips on people, or bullied them, or threatened them, to get money. However, the phrase also refers to other kinds of gain that can be acquired in a dishonorable manner, such as gaining popularity by adulterating the Gospel to attract more people to the congregation. Greed for money, power, recognition, etc., can cloud the mind and ruin the ministries of Christian leaders.


“liking what is good” is philagathos = liking that which is good (Louw Nida; Greek Lexicon). This word occurs only here. The Christian leader likes good, and good things, and his entire life reflects that fact. This is not just “liking good people,” or being a friend.” It is liking good, i.e., good versus evil. Because he likes what is good, there are no evil or immoral activities in his personal life or “recreational life.” The minister of God does not like or participate in sinful activities. They are just not something he likes.

“righteous.” The Greek is dikaios (δικαίος), which means righteous, upright, honest, just, law abiding. The leader must be honest, just and law abiding in his life. He is often called on to judge things in other people’s lives, and living an upright life gives him the clear vision to make judgments as Christ would make them. (See commentary on Rom. 3:22).
“pure.” The Greek is hosios (#3741 ὅσιος), holy, pure, devout. Used of someone who observes his duty to God and fulfills his obligations to God. Christian leadership is a serious thing, and the person who wishes to be a leader gets more than a title or respect. He must be willing to get the work of the Lord done. He will not be able to do that without the active involvement of the Lord in his life, and unholliness and ungodliness limits how the Lord will work with a minister. Salvation is by unconditional grace, but the grace a minister needs to truly be successful is conditional. “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet. 5:5).

“self-controlled.” The Greek is egkrates (#1468 ἐγκρατής) from the root word kratos, “power.” It is used of the person who has power over himself. In the Greek literature it was often used of the person who was self-controlled regarding sex, although it includes self-control in general. The minister is one who controls his life and environment. He is a self-starter and disciplined in his personal life. This is the noun form of the adjective, which is the fruit of the spirit “self-control” (Gal. 5:23).

1:9. “faithful word.” The Devil uses all the resources at his command to get people to abandon the message of the gospel. He uses false doctrines to replace the truth, he tries to get people to water down the truth, and he gets people to be so focused on the practical side of life that they forget the doctrinal side or think it is not relevant or important. The minister of God recognizes the importance of doctrine and the message God has communicated in the Scripture, and holds it firmly. It is the responsibility of a leader to know and contend for the faith. This is not always popular, but it is a sacred trust that leaders have been given.

“doctrine.” The Greek word is didaskalia (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse we felt “doctrine” was better than “teaching,” because we encourage and refute by the substance of what is taught, “doctrine,” not by the way of teaching. Furthermore, it refers back to the Word, mentioned earlier in the verse. [For more on didaskalia see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13].

“that.” The Greek reads “the,” in reference to “the” Word that Titus had been taught, but we would say “that” in English to make it clear.

“refute those who oppose it.” The minister is not only charged with keeping the deep truths of the faith, he or she is charged with “refuting” those who oppose it. The word “refute” is elegho, and it has a broad meaning that includes, “refute, reprove, admonish, call to account, expose, correct, demand an explanation.” We chose “refute” for the REV (cp. NIV, NASB, NRSV) because although a minister may not be able to “convince” or “convict” someone with the truth, he can always “refute” the error, which may help someone else listening to believe. “Refuting” someone is not very popular or comfortable in our society, which has rejected the notions of truth and error in favor of “sincerity,” and relationship with others, yet refuting error is very clearly a responsibility of those who say they represent God as His overseers. Many people resist the idea of ministers performing this part of their God-given duty. The minister must graciously bear up under such pressure and press on with the work given him by the Lord to strive to preserve and promote sound doctrine in the Church.

1:11. “by teaching.” The participle can be causative, and this is an example of that. Here, the present active participle, didaskō (#1321 διδάσκω), means, “by teaching.”
Households of believers were being overthrown, led into false beliefs and practices, by false teaching.

Chapter 2

2:1. “doctrine.” The Greek word is didaskalia (διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse we felt “doctrine” was better than “teaching.” For more on didaskalia see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13.


2:5. “working at home.” The Greek word is oikouros (οἰκουρός; pronounced oik-koor-os). Oikouros occurs only here in the NT, and it is made from oikos (house) and ergon (work), so in its roots it refers to one who works at, or for, the home. It refers to someone who works at home and cares for the home and family that lives in it. One who takes care of domestic affairs. It is similar in sense to 1 Timothy 5:14, which says that women are to “rule the household.” The idea is that it takes a lot of work to run a godly household, and God charges the women with that responsibility. It is important to note that the impact of the verse is not “being” at home, but “working.” Work is challenging, and it takes dedication and focus to run a godly home. The challenge, in biblical times and now, is to do the work it takes to make the home a blessing, joy, and success, and not just a place to sleep at night.

While many women work outside the home today and family issues and responsibilities are discussed and divided between the husband and the wife, nevertheless, God created us male and female and there are still overarching responsibilities that follow accordingly. Men are still charged with protecting the home and family, and the woman still is charged with the internal running of the home. However, the culture and state of life in biblical times almost always demanded that a woman stay home. There was no effective birth control, so families were usually large and most women found that much of their lives they were either pregnant or had little children. A good example is Mary, the mother of Jesus. Jesus had 4 brothers and at least 2 sisters (Matt. 13:55, 56). That means Mary had at least 7 children (if "sisters" was more than two, then Mary had more than 7).

So if Mary married Joseph when she was 13 (a usual age for girls to be married) and if she gave birth an average of every 18 months (not unusual) then she was pregnant for about 10 years and then nursing her youngest for a couple years after that, for a total of 12 years, making her 25 when she stopped nursing babies. Then, if her youngest was a girl and married at age 13, we add another 13 years for her to "launch" her last child out of the home, making Mary 38 when her youngest was married and Mary was free of the responsibility of children. By now, in the biblical parlance Mary is not a "young woman" any more. Between death in childbirth, childhood diseases, and no way to fight disease or infection, the average lifespan for a girl in Christ’s time was in the low thirties (some sources say 32). In comparison, a girl’s life expectancy today in the USA is in the 80's.
Beyond that, however, families were very close knit and as a grandmother, Mary would now have plenty of grandchildren to help with.

Besides mothering responsibilities, work at home was difficult. Just cooking was a herculean job. Water usually had to be drawn from a well or obtained from a local cistern and carried to the house. Firewood had to be gathered and chopped and the fire watched, if the family even had a stove, which would have been a mud-brick oven. Often in the country the family would just have a fire to cook over. Cooking itself was a chore, and food storage was difficult. All food had to be carefully guarded from insects and vermin (and sometimes thieves). Cooking was just the tip of the iceberg. The family clothing was made by hand. That meant spinning the wool or linen into yarn and then weaving that into cloth. It was a huge job to clothe a family and clothing was very valuable, which is why, bloody as they were, the soldiers wanted Jesus’ clothing and divided it up right at the foot of the cross. Of course, there is much more to running a successful home in the biblical world than just food and clothing, but these are some of the considerations.

If we consider all the things it took to run a successful and profitable household, the women had to be at home working, and the men had to be working outside the home at jobs such as tilling the soil, fishing, or were at work at some craft like building and carpentry (like Joseph and Jesus). A successful family was a large family with lots of teamwork, and so God charges the women to be working at their homes.

“defamed.” The Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

2:7. “in all things.” The phrase “in all things” most likely goes in verse six prescribing the young men, “to be sensible in all things,” rather than in verse seven with Titus “setting an example in all things.” This is the punctuation chosen by the Nestle-Aland Greek text, HCSB, and NJB, although, grammatically the phrase could go with either. The ambiguity of the Greek shows that both are true, nevertheless, there are reasons for preferring the translation in the REV. As Hendriksen and Kistemaker point out, “the fact that this admonition is very brief makes it all the more probable that the phrase “in every respect” belongs here and must not be construed with verse 7.”

“teaching.” The Greek word is didaskalia (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse we felt bringing didaskalia into English as “teaching” was better than “doctrine.”

2:9. “masters.” The Greek is despotēs (#1203 δεσποτής), and means master or lord, and it refers to someone who has legal control and authority over others, such as subjects or slaves (cp. 1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:9). See commentary on Luke 2:29.

2:10. “the doctrine.” The Greek word is didaskalia (#1319 διδασκαλία), a noun, and it has two primary meanings: It is used of the act of teaching or instruction (as if it was a verb), and it is also used for what is taught, i.e., the doctrine or material that was presented. In this verse we felt “doctrine” was better than “teaching.” For more on didaskalia see commentary on 1 Tim. 4:13).
2:13. “waiting for the blessed hope…” We translated the verse in a similar fashion to many other versions; “waiting for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior—Jesus Christ.” See One God & One Lord.

2:14. “in our stead.” From the Greek preposition huper (#5228 ὑπέρ). An alternate translation could read, “who gave himself in our place.” See Romans 5:6-8 commentary on “in place of the ungodly… for… in our place.”

Chapter 3

3:2. “defame.” The Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

“reasonable.” See commentary on 1 Timothy 3:3.

3:5. “righteous works.” The Greek is emphatic, but becomes unclear when translated literally into English. The Greek phrase, ergōn tōn en dikaiosunē (ἐργῶν τῶν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ), literally translates as: “works, the [ones] in righteousness.” By making “righteousness” into a noun, it adds emphasis to it in the Greek sentence. It is emphatic, and could be more literally understood as, “not by works, the ones done in connection with [that are connected to] righteousness,” perhaps better expanded for easier reading to: “not by works: those works that are done that are associated with righteousness.” In other words, no one is saved by works; those righteous acts that people do. Those will not save anyone. Given the fact that the emphatic nature of the sentence is usually lost in English, and trying to produce the Greek structure only causes confusion, (what is a “work done in righteousness”?), it seemed much clearer to make “righteousness” adjectival and just go with “righteous works” (cp. NAB or NIV). It is amazing that the Word of God can so clearly in many places tell us that no one is saved by good works, and yet somehow when people do not do righteous works they feel their salvation is in jeopardy.

“on the basis of his mercy.” We could not be saved on the basis of our works, but we can be on the basis of His mercy. The RSV has “in virtue of his mercy,” which is somewhat archaic vocabulary today, but catches the sense of the passage, and so does The Source New Testament, which has, “due to His mercy.”

“new origin.” The Greek word is paliggenesia (#3824 παλιγγένεσις), this is a compound noun made up of the words palin (#3825 πάλιν), meaning “again,” and genesis (#1078 γένεσις) meaning “origin,” or “beginning.” The Greeks sometimes used the word genesis when referring to birth, because birth is the beginning or origin of our independent life on earth. However, genesis does not technically mean “birth,” and so we must be careful not to confuse genesis (#1078 γένεσις) with gennēsis (#1083 γέννησις), which properly means “birth” (the word gennēsis (#1083 γέννησις) does not appear anywhere in the best manuscripts of the New Testament (see commentary on Matt. 1:18)).

In this context, paliggenesia refers to the new origin that Christians have when they are born again and receive holy spirit. It is one of the three words used for the individual new birth of a Christian that guarantees him everlasting life. The other two are anagennao (#313 ἀναγεννάω), which means “born again,” see 1 Peter 1:23, and apokueo (#616; ἀποκυέω; from the Greek prefix apo, “away from,” and kueo, “to be pregnant”). It
means “to give birth to;” see James 1:18. These three words all refer to the New Birth that happens to the Christian when he makes Christ the Lord in his life (cp. Rom. 10:9).

When a person gets “born again” (anagennaō; #313 ἀναγεννάω; see 1 Peter 1:23), he is not the same person. He is truly “born again,” a brand new “baby,” if you will, because now he is God’s child. He has a “new origin” (Titus 3:5), and is a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). He has a new divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), and it is at war with his old flesh nature (Gal. 5:17). In spite of his sin, he is “holy,” a “saint” (see 1 Cor. 1:2), because he has “holy spirit” sealed inside him (Eph. 1:13), which guarantees his place in future Kingdom of the Messiah on earth.

Paliggenesia is also used of the new origin, or new creation, of the world in the Messianic Age (cp. commentary on Matthew 19:28).

“by.” There is no word “by” in the Greek text. The words “holy spirit” are in the genitive case: “renewal of holy spirit.” This is most likely a genitive of production (Cp. Wallace, Exegetical Syntax, p. 104-106). That being the case, an expanded translation would be, “He saved us through the washing of a new origin and a renewal produced by holy spirit.” In the salvation process, the “new beginning” and the “renewal” are both produced by holy spirit.

“holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”]

3:7. “declared righteous.” The Greek is dikaiō (δικαιώ), and it means to “declare someone to be righteous.” It is not that we are “made righteous,” as if simply having faith in Christ made us good people. Rather, because of the work of Christ and our trust in him, we have been “declared righteous” in the sight of God: our sins have been paid for. See commentary on Romans 3:22.

“we became heirs who have the sure hope of life in the Age to come.” The Greek construction with the preposition kata shows that “the hope of life in the Age to come” is what we have because we are heirs. Although many English versions have something like, “heirs according to the hope . . . ,” that translation is not clear. The Greek preposition kata can point to what we have as an heir of, and in that sense this construction is similar to that in Galatians 3:29 (see commentary on Galatians 3:29). Quite a few modern versions get the sense of this verse correct, although they word it somewhat differently (CJB: “heirs, with the certain hope of eternal life.” HCSB: “heirs with the hope of eternal life.” NET: “heirs with the confident expectation of eternal life.” NIV: “heirs having the hope of eternal life.” The Source New Testament: “heirs with the expectation of eternal life.”

“sure hope.” This is the use of “hope” as something in the future that will absolutely happen. It is a “confident expectation.” God made promises about our salvation and everlasting life in Paradise, and He will bring those promises to pass.

“life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”]

3:8. “This statement is trustworthy.” See commentary on 1 Timothy 1:15.

“in excelling.” Literally, “to take the lead in” (Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament), “excel” is the meaning here (Lenski). Christians are not to be slackers when it comes to good works. We are to excel in them. I do not feel “devote” is the best translation, because it seems too exclusive. The NASB’s “engage in” seems too weak.
3:9. “questionings.” There is a biblical custom behind this Greek word, zetesis (#2214 ζήτησις). Greek philosophy was prominent during biblical times, as can be seen by Paul’s reasoning in the Areopagus (Acts 17). One aspect of Greek philosophy was the discovery of truth by asking questions, however this was perverted into a skeptical sort of questioning that did not care to learn truth, but only be disputing. What Paul is warning against here is a nonproductive dispute caused by a dishonest questioner.

“genealogies.” The Jews had a great interest in genealogies, and they were important when it was essential to determine who were the priests, who were the Levites, who was of the line of David, etc. In that light, in the Old Testament and Gospels a person’s genealogy could establish rights and primacy in Israel’s society. However, there is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ, and any Jewish believers needed to leave arguments about genealogy behind and fulfill their calling as an individual member of the Body of Christ.

3:12. “be diligent.” Paul was telling Titus to come to meet him. “do your best” as in some versions, misses the point here, because that phrase would make it seem okay if Titus did not come but “did his best” to come. “make haste” may even be better than “be diligent” in this context.

3:14. “learn.” When maithano (#3129 μαθάνω) is used with the infinitive, it means learn or “learn how” not “learn that” (Lenski).

“excel.” (see Titus 3:8)

3:15. “are our friends.” The Greek word we translate as “are…friends,” is phileō (#5368 φιλέω). It is hard to translate the Greek verb phileō in this context and keep the English as a verb. If we say, “love,” as most versions do, we lose the meaning of phileō here, and confuse it with agapē love. Phileō love has a deep attachment, like the attachment of true friends, while agapē love does not necessary have any feeling of attachment at all, which is why we can “love” (agapē) our enemies. We could translate the word, “friendly to us” or “fond of us,” but these seem too weak. Also, the Greek verb phileō is in the present tense. Given that, it seemed that using the phrase, “are…friends” was the best way to bring the meaning of the Greek into the English. For a more complete understanding of phileō, see the note on John 21:15.
Philemon

6. “and I pray.” A new subject has started, which is much clearer in Greek than English, so the italics helps the reader realize that a new subject has started, (cp. v. 4 where the subject starts.)

“fellowship of your faith.” Much has been written on this. It refers either to the “fellowship that is associated with your faith” or the “sharing” or “communicating” of your faith. Given the fact that Paul is exhorting Philemon to take Onesimus back into his good graces (his “fellowship”), “fellowship” seems to be the preferred meaning here. The epistle is not about outreach, and placing an unattached sentence about that here seems out of place, when nothing relates to it before or after.

“be energized.” Not “become” anything. Paul is not saying that Philemon has not had something and now it must “become.” Just “be” in this situation. In fact, in light of Philemon’s love that is mentioned in 5, 7 etc., “continue to be” would be more accurate than “become.” “Energized” or active. “Effective” adds too much. Paul is writing that Philemon’s fellowship would be energized and that as a result he would take Onesimus back (Lenski has “energetic” or “active”).

“by the acknowledging.” In this verse the Greek preposition en (in) seems to be the instrumental use of en, and Philemon’s fellowship would be energized by his acknowledging what we have in Christ (cp. KJV).

“us.” The Greek texts have a variant reading, some reading “you” and some reading “us.” The NA 27 goes with “us” since, given the surrounding pronouns, it is the more difficult one. Especially given the context, it would be easier for a copyist to change “us” to “you” than “you” to “us.” Paul is trying to establish a bond with Philemon, and using “us” does that well.

“pertaining to Christ.” The Greek word eis here is “to” or more understandably, “pertaining to.” Although some translators have taken this as “for Christ” (or “for Christ’s sake), this does not seem to be as strong in the context. As we fully realize what we have pertaining to Christ, we are more likely to have “fellowship” with any other person. The text does not read “in Christ” as some versions have.

The verse is saying that Paul is praying that Philemon’s fellowship (his personal fellowship with others), which is in relation to the faith, would be energized as he acknowledged all the good things in us that pertain to Christ.

15. “forever.” From the adjective aionios (#166 αἰώνιος), which most versions render “eternal.” For this word see commentary on John 3:16. Aionios can mean “age” as in the messianic age, or it can have a strictly temporal meaning of “eternal.” Here the word is used in it specifically temporal aspect. Paul contrasts Onesimus’ absence “for a little while” with having him “forever.”

18. “charge that to me.” (Lenski).

Hebrews

Chapter 1

1:1. “through the prophets.” The Greek here represents a Hebrew idiom (represented in Greek by the instrumental dative) and means, “through” the prophets (Buchanan, Anchor Bible).

1:2. “ages.” The Greek word is the plural of aiōn (#165 αἰὼν) and means “ages.” This verse is referring to the “ages,” not the “world.” Vine’s Lexicon has, “an age, a period of time, marked in the N.T. usage by spiritual or moral characteristics, is sometimes translated ‘world;’ the R.V. margin always has ‘age.’” Bullinger’s Critical Lexicon (under “world”) has: “Aion [age], from ao, aemi, to blow, to breathe. Aion denoted originally the life which hastes away in the breathing of our breath, life as transitory; then the course of life, time of life, life in its temporal form. Then, the space of a human life, an age, or generation in respect of duration. The time lived or to be lived by men, time as moving, historical time as well as eternity. Aion always includes a reference to the filling of time.”

Since most translators are Trinitarian and think that Jesus was the one who made the original heavens and earth, they translate “ages” as “world,” or even “universe” in this verse. There are other Greek words that mean “world,” such as kosmos and oikoumene, and when the Devil tempted Jesus by showing him all the kingdoms of the “world,” these words are used. In Hebrews 1:2 aiōn means “ages,” and should be translated that way.

Trinitarians use Hebrews 1:2 to try to prove that Jesus Christ created the world as we know it, but the context of the verse shows that cannot be the correct interpretation. Verses 1 and 2 show that God spoke through Jesus “in these last days,” whereas He had spoken “in the past” in various ways. If indeed it were through Jesus that the physical world was created, then one of the ways that God spoke in the past was through Jesus. But that would contradict the whole point of the verse, which is saying that God spoke in other ways in the past, but “in these last days” is speaking through the Son.

Since verses 1 and 2 say that it was “God” who spoke through prophets and through His Son, it is clear that God is the prime mover and thus different from the Son. These verses show that the Son is subordinate to God and, as a “mouthpiece” for God, is compared to the prophets.

The fact that God appointed the Son to be “heir” shows that God and the Son are not equal. For the Son to be the “heir” means that there was a time when he was not the owner. The word “heir” is a common one and, because death and inheritance are a part of every culture, it occurs in all the biblical languages. Any dictionary will show that an heir is one who inherits, succeeds or receives an estate, rank, title or office of another. By definition, you cannot be an heir if you are already the owner. No one in history ever wrote a will that said, “My heir and the inheritor of my estate is…ME!” If Christ is God, then he cannot be “heir.” The only way he can be an heir is by not being the original owner. That Christ is an “heir” is inconsistent with Trinitarian doctrine, which states that Christ is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. If Christ were God, then he was part owner all along, and thus is not the “heir” at all. These verses teach that God is the original owner, and will give all things to His heir, Jesus Christ. It is obvious from the
wording of these first two verses that the author of Hebrews does not consider Christ to be God.

Since aionas means “ages” and not “world,” it is fair to ask in what sense God has given form to the ages through Jesus. The Greek word from which “given form” is translated is poieō, a word with very many meanings. Alone, and in combination with other words, it is translated more than 100 different ways in the NIV. Some of the ways poieō is translated are: accomplish, acted, appointed, are, be, bear, began, been, bring, carry out, cause, committed, consider, do, earned, exercise, formed, gain, give, judge, kept, made, obey, performed, preparing, produce, provide, put into practice, reached, spend, stayed, treated, was, win, work, wrote, and yielded. Although most people read poieo in Hebrews 1:2 as referring to the original creation, it does not have to mean that at all. The context dictates that the “ages” being referred to are the ages after Christ’s resurrection. In verse 2, Christ became heir after his resurrection. In verse 3, he then sat at God’s right hand after his resurrection. Verses 5 and 6 also refer to the resurrection. The context makes it clear that God was not speaking through His Son in the past, but that He has spoken “in these last days” through His Son, and “given form to” the ages through him. For more information see, One God & One Lord.

1:3. “powerful word.” The Greek text reads, “word of his power,” which, by putting both “word” and “power” in the sentence as nouns emphasizes them both equally (nouns usually have more emphasis grammatically than adjectives). However, it makes the English translation more difficult to understand. The genitive noun “power” has the effect of an adjective, thus we, and many versions, have “powerful word.”

1:4. “having become as much better than the angels.” The entire opening section of Hebrews, usually used to show that Christ is God, actually shows just the opposite. After Christ sat down at the right hand of God, “he became as much better than the angels” as his name is better than theirs. “God” has always been superior to the angels. If Christ only became better than angels after his resurrection, then he cannot be the eternal God. Furthermore, it is sometimes taught that before his birth, Jesus was an angel or referred to as “the angel of the Lord.” Hebrews 1:4, 5, and 13 clearly refute this.

“better.” The Greek is kriittōn (#2909 κρείττων), and it means “better,” or in some contexts, “superior.” It is a major theme of Hebrews, occurring sixteen times in 13 chapters. The NIV text note on Hebrews says, “Hebrews could be called ‘the book of better things…’” NIV Study Bible (Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, MI, 1985), p. 2346.

The book of Hebrews was addressed to unsaved Jews and/or Jewish Christians who were intimately familiar with the Old Testament. Every chapter is packed with Old Testament references, and there is much discussion about the Law. Hebrews teaches that obeying the Law will not get people saved, but what will is faith in Jesus, the one who died for our sins and is now our living High Priest, elevated even higher than angels. The Jews fiercely held to the Law, which was given by Moses. To persuade them to let it go and move on to something else, God would have to offer something “better,” and that is a major theme in Hebrews.

Hebrews teaches that God has done something in Jesus that is “better” than what He had done in the Law. Jesus is specifically said to be better than angels (1:4); he brings a better hope (7:19); guarantees and mediates a better covenant that is founded on better promises (7:22, 8:6); is a better sacrifice than those offered under the Law (9:23);
reminds people of better possessions in the future, including a better future country (10:34, 11:16); offers a better resurrection (11:35), brings something better for us than the Old Testament believers had (11:40); and his blood speaks better than the blood of Abel’s sacrifice (12:24). Hebrews also shows (without specifically using the word “better”) that Jesus was a greater High Priest than Aaron (4:14-5:10) and ministers in a better sanctuary (9:11-14).


1:6. Quoted from Deuteronomy 32:43.

“again when he brings...into the inhabited world.” This is a referral to Jesus 2nd birth, his resurrection from the dead (Cp. NASB).


1:7. Quoted from Psalm 104:4. The quotation more closely follows the Septuagint than the Hebrew text.

“angels as winds.” The point of this verse is to elevate the Son. The angels of God are swift as the wind, strong as a fire, but they pay homage to the son (verse 6). The “feel” of the verse is that angels are beings whom we should hold in awe, but they are subject to the Son. In the Old Testament both wind and fire were ways that God revealed Himself, and as well as angels being quick and powerful, they reveal God.

This is the only time in the New Testament when the Greek word pneuma (ἐναίμα) is translated “wind.” Pneuma can mean “wind,” and often does so in the Greek writings, but it is not used that way in the New Testament except here. The reason for the translation “wind” is that this verse is a quotation from the Old Testament. The Old Testament uses the word ruach, which can mean “spirit,” “breath,” or “wind,” to refer to the wind on many different occasions (cp. Gen. 8:1; Exod. 10:19; 1 Kings 18:45), so it is not at all unusual that it would refer to the wind in Psalm 104. The translation “wind” seems clearly to be the correct one. Psalm 104:3 and 4 extoll God, and say,

“He lays the beams of his chambers on the waters; he makes the clouds his chariot; he rides on the wings of the wind [Heb. ruach]; he makes his messengers winds [Heb. ruach], his ministers a flaming fire.

Psalm 104:3 and 4 are one sentence in the Hebrew text, the Hebrew word ruach (“wind, spirit, breath”) occurs twice. The first use clearly refers to the wind. The second use fits well as “wind,” and it would be unlikely that the two uses of ruach would refer to different things in this sentence. Since the verse in the Hebrew text refers to wind, not “spirit,” then it would refer to that in the New Testament when it is quoted. Of course, the angels are not wind, nor are they fire, but in what they do they are “as winds” and “as fire.”

“flaming fire.” The Greek reads “flame of fire,” but this is the figure of speech antemereia, (see Bullinger).

1:8. “Your throne, O god.” Quoted from Psalm 45:6. To understand why we have “god” in lower case in this verse, there is some important background information that must be understood. For one thing the Greek word theos, often translated “God,” can also refer to a pagan “god” or “goddess” (Acts 19:37), the Devil or a demon (2 Cor. 4:4), or of people who represent God in some way (John 10:34), in which case it is translated “god.” Furthermore, this is true of the Hebrew and Aramaic words for “God” as well—those words can also refer to God’s representatives or rulers. Also, in the early manuscripts the
letters were all printed in upper case, in fact, Hebrew does not even have lower case letters. We will cover these points below in getting to our interpretation of the verse.

The English language makes a clear distinction between “God” and “god.” Thus, in English Bibles, the heavenly Father is called “God,” while angels, demons, lesser divinities, people who have God’s authority on earth, and important people such as kings, are called “god,” using a lower case “g” (cp. 2 Cor. 4:4; John 10:34 and 35; Acts 12:22). However, the Hebrew and Aramaic languages cannot make the distinction between “God” and “god” because they only have capital letters, no lower case letters. Thus, in Hebrew and Aramaic, every word is spelled in all capital letters, and of course that includes “GOD.” Furthermore, although the Greek language has both upper case and lower case letters as English does, the early Greek manuscripts all had only capital letters. It was the style of writing at the time of the New Testament that manuscripts were in all capital letters, so the Greek manuscripts were all upper case script. Scholars call these Greek manuscripts “uncials,” and that style was popular until the early ninth century or so when a smaller script was developed for books. (See Bruce Metzger, The Text of the New Testament, Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration (Oxford University Press, NY, 1992), pp. 8-10).

To make matters even more difficult for translators, in the early biblical manuscripts there were no spaces between the words, no punctuation marks, no chapter divisions and no verses. The ancient texts of both the Old and New Testament were just capital letters all run together. So Genesis 1:1 and 2 looked like this in the early manuscripts:

INTHEBEGINNINGGODCREATEDTHEHEAVENSAND THEEARTH NOWTHEEARTHWASFORMLESSANDEMPTYDARKNESS WASOVERTHEEARTH WASOVER THEWATERS INGOVERTHEWATERS

The entire Bible was hand-printed that same way, with every letter in upper case and no spaces or punctuation between any words. That made reading very difficult, and so it was the common custom for people to read out loud, even when reading to oneself, to make it easier to follow the words. That is why Philip the Evangelist could “hear” the Ethiopian eunuch reading the scroll of Isaiah (Acts 8:30). It was hard to read and teach from a text like that, so people began to make divisions in the text. However, because scribes lived far apart and hand-copied manuscripts, the divisions in the various manuscripts were not uniform. The first standardized divisions between verses came into being around 900 AD, and the modern chapter divisions were made in the 1200’s.

As we can see from the background information given above, in the early manuscripts there was no way to distinguish between “God” and “god” from the words in the manuscript. That meant the meaning of Elohim, Theos, and the other words for God always had to be determined from the context: did it refer to the Supreme God or a lesser “god?” Although it was usual that the presence of the definite article in the Greek text alerted the reader that the “GOD” being referred to was the Father, this was not always the case (see the note on John 10:33). For example, in 2 Corinthians 4:4, the word “THEOS” has the definite article, but the verse is referring to the Devil. Context is always the final judge of whether THEOS should be translated “God” or “god.”

Another thing we have to know to understand Bible is that the biblical languages, including the Semitic languages of Hebrew and Aramaic, and Latin and Greek as well,
used the word “God” with a much broader meaning than we do today. “GOD” was a descriptive title applied to a range of authorities, including angels and demons, lesser gods, great people, rulers, and people acting with God’s authority. An example from the Old Testament is Exodus 7:1. God is speaking to Moses and says, “See, I have made you God to Pharaoh” (Darby). That very literal translation makes many people uncomfortable, so another translation is: “See, I have made you a god to Pharaoh” (BBE, KJV). Even that translation, which is also literal, makes some modern people uncomfortable, so a less literal translation is common: “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh.” That translation adds the word “like” (HCSB, ESV, NET, NIV, NRSV), but we must not lose sight of the fact that the Hebrew text says the true God made Moses “GOD” to Pharaoh. A New Testament is John 10:33, when the Jews challenged Jesus and said he was claiming to be “a god” (mistranslated in most versions as “God”; see the commentary on that verse), he answered them pointing out that in the Old Testament that people to whom the Word of God came were called “GODS.”

Any study of the several words for “GOD” in the Hebrew and Greek (including the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament), will show that they were applied to people as well as to God. This is strange to English-speaking people because we use “God” to refer only to the true God, but when we read the Bible, we have to use the context to determine who “GOD” refers to. The context is always the final judge as to whether the English should be translated “God” or “god.”

There are a few times when the context is disputed by translators and the translators disagree. One example of a disagreement occurs in Exodus 21:6, which tells a person to bring his servant “to ELOHIM” (GOD). Some translators believe that the owner of the servant is supposed to bring the servant before the local authorities, and so they translate ELOHIM as “judges” (cp. HCSB, KJV and NIV; and see Exod. 22:8 and 9 for more examples). Other translators felt that the master was required to bring the servant to God, so they translated ELOHIM as “God.”(cp. ESV, NRSV) Thus, in English the verse reads “God” or “judges,” depending on the translators interpretation of what the Hebrew text is saying. Actually, in those verses the accompanying verb is plural, not singular, so the traditional teaching of the Rabbis, that the meaning is “judges,” is almost certainly correct.

Hebrews 1:8 is one of the verses translators disagree about. Most Trinitarians already believe Jesus is “GOD,” so they think “God” is the proper translation, while biblical Unitarians think Jesus is the created Son of God, and so favor “god” as the correct translation. We feel that here in Hebrews 1:8 the context is clear, and backed up by the scope of Scripture. Throughout the entire context of Hebrews 1, Jesus is presented as lesser than God the Father. Given that, the use of “THEOS” here should be translated “god.” In the context, Christ is called “THEOS” (GOD), but he has a “THEOS” (GOD). Hebrews 1:9 says, “therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions.” Christ cannot be the supreme God, because the supreme God does not have a God, but Christ does. Furthermore, Christ’s God “set” him above others and “anointed” him. This makes it abundantly clear that the use of THEOS here in Hebrews is not referring to Christ being the supreme God, but rather a man with great authority under another God.

Another thing we must consider when trying to interpret Hebrews 1:8 is that it is a quotation from Psalm 45:6 and 7, which was God’s revelation first to the Jews and written down by them. Yet the Jews read those verses in Psalms for centuries and,
knowing the flexibility of the word “God,” never concluded that the Messiah would somehow be part of a Triune God.

Lastly, it is worth noting that the Greek text of Hebrews 1:8 can be translated as, “Thy throne is God.” However, because the verse is a reference from the Old Testament, and because we believe that God, the Father, is calling His Christ a “god” (i.e., one with divine authority), there is no need to translate the verse other than, “Thy throne, O god, is forever.”


1:13. Quoted from Psalm 110:1. It is sometimes taught that before his birth, Jesus was an angel or referred to as “the angel of the Lord.” Hebrews 1:4, 5, and 13 clearly refute this, see commentary on Hebrews 1:4.

1:14. “for the sake of.” The Greek is *dia* with the accusative, meaning for the sake of, on account of. A number of modern versions have translated this verse as, “sent to serve those who will inherit salvation” (NIV), but that is not quite accurate. It is not that angels serve Christians, as if we could tell angels what to do. Angels serve God for the sake of Christians, which the preposition makes clear.

**Chapter 2**

2:2. “legally binding.” The Greek is *hebais* (#949 βέβαιος), and it means reliable or firm; or it can refer to something that is unwavering or persistent over time, and thus abiding; or it can refer to something that is in force or valid over a period of time, which is its primary meaning here. A perfectly fine translation would be: “the Word...was in force,” as long as we knew what “in force” meant. The HCSB reads “was legally binding,” while the NIV reads “was binding,” and these certainly capture the idea that the Word of God, spoken through angels was in fact legally binding, which is why there was a righteous retribution for not obeying it.

2:4. “(God also bearing witness with them...).” This verse is a parenthesis, expanding on the fact that not only have others people confirmed what was spoken by the Lord (verse 3), but God himself has also borne witness by signs and wonders to what the Lord said.

“distributions of holy spirit.” This is an objective genitive (cp. Meyer; Lenski is not correct) as can be seen from the context and grammar. The distributions “of holy spirit” are the manifestations of the spirit, which are energized by the Lord and show up in the life of a believer and the Church. The phrase is followed by the same basic phrase as 1 Corinthians 12:11, which also is in the context of the manifestations of holy spirit. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]
2:5. “did he subject.” The Greek word is hupotassō (#5293 ὑποτάσσω), and it means to arrange under or to subordinate; to subject or be subject, or put in subjection; to obey or submit to one's control. It is a fairly common word, occurring more than thirty times in the New Testament. This verse confirms what Corinthians says; that the believers will administer the future world, including the angels (1 Cor. 6:1-3; see commentary on 6:2).

An important thing to notice in this verse is the verb is in the aorist tense, which here is referring to the past, which is why the English versions say, “subjected,” or “has...subjected,” or “did...subject,” etc. We would normally expect the future tense: “not to angels will God subject the world to come....” However, this is the idiom the prophetic perfect (specifically it is the proleptic aorist) where a future event is put in the past tense so we can be assured of its certainly (see commentary note on Eph. 2:6).


“Little” can also refer adjectivally to “a little lower,” as it does in most translations.

The context, as usual, determines the meaning. Trinitarians say that Jesus was made “a little lower than angels,” but of course imply that as “God in the flesh” was still very different from the rest of mankind. This argument is inconsistent, at best. If Jesus was “God in the flesh, fully God and fully human” then he was not “a little lower than the angels,” even if he acted like it by acting human. On the other hand, if the kenotic Trinitarians are correct, and Jesus “emptied” himself of his godhood while on earth, then Jesus was not made “a little lower than angels” at all, he was in fact made just like the rest of mankind. We believe that the context in the next 8 verses show that Jesus was “made like his brothers in every respect” (Heb. 2:17). He was “fully human” in the usual sense of the word. Jesus was fully human, and lower than the angels “for a little while,” which turned out to be the duration of his earthly life, about 30 years. The fact that Jesus was “for a little while made lower than the angels” speaks both to God’s purpose and destiny for Christ, and the facts of the case. God did not destine Christ to be lower than the angels for long, and because of his obedience even to suffering and death, he was not.

Some might argue that Jesus was made positionally “a little lower than angels,” but this would not be the case. Even on earth Jesus was the king of kings, certainly something the angels knew, even if many humans did not.

“in place of everyone.” From the Greek preposition huper (#5228 ὑπέρ). See Romans 5:6-8 commentary on “in place of the ungodly... for... in our place.”

2:10. “through suffering.” The “suffering” that Jesus went through included his death, and Jesus was “made perfect,” that is, brought to full maturity and the planned goal of God both spiritually and mentally, by his suffering and his death. It is often taught, and we understand, that because Jesus lived a sinless life and suffered death for mankind, God highly exalted him and set him at His own right hand. Much less understood is the maturity that Jesus experienced because of his suffering. The Old Testament predicted over and over that Jesus would suffer. The very first prophecy about him, Genesis 3:15, stated that his heel would be “bruised,” and as anyone who has ever had a bone bruise on their heel knows, it is very painful. Psalm 22 graphically portrays some of the suffering of the Messiah. In fact, Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, and other passages of the OT portray both the physical and the mental suffering of our Lord Jesus.
We are familiar with some of the physical suffering Jesus went through, specifically the beatings before his death. Sadly, however, even much of that has been obscured by tradition. The traditional teaching is that Jesus was arrested Thursday night before Good Friday, was crucified Friday morning, and was dead by late Friday afternoon. Jesus actual sufferings were much more horrible than that.

If we look at the chronology in the Bible and lay it out day by day, we can see that Jesus was arrested after the Last Supper, 2 days before his death. He was first taken before Annas (John 18:13), then to Caiaphas (John 18:24), and it both places he was beaten and assaulted. Then the next morning he was tried before the Sanhedrin in a kangaroo court (Luke 22:66ff). The Sanhedrin then took him to Pilate (Luke 23:1), who sent him to Herod (Luke 23:7). Herod sent him back to Pilate (Luke 23:11; by then it was noon; the “sixth hour;” John 19:14). Pilate tried to release him, but gave in to the crowd who wanted Jesus crucified. So Pilate handed Jesus over to his guard, who tortured him all night by doing things like placing a crown of thorns on his head and hitting it with a stick (this is now the second night in a row he had been up all night being beaten). The guards took Jesus and crucified him at 9AM the next morning (the “third hour;” Mark 15:25; he would have been awake for something like 50 hours at this point). After hanging on the cross for six hours, Jesus died. No one can deny that the physical sufferings of Jesus were horrific.

We should also keep in mind that Jesus suffered mentally as well as physically. He had sorrow, grief, and plenty of opportunities for “stress.” Isaiah 53:3 (ESV) calls him a “man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” Although the Bible does not give us any details, it seems clear that his father Joseph died before he started his ministry (see commentary on John 19:27). His mother and family misunderstood him, and at different points did not believe him (John 7:5), and even thought he had gone insane (Mark 3:21). Jesus was constantly grieved by the hardness of people’s hearts. He had disciples leave him (John 6:66), and intimate friends desert and betray him. No wonder the Bible says that he was “tempted in every way just as we are” (Heb. 4:15), and that he “learned obedience by the things that he suffered” (Heb. 5:8).

There are many sources of suffering. They are all rooted in the Devil, but by now there are many secondary sources of suffering. Suffering comes from the Devil, his demons, and people who are influenced by the demonic. It also comes from the fallen nature of the world, and from things such as our own ignorance, pride and stubbornness. It can also come from our standing against evil and suffering for it. As much as we would like to eliminate suffering, while we are on this earth it helps to recognize that when it comes to suffering, we can “turn a lemon into lemonade.” We can use our suffering to God’s advantage; it can have some benefits. In Jesus’ case, as Scripture says, it helped bring him to full maturity, and he learned obedience from it. Some of the potential benefits of suffering are:

- Suffering destroys our illusion of self-sufficiency, and makes us aware of our dependence on God. People tend to forget God when things are going well. There is a military saying, “There are no atheists in foxholes.” When the artillery shells are falling from the sky and people’s comrades in arms are being blown to pieces, everyone realizes that they cannot determine their own fate, and they look to God for help. Sadly, when the war is over, most of those people forget the promises they made and return to their illusion of being in
control of life. The suffering we experience, whether it is physical or mental, can help us be more aware of our need for, and dependence on, God. A great challenge is to retain that mindset and be God-centered when the suffering we were experiencing is over.

- Suffering allows us to better understand the suffering of others, and makes us more understanding and caring toward others in need. That has to be part of the meaning of Hebrews 2:10, which says Jesus was “made perfect,” through suffering. The Greek word translated “made perfect” has many applications, and can refer to becoming mature or complete, or attaining a desired goal. Although Jesus was truly made perfect (brought to God’s desired goal) by his suffering and death, inherent in the Greek phrase is also that he attained maturity by suffering. It is truly difficult to understand what others are going through if you have not been through something similar. Jesus’ suffering makes him better able to relate to us, and us to him, and our suffering makes us better able to relate to others who are suffering.

- Suffering can give us credibility with others. Many people who are suffering or have needs are suspicious of, or doubting of, people who have never experienced what they are going through. People who minister to others know that often the best person to reach an alcoholic is a former alcoholic, the best person to reach a drug addict is a former drug addict, etc. We are naturally suspicious of the advice we get from someone who has never experienced what we are going through. God shows us that Jesus Christ is better able to be our High Priest because he suffered like we do: “For we do not have a high priest who is not able to empathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

- Suffering can get us to readjust our priorities, both physically and mentally. God commands us to seek Him first, and set our minds on things above. As horrible as it is, suffering helps us be successful at that. Many people who live ungodly lives, or even just lives that do not include God, readjust their priorities when faced with suffering. Often prayer, the hope of a better life, and friends in the Church, are the only relief suffering people have.

- Suffering makes the Hope of Christ’s return and a wonderful life on a wonderful earth burn brightly in our soul. Nothing makes the wonderful future earth more appealing than suffering on this earth. People who are happy and healthy in this life, even though they know the next one will be better, never have the burning Hope for the next life that those people who are suffering do. It is when we are in pain that we think like the psalmist: “My soul is in deep anguish. How long, LORD, how long?” (Ps. 6:3).

2:11. “one.” The Greek text reads, “all from one, which is why...” The question is, what is the “one” referring to? Commentators are divided. Some say “one Father,” which is true in one sense but countered by Lenski who asserts that then the angels would be included also, since they too are from the Father. Lenski asserts that the “one” is Adam, from whom the whole human race came, however, Jesus is both from Adam and directly from God, so “Adam” has problems also. Nyland says “family,” which might be good, but again, could imply too much. The Greek text is ambiguous. God is inviting us into the conversation to think, pray, and meditate about the “one” from whom we come. In that
sense, the word “source” (which is in some versions) seems to be very good because it somewhat competes the thought without filling in the blank and thus giving us a firm answer. This seems to be one of the places where we would like for God to have been more plain, and He certainly could have, so therefore it seems best to follow His lead and leave our translation somewhat ambiguous.

2:13. Quoted from Isaiah 8:17, 18.

“trust.” We can and should trust God. Although it is common to hear religious people say, “Just have faith,” meaning, “Just trust,” the fact is that the human mind cannot “just trust.” In order for us to trust, we must believe the object of our trust is trustworthy. There are five basic elements to trust, and all can be expressed starting with a “c,” nicely making “The Five C’s of Trust.” Whether or not we trust someone or something is directly related to the presence of these five elements. If they are present, we will trust, and if they are not, we will instinctively not trust. The five are: Character; Competency; Commitment; Consistency; and Cohesion.

“Character” is the sum total of our moral and ethical qualities. A person of dubious character cannot be trusted, because they will without notice fail to keep their word or somehow turn against us. The Greco-Roman gods are a good example. They were selfish, capricious, and often just plain evil. They could not be trusted to being loving and helpful.

“Competency” speaks for itself when it comes to trust. If we know a person cannot do for us what we need done because they are simply not capable, then we cannot make ourselves trust them; our minds just will not trust. We can take a risk and hope; but we cannot “trust.”

“Commitment” is a person’s dedication to something, and especially to do what they say. We do not trust people who we know have no commitment to their work or words. They could change their mind and leave us in a very bad state.

“Consistency” is needed to make competency and commitment trustworthy. A person might be competent and also committed to something, but if we know the person may be inconsistent for some reason, we cannot trust him.

“Cohesion” is the part of trustworthiness that puts people on the same team, or working together. A person might have character and be competent, committed, and consistent, but if he or she works for a rival company, plays for a rival team, or is dedicated to a different or rival cause, then we cannot trust that person.

Once we understand how trust works, we can see that God meets all the requirements of trust, and if we enter into a relationship with Him, we will trust Him more and more over time. In fact, once we understand how trust works, we can see how people get deceived into trusting something they should not trust. A lying salesman might seem to be trustworthy, but in reality not have good character, or be consistent. Or he may only feign cohesion but really be after his commission, not a good result for us.

There is one caveat about trusting God. If we have wrong beliefs about God, then we will not trust Him. If for example, we think that God causes cancer, car wrecks, or hurricanes that kill untold innocent people, then he is acting like the Greek gods and we will not trust Him. We might try to love Him, but in our hearts we will not trust Him. Thus, a very important part of our trusting God is having right doctrine.
"Look!" The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ιδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 ("Look!").

**“and the children who are with me.”** This quotation is from Isaiah 8:18. These "children" are disciples; "children" is being used in the Semitic sense of being followers of God; this use of "children" falls into the category of being a part of the customs and culture of the Bible. The context of Isaiah 8 is the Syrian and Israelite threat to Judah, and whether the king and people would rely on human efforts or on God (the king relied on human efforts and hired the Assyrians to attack Syria and Israel. As a result Judah had temporary relief, but it was later devastated, but not completely destroyed, by Assyria). Yahweh warned Isaiah not to follow the way of the people (Isa. 8:11); He and told Isaiah to fear God (8:13). God told Isaiah He would be a sanctuary for him, but trap, snare, and stone that crushes, to the people of Israel (8:14). In response, Isaiah said “I will wait for Yahweh...I will put my trust in him. Here I am, and the children [the followers of God] who are with me” (8:17, 18). By these words, Isaiah shows his dedication to God and his refusal to go along with the ways of the people. This is a good life lesson for us. We are always tempted to do things the world’s way and follow the crowd, but we should always, like Isaiah and the disciples with him, do things God’s way, even though there is often a short term cost for obeying God.

In Hebrews 2:12 and 13, the words of Isaiah are combined with the words of David from Psalm 22 (which is a prophecy about the Messiah), and are recorded as being spoken by Jesus Christ. In the context of suffering, which is mentioned several times in the immediate context), Jesus testifies about God, praises God, trusts God, and stands together with others who are also following and trusting God. In the context of Hebrews 2:13, the "children" are the believers who follow Christ and who stand with him.

**2:14. “children.”** Here “children” means “disciples” or “followers.” The Greek word is *paidion* (#3813 παιδίον), and although the Greek means a young child, in the Semitic culture, the word "child" was often used for a disciple (cp. Matt. 12:27). Isaiah used the word as “follower, disciple,” and that is the way it is used here in Hebrews as well (see commentary on Heb. 2:13).

**“in a similar way.”** The Greek is *paraplēsiōs* (#3898 παραπλησίος), and it has engendered much discussion by scholars. The problem is that it does not mean “likewise” or “in the same way,” but rather it expresses a very close similarity. However, in many cases in the Greek the purpose of the word is to describe a similarly that is meant to show essential sameness. Thus Thayer says the word is “used of a similarity which amounts to equality.” Also, the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (EDNT) says, “Jesus took on flesh and blood in the same way as others...In spite of the ambiguity of the expression, the thought is not simply of a ‘similarity.’” The EDNT also references Spicq, who says, “without any difference.”

Nevertheless, the Greek word *paraplēsiōs* does not mean “likewise,” which means, “in the same way,” but rather, “in a similar way.” Meyer (*Meyer's Commentary on the NT*) gets the heart of the word when he says that it is “not ‘equality,’ or ‘likewise,’...but : ‘in a manner very closely resembling.’” Meyer then notes that *paraplēsiōs* expresses the resemblance of Jesus to other humans while still expressing that there is some diversity from them. About the difference between Jesus and everyone else, Meyer continues; “And rightly so...He was distinguished from his human brethren by his sinlessness.” Sinlessness was one way that Jesus was different from “the children"
(the subject of the verse), He also had God as his Father, instead of a human father. The point is that he was fully human, but still had differences from the rest of humanity.

The danger of translating *paraplēsiōs* as “in the same way, or “likewise,” is that we might think that Jesus took flesh and blood “in the “same way” that we have, when he was somewhat different than we are: for example in having God as his father and having sinless blood. The danger of translating *paraplēsiōs* as “in a similar way,” is that we might not think of Jesus as fully human, but only “similar” to us. It is not an easy choice to make, and so translations differ. Given the fact that if God had wanted to emphasize “the same way,” He would almost certainly have found a clearer way to say it, writing “in a similar” way and then explaining the similarity seems safer than writing “in the same way” and then saying, “well, sort of the same way—he had sinless blood.”

**make ineffective.** The Greek word is *katargeō* (καταργέω), which has a wide range of meaning and therefore must be translated according to the context. Some of the meanings of *katargeō* are: to cause someone or something to be ineffective or unproductive; to render idle, or inactive, or inoperative; to make ineffective; to deprive of force or influence; to put an end to, do away with (thus the translation in many versions, “destroy”); and to be separated from.

There are many versions that have the word “destroy,” and read, “destroy him who has the power of death” (cp. ESV; KJV; NIV 84). However, R. C. H. Lenski correctly notes in his commentary on Hebrews that “destroy” is an “inexact” translation, because the Devil still exists and murders. Thus, Jesus did not actually “destroy” the Devil through his death, rather, Jesus’ death made the Devil’s work ineffective. Even if our body is killed, the Devil’s work has been made ineffective because Jesus Christ conquered the power of the grave. F. F. Bruce stated it well and poetically when he wrote: “Jesus broke the Devil’s grip on his people when in death he became the death of death” (*New International Commentary on the New Testament: Hebrews*).

Of course we know that Jesus’ death set in motion the events that will lead to the destruction of the Devil, but even so, the destruction of the Devil is not the point of the verse. The point of the verse is that through the death of Christ the Devil has been made ineffective. He can rant and rage, and even kill, but his power has been broken because Jesus conquered death. There are many translators who have seen this truth and do not use the word “destroy” in their versions. Some ways *katargeō* has been translated include: “bring to naught” (Cassirer); “annul” (Darby); “dethrone” (Goodspeed); “put out of commission” (Lenski); “render powerless” (NASB); “break the power” (NIV); “abolish the effects” (Nyland) “paralyze” (Rotherham); “put a stop to” (Williams). Thank God that through the death of Jesus Christ, the Devil and all his power has been made ineffective. Every Christian will live forever.

**the Slanderer.**” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is *diabolos* (διάβολος). The Greek word *diabolos* means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

2:15. “by their fear of death.” The Devil holds the power of death—he can kill the body. That is fearsome power. Death is feared by almost everyone. However, Jesus died and “made ineffective” the Devil’s power of death. Yes, the Devil may kill, but the
righteous will get up. As Jesus himself said, “the gates of the grave” (sometimes misunderstood as “the gates of hell”) will not be able to retain those who have given their lives to Jesus and become saved. They will get up from the grave, and overcome death. If believer’s clearly understood that Jesus will get them up from the grave—that his promise of everlasting life is sure and steadfast—the anxiety and mental and sometimes physical slavery that comes from the fear of death would vanish.

2:16. “Indeed.” The Greek is γάρ (#1063 γάρ), and is usually translated “for” and understood to communicate a reason for something. However, that use of γάρ does not fit this verse. Rather, this is what some scholars refer to as the “confirmatory γάρ” and confirms and clarifies what has already been stated. (see commentary on Rom. 9:3).

“it hardly needs to be said.” The Greek is δήπου (#1222 δήπου pronounced “day’-poo”), and it “is used when something is affirmed in a slightly ironical manner” (Strong’s). Nyland translates it, “I hardly need to say,” and Lenski, “it hardly needs to be said.” There was a lot of emphasis on angels in the Jewish religion, so much so that Colossians 2:18 mentions the worship of angels. But angels are not under the Devil’s power of death, and not afraid of dying, so Jesus did not die to free them from that power of the Devil. Thus the verse is appropriate; that in spite of all the attention angels get in the Jewish religion, it hardly needs to be said that Jesus did not come to help (primarily in the context of death and fear of death) angels, but to help people, so “he was obligated to become like his brothers in every respect” and die for them.

2:17. “had to.” The Greek word is ὀφείλει (#3784 ὀφείλει), and it means to owe; to owe money, be in debt for. It is used of an obligation, or a moral obligation, and it is often used that way in the NT (cp. Eph. 5:28). However, BDAG, for its third definition of ὀφείλει, says, “to be constrained by circumstances; have to,” and that is its meaning here, which can be seen especially in combination with “be made,” which is in the passive voice. The circumstances dictated that Jesus had to “be made” (passive; made by God) like his brothers. The only way Jesus could have been a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God was that he “had” to be made like his brothers in every way.

“wipe away.” The Greek word is ἠλευκώμαι (#2433 ἠλευκώμαι). Strong’s lexicon, and other Greek-English lexicons such as Thayer’s, gives the definition as “to expiate, make propitiation for.” BDAG gives us a little more detail, saying, “to eliminate impediments that alienate the deity, expiate, wipe out,” and it points out that is the reading in the Moffatt Bible is: “to expiate the sins of the people,” (which is also the reading in the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament). Also however, BDAG points out that the NRSV translates this as, “make a sacrifice of atonement.” Hendriksen and Kistemaker (New Testament Commentary: Hebrews) point out that the purpose of Christ’s being the High Priest was to make atonement for the people, and write: “The term ‘atonement’ is a theological one with profound meaning: it is often explained by other, even more difficult, terms such as “propitiation” and “expiation.” Difficult indeed! What English speaker uses these words in everyday life, and is the biblical concept so difficult to explain that we need words that we have to look up to understand? And if we can understand them by looking them up, cannot we just use those simple definitions in place of the difficult words? What is the verse really saying?

The reason theologians default to difficult theological terms often has to do with the fact that in theological circles the terms become “loaded,” that is, they are given meanings that come from theology, not from lexical meaning. “Propitiate” means, to
appease; gain or regain goodwill; and a “propitiation” is something that propitiates, i.e., something that appeases or regains goodwill. “Expiate” simply means to extinguish the guilt incurred by something and also make amends for something (both definitions from Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary; eleventh edition). Also according to Merriam-Webster, at the time the early English Bibles, such as the KJV, were being translated, “atonement” meant “reconciliation,” and that is the meaning that has continued into modern theology.

The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible notes that “atonement” refers to a “harmonious relationship,” or that which brings about such a relationship, i.e., “reconciliation,” and it says “atonement” “is primarily used of the reconciliation between God and man effected by the work of Christ.” Thus the translation in some Bible, “a sacrifice of atonement,” is a “sacrifice that procures reconciliation,” and that is not a bad translation in this verse.

We can see why Friberg’s Lexicon gives the definition of hilaskomai as, “bring about reconciliation, make acceptable to, provide for forgiveness, with focus on the means of reconciliation.” Given the range of the meaning of hilaskomai, that it has to do both with bringing about reconciliation and also forgiveness, the Greek-English Lexicon by Louw and Nida leans toward forgiveness and gives the meaning of hilaskomai as “to forgive, with the focus upon the instrumentality or the means by which forgiveness is accomplished...‘so that the people's sins would be forgiven’ or ‘so that God would forgive the people's sins.’” The Source NT (A. Nyland) goes in that direction by translating the phrase: “so that he could take away the sins of the people.” The NLT (New Living Testament) also says, “take away,” and the CEB (Common English Bible) says, “wipe away.”

Since the word hilaskomai is a verb, and the object is “the sins of the people,” we can see the strength of the translation given by Louw and Nida: “so that the people’s sins would be forgiven.” It is easy to understand, quite lexically sound, and in forgiving the sins of the people, God is obviously reconciled back to the people (if He was not, He would not have forgiven their sin). However, in light of the fact that there are well accepted words for “forgive,” we felt that “wipe away” was a good translation. Actually, more support for “wipe away” comes from the Septuagint. F. F. Bruce writes: “The NT use of these words follows the precedent of the LXX [Septuagint], where...they are chiefly used as equivalent of the Pi’el conjunction of the Hebrew k-p-r and its derivatives. Whether the etymological force of this Pi’el conjugation is “cover completely” or “wipe out,” its cultic [religious] use denotes the restoration of a relationship between God and mankind which has been broken by man’s sin....” Thus there is good evidence for the translation, “wipe away” in this verse, and the wiping away of sins restores our relationship with God.

It is worth noting that hilaskomai is in the present tense, and Lenski notes: “the one act of Jesus is viewed in its continuous application to the sins of the people.” In other words, even though Jesus’ death was a one-time act, the forgiveness for sins which his death procured continues day after day.

Hendriksen and Kistemaker (New Testament Commentary: Hebrews) get the point of what the verse is trying to say: the word...[ hilaskomai]...means that Jesus as High Priest brought peace between God and man. God’s wrath was directed toward man because of his sin, and man, because of sin, was alienated from God. ...Jesus offered
himself so that the shedding of his blood covered our sins. Thus we might be acquitted, forgiven, and restored. Jesus brought God and man together in inexpressible harmony.”

In conclusion, we can see that what Jesus did as expressed in the Greek is hard to express easily in English, which accounts for the many different English translations, but he became the High Priest so that he could wipe away the sins of the people, and in so doing he appeased the wrath of God, removed the guilt of the people, and restored the harmony between God and man. What the Old Testament high priest, and sacrifices could only do in a token way, Jesus Christ actually and fully removed the sins of the people [For more on this, see commentary on Rom. 3:26].

Chapter 3

3:2. “appointed.” The Greek word is poieō (#4160 ποιέω), to make or to do, in this context, God “made” Christ the high priest, so “appoint” is clearer than simply “made.” Lenski has “made him (what he is),” which would be a way to go if you wanted to keep the word “made” and still retain the meaning in the passage.

“in all His house.” Moses was faithful in all of God’s house. In this context, the “his” refers to God.

3:3. “Moses.” Sometimes things that God has in His Word are not immediately apparent to us, even though they would have been immediately apparent to people living in the biblical culture at the time the Scripture was written. This is such a case. We may not know why God compared Moses to the Messiah here in Hebrews, but at the time Hebrews was written, it was not uncommon among the Jews to think of Jesus as a second Moses. This passage makes it clear that the Messiah was not a “second Moses,” but much greater than Moses.

3:7. Quoted from Psalm 95:7

“The Holy Spirit says.” “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

“If you hear his voice.” The verb “hear” is second person, plural, subjunctive. It may be that God will not speak to us and therefore we will not hear His voice. But if He does speak to us, then we should not harden our hearts as the Israelites did in the desert.

3:8. Quoted from Psalm 95:8.

3:9. Quoted from Psalm 95:9, 10. The NT breaks the verse differently than the OT.

3:10. Quoted from Psalm 95:10.

3:11. Quoted from Psalm 95:11.

3:15. Quoted from Psalm 95:7, 8.

3:16. “was it not all.” There is a question about whether or not the text should read “was it not all” as if all did rebel, or “not all” as if all did not. But the meaning clearly seems to be as we have it (Cp. Lenski). “But” is alla of emphasis.

Chapter 4
4:1 “lest any of you fails to reach it.” The Greek text has the word dokeō (#1380 δοκέω), which can mean to seem, to think, to suppose, etc. This causes more literal versions such as the KJV to say things such as: “any of you should seem to come short of it.” This is very confusing to the English reader. Do people fall short, or do they just “seem” to fall short? The key to understanding the verse is to realize that the Greeks had a “rhetorical” use of dokeō, in which the word was used by way of courtesy to moderate a statement so it would not seem to be so harsh (cp. BDAG; EDNT; Thayer). The problem is that we do not use “seem” in that way, so if we translate it into our English version it imports a meaning that the Greek text does not have. The verse is saying that people should “fear” (be afraid and therefore careful) that they do not miss the rest God has provided, which is still open to them.

4:3. (for we who have believed enter into that rest). The quotation that follows this statement applies to the people in verse two who heard the Word but did not trust God. God swore people like that would never enter His rest—the Millennial Kingdom. The Holman Christian Standard Bible also has the parenthesis.

“enter.” In Greek the verb translated enter, eiserchomai (#1525 εἰσέρχομαι) is in the present tense. The proleptic sense of the verb is clear, for the context shows us that “there still remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.” In that sense, it would not be wrong to consider the verb as a future tense, and translate the phrase, “for we who have believed will enter into that rest.” God uses the present tense on purpose, however. The New Birth guarantees the believer a place on the New Earth when Jesus sets up his kingdom, and because of that guarantee there is a certain sense of rest that the believer can enjoy. Although the REV uses the present tense, as does the Greek text, we must understand both its present and future implication.

Quoted from Psalm 95:11.


4:5. Quoted from Psalm 95:11.

4:7. Quoted from Psalm 95:7, 8.

“after so long a time.” David wrote that the people of God should not “harden their hearts” as they did at Meribah and Massah.

4:12. “soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is juxtaposed with “spirit,” but it is exceedingly difficult to pin down an exact meaning for either “soul” or “spirit” in this verse. G. W. Buchanan correctly observes that “The point of the author’s affirmation was to show that the Word of God could make divisions and distinctions that are impossible for human beings” (The Anchor Bible: To the Hebrews).

The context lets us know that the meanings of “soul” and “spirit” are not just the simple meaning where “spirit” refers to the gift of holy spirit in the believer and “soul” refers to the life of the body. This section of Scripture is about people, specifically Israelites, who did not take advantage of God’s offer to enter into His rest and were defiant (Heb. 4:6), but nevertheless, God’s offer of a future rest still remains open (Heb. 4:1, 9). Of the many people who heard the message, some were openly defiant and did not enter into God’s rest (Heb. 4:6), some gave lip service to the offer but did not mix what they heard with genuine faith, and so did not enter in (Heb. 4:2), and others believed and will enter the rest God promised (Heb. 4:10). It is impossible for us to determine who
is in which category, but the Word of God, which can divide between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and the considerations and intentions of the heart, can and does make that division and determination.

The context of Hebrews 4:12 is the Israelites of the Old Testament, the vast majority of whom did not have the gift of holy spirit upon them, and how they responded to the offer God made to them of entering into His rest, and how that offer still stands today. From that we can see that the contrast between “soul” and “spirit” is not as simple as “soul” referring to “the soul life that animates the body” and “spirit” referring to “the gift of holy spirit,” although God can divide between those also. It seems clear that psuchē, soul, although used in a very broad manner including physical life, thought life, and emotional life, in this context it emphasizes the thought and emotional life. In contrast, pneuma, “spirit,” here does not primarily mean the gift of holy spirit in the Christian, although that meaning can be included in the overall interpretation, but rather refers to the seat of the spiritual life and people’s attitudes, as illustrated by the Israelites.

The use of “joints” and “marrow” in the verse adds to the evidence from the context that “soul” and “spirit” have a primary emphasis upon our mental and emotional life and also our attitudes. Although God could dissect our physical bodies distinctly enough to divide our joints from our marrow, that does not seem to be the main point of the verse. Meyer points out that the classical Greek literature used the word “marrow” to refer figuratively “to denote the innermost, most hidden depth of the rational life of man” (Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament). It makes sense in the context of this chapter, which is about mankind’s response to God’s offer, that “joints” and “marrow” primarily refer figuratively to workings in the mind. Thus this verse very thoroughly teaches us that all of the mental and emotional life of man is open before God.

Hebrews 4:12 is a verse that should cause each human to wake up and pay attention to his or her life. The God who created the Universe and is ultimately responsible for each of us being alive has made us an offer that we can “enter His rest” and live forever with Him. He holds us accountable for what we do, and, unlike people, He is never fooled by our words, however fine-sounding they are. His Word is both powerful and active, and divides every thought and action in our life, separating those that honor Him from those that are defiant and selfish. He becomes angry with people who ignore or defy Him (Heb. 4:3), and Judgment Day will be a sad day for those people who discover to their horror that while they could have had a wonderful everlasting life with God, they will be annihilated in the Lake of Fire. In contrast, Judgment Day will be a great day for those people who, after suffering through this life, finally get to enter God’s rest.

Another lesson we should learn from this verse is that it is the Word of God that is sharp enough to make judgments about life, not our human opinion. When making judgments and evaluations about this life, we should use “it is written” as our standard, just as our Lord did so often in his life. We must let the Word dwell in us richly, and Colossians 3:16 tells us. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of Soul.” For more on “spirit” see commentary on Matthew 5:3].

“considerations and intentions.” The mind “considers” then it forms a conclusion. 4:13. “to whom we must give account.” This is the usual rendering of the Greek of the last part of Hebrews 4:13, and the majority of scholars favor this reading, or one that is
similar. It is certainly true that a large number of other verses say that we must give an account of our lives to God.

We should not miss, however, that the Greek text of verse 13 ends with the phrase ho logos (ὁ λόγος), which is the same phrase that is translated “the word” in the opening of verse 12: “the word of God is living and active….” It is true that logos has many meanings, among them “word” and “account,” and so there is no grammatical problem with logos in verse 12 meaning “word” and logos in verse 13 meaning “account,” which is one reason most scholars favor that translation. Also, in Hebrews 13:17 uses the word logos in the context of leaders giving an account.

We should take note of the fact, however, that there are some very knowledgeable scholars, among them R. C. H. Lenski and Ann Nyland, who feel that the word logos is used of the word of God in both verse 12 and verse 13. That changes the meaning of the verse significantly. Lenski would quite literally translate the phrase as: “to the eyes of him facing whom this Word is for us.” That literal translation is very stilted and difficult to understand. What is clear, however, is that the Word, which is alive and active, and sharper than any double-edged sword, is “for us,” thus in some way committed to us. Nyland (The Source New Testament) is more colloquial than Lenski, and goes with this translation: “in his [God’s] view the Word is our responsibility.” That translation could well be the meaning of the verse, or certainly a meaning contained in the verse. There are certainly other verses that say that each believer has the responsibility to both live by, and use, the Word of God in a godly manner.

If we understand the meaning of logos in verse 12 as “word” and the meaning of logos in verse 13 as “account,” then the use of logos in verses 12 and 13 (which can be taken as one sentence in the Greek text), is the figure of speech antanaclasis (“word clashing,” the use of two different meanings of the same word in a phrase or sentence; cp. Bullinger; Figures of Speech Used in the Bible).

4:15. “tempted.” The fact that Jesus was tempted in every way, just like we are, helped him grow and mature, and makes us able to understand and identify with him. See commentary on Hebrews 2:10.

4:16. “open and honest speech.” The Greek word is parrhesia (παρρησία). Although some translations, including the KJV, have “boldly” or “boldness,” in this context, which is a person coming before a powerful ruler, the English word “boldness” gives the wrong impression. Parrhesia was used of the Greeks in the marketplace who were called upon to speak about political issues with complete openness. It was to speak one’s mind, or say what one will, so perhaps “straightforwardness,” “candor,” “openness,” or “frankness” would be good translations (Spicq, Theological Lexicon of the New Testament). As it can be imagined, being totally open and honest about one’s ideas and feelings to a ruler was quite rare in the ancient world. It could get one in serious trouble (note what happened to John the Baptist when he confronted Herod). No one would speak with parrhesia (openness and honesty) about Jesus because they were afraid of the Jewish rulers (John 7:13). Because complete openness of speech required confidence and even boldness, it can be translated that way also, and is in other verses. However, to translate it “boldness” here misses the point. The verse is not saying to be “bold” before God, as if we could swagger into His throne room and make demands on Him based upon our “rights.” Rather it is saying that we can be completely honest with Him, and lay our hearts out before Him knowing that we will find mercy and grace to

**Chapter 5**

5:7. **“having been heard.”** This phrase can be confusing if we take it to only refer to Jesus’ prayer, “Take this cup from me,” because that prayer was not answered the way Jesus would have liked it to have been. Isaiah said that Jesus was a man of sorrow and familiar with grief (Isa. 53:3). Of course his greatest grief came in the last week of his life, and it is surely in light of his death that he became the author of salvation. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that all through his life he prayed fervently, often crying, as many people do when they pray. No one felt a greater connection to mankind, and a greater sorrow at their plight, than did Jesus. And as far as God answering Jesus’ prayers, one only has to read the Gospels to see Jesus pray and God answer over and over again. So we have a great lesson in this verse: Jesus prayed, and he was heard “because of his reverent submission.” The Bible says plainly that “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). If we want our prayers answered consistently, we must become reverently submissive to the will of God, like Jesus was.

“because of.” The Greek preposition *apo* (#575 ἀπό), which has a number of possible definitions, but the best fit in this context is to indicate a cause or means (BDAG). Why was Jesus heard? It was due to the way he had lived his life in total submission to God. When someone lives in a way that is totally honorable to God, God hears that person. That is why Scripture says God gives grace to the humble but sets His face against the proud (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). Some scholars assert that he was not heard “because of” his reverent submission, but “from” it. That would make the verse say that Jesus was praying in a state of reverent submission, and not like the submission with God’s hearing him. That would make the verse the equivalent of, “and he was heard from his posture of godly submission,” but that does not seem to be what the verse is saying. The fact that Jesus had, and always had, a posture of godly submission to the Father is not debated.

“reverent submission.” The Greek word is *eulabeia* (#2124 εὐλάβεια), and it is used only twice in the New Testament, both times in Hebrews (cp. 12:28). There has been much discussion among theologians as to what the word means. Generally in the NT the Greek word *phobos* (which occurs almost 50 times, and is the origin of the English word “phobia”) is translated “fear,” and thus to use the word “fear” here when it is unnecessary seems to be potentially confusing. Wuest (Word Pictures in the New Testament) gets the sense of *eulabeia* correct when he says, “The picture in the word [eulabeia] is that of a cautious taking hold of and a careful and respectful handling.” F. F. Bruce notes, “...the consistent meaning is reverence toward God,” and while he notes the translation “godly fear,” he also notes the translation of the NEB, “humble submission” (Bruce: New International Commentary: Hebrews, pp. 101, 102). “Godly fear” is a fine translation if one realizes the semantic range of “fear” and that in this context it refers to respect and
reverence, not “fear” in the modern sense, and it is precisely because of the modern sense, and possible confusion with phobos, that we have avoided that translation.

5:8. “(although he was a son...)” This sentence is the figure of speech *parembole*, a type of parenthesis, which is complete in itself (Cp. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*). The context flows perfectly without the parembole, but it adds to the context.

“suffered.” Jesus matured in part due to the things he suffered. See commentary on Hebrews 2:10.

5:9. “*in the Age to Come.*” This is the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.]

5:11. “about this.” The Greek phrase peri hou can be masculine (“about him”) or neuter (“about this,” “about which”). In this case, neuter carries the day because the discussion is about the comparison between Christ and Melchizedek, not only about Melchizedek the person. These Jews, who once were considering a Messiah, had become dull, and so the relation between Melchizedek and Christ would be hard to explain or expound.

5:12. “*kai*” = indeed (Brown, Comfort, *Interlinear*);

“indeed.” We feel that the *kai* is emphatic, making the same point that it made in the opening of the verse. The RSV and NRSV have the sense, but attain it by ignoring the *kai* altogether.

“obligated.” The Greek is *opheilō* (#3784 ὀφείλω), and it has two major meanings, to be indebted to someone in a financial sense; or to be under obligation to meet certain social or moral expectations (BDAG). Mankind has a moral obligation to God to use his talents to further the kingdom. In this case, the hearers had heard long enough to be teachers of the subject, but had stayed so long in disbelief, doubt and hesitation that they needed someone to teach them again.

The beginning of the sayings of God would be the OT. These Jews needed a proper teaching on the first principles of what God has said, beginning in the OT.

“*words.*” The Greek word is *logion* (#3051 λόγιον; pronounced log’-ee-on), and it is the diminutive of *logos*, “word” or “message.” Literally, it is “little words.” We can see why the Bible uses the word *logion* for communications from God, because the Greeks used *logion* for the divine utterances of the oracles, particularly the Oracle of Delphi. The reason for that was that the messages from the oracles were typically short. Thus in time, *logion* was used of the communications that come from the gods. We felt the translation “oracle” was too obscure for our English translation, although it occurs in many English Bibles, because the English word “oracle” has many meanings that do not apply. We went with “words” because it accurately represents that it is the words coming from God, and whereas the “word” of God means His entire communication, “words” of God can refer to smaller pieces of His revelation.

Chapter 6

6:1. “*fundamentals.*” Technically, “beginnings,” as per 5:12, but since the beginnings of Christ might seem like his conception and birth instead of the beginning principles, we have gone with “fundamentals.” Why would we leave the fundamentals of Christ? The answer is in the verse, “to press on to maturity.” This is not saying that we forget the fundamentals, or that they are not important. But the Jews were famous for arguing to the
point of exhaustion over the most simple of truths. The Rabbis debated for hours over words and the meanings of words that at some point we have to leave behind and press toward maturity in the faith, so that we know the things of God, can be warriors in the spiritual battle, and help others master the fundamentals of the faith. Everyone who reads the scholarly commentaries on the Bible knows how sometimes they can miss the most obvious of truths, and then argue about them, all of which keeps people stuck in the fundamentals, not able to move on to maturity.

“dead works.” Works that are “dead,” they produce no life. It is not “works that produce death,” although that is true too. If all a person does is “dead works,” eventually he will end up dead, without everlasting life.

6:2. “the Age to Come.” This is the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”]

6:4. “the holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”]

6:6. “and then have fallen away it is impossible to renew them again to repentance.” This verse reflects the permanence of salvation that is spoken of in so many other places in the Epistles [see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation”]. This verse is not about losing salvation and not being able to regain it, although that is what many people think. If this verse were about losing one’s salvation, then we need to be clear about what it is saying, because it would be saying that if a saved person sins and loses his salvation, he cannot be forgiven and be saved again because that is “impossible.”

Could this one verse in Hebrews contradict all of the other verses in the Epistles that indicate the New Birth is permanent? A principle of interpretation is that the many clear verses on a subject outweigh what a contradictory verse seems to be saying. Also, can it really be true that the Bible says if a saved person sins and falls away from the faith it is “impossible” for him to get forgiveness and be saved again? Even in the Old Testament God implored the people of Israel to forsake evil and return to Him. Could it be that in the Old Testament a person could turn away from God but be accepted back with open arms if he would just ask God for forgiveness, but in the Christian Church if a person sins and falls away it is “impossible” for him to come back? That makes no sense. A study of the Scripture shows us that people who sinned were welcomed back into the Christian community. For example, in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 the Apostle Paul asked the Church to welcome back a person who had sinned. In Galatians 6:1 people who sin are to be “restored.” The Church Epistles are filled with exhortations for Christians to stop sinning and obey God. The invitation of God always is for people to stop sinning and come back to Him. That fact in itself tells us there is a different way to understand Hebrews 6:6 than believing it is saying a saved person cannot repent after sinning.

We also see God’s forgiveness and restoration daily in our churches. Our churches have many people who were strong in the faith at one time, then leave the faith for a while, then repent of their sin and return to church and the Christian lifestyle. Is there anyone who will say that all those people, who are now valuable members of the church, are actually not saved because it was “impossible” to renew them to the faith once they left the faith? We hope not.

If this verse does not mean that it is “impossible” for someone who left the faith to be forgiven and return to God, then what does it mean? It means that it is “impossible” to renew a sinner to repentance because once a Christian repents and gets saved that
salvation is permanent. It is “impossible” for the Christian to lose his salvation, so it is “impossible” for him to repent and get saved again. Every Christian can and does sin, but the sin, even egregious sin, does not cause a person to lose his salvation. Since the person’s salvation was never lost, the person cannot “renew” himself to “repentance.” Everyone can only repent and be saved one time. After that, when we sin, we can repent of our sin and be forgiven, but we do not get saved again because we never lost our salvation. Salvation is by the New Birth, and it is permanent.

What happens when a Christian sins and asks for forgiveness is clear from 1 John 1:8, 9: “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” These verses in 1 John assume that Christians will sin. In fact, 1 John 1:8 says that if we think we do not sin, we are deceiving ourselves. However, neither 1 John nor any other book of the New Testament has a warning such as, “Be careful! We all sin, but if you sin so horribly you fall away, you will not be able to be saved again.” No! Instead are the comforting words that if we confess our sin, God will cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Scholars who have studied this section of Scripture do not know why God addressed the permanence of our salvation by telling us it was impossible to be renewed to repentance. However, there are a couple possibilities we should consider. One is that there are many other places God plainly indicates that it is impossible to lose salvation. He calls it “birth,” and birth is permanent. He says our salvation is “guaranteed” (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14). Furthermore, He says we are already in heaven (Eph. 2:6). Saying it is impossible to renew our repentance would be just one more way that God would tell us that our salvation is permanent.

It is also possible that given the prevailing Jewish mindset of salvation by works, the idea of a permanent salvation was very upsetting to those determined to cling to their Jewish heritage. Thus Hebrews, rather than saying anything about someone losing his salvation, states the message in the opposite terms of it being impossible to repent again. If it were possible to renew oneself to repentance, then that would be saying that the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ was not sufficient to cover a person’s sins once and for all, which is not the case. The one time sacrifice of Christ, and his substitution for the sinner, made that sinner righteous for all time, not just until he sinned the next time. There is another good reason to believe that Hebrews 6:6 is about the permanence of salvation and not about a person falling away and then it being “impossible” for him to get saved again. There is no instruction in the New Testament about exactly what a Christian would have to do to fall away so completely that it would then be impossible for him to be saved again. Everyone sins, and the Word of the Lord is that to be forgiven we just confess our sin to God. If there was a sin that was so horrible that it made regaining salvation “impossible,” it surely seems that our loving Father would let us know what that was. Our earthly fathers sternly warn us about dangers, and so it certainly seems that if there was a sin from which we could not repent, our Heavenly Father would certainly warn us of it. But there is no such warning. Nowhere is the Church Epistles a warning saying, “Do not do such and such, because if you do it will be impossible for you to regain your salvation.” That fact alone is very good evidence that this verse is not about a person losing his salvation and not being able to regain it. There is the verse about not being forgiven for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, but this verse in Hebrews
does not seem to be about that specific sin. Furthermore, Hebrews is written to people in the Grace Administration, when salvation is permanent, whereas Jesus was talking to people who lived before the Grace Administration started (see commentary on Ephesians 3:2).

Having given good evidence that this verse is about the permanence of salvation, there is one more thing that we have to consider as to why God has worded this verse the way He did, which seems very harsh, and that has to do with the overall context of this section. The whole section is written in a harsh way, with serious warnings for people to be faithful. For example, verses seven and eight speak of land that is blessed if it bears good fruit, but cursed if it does not. Orthodox Christian doctrine about heaven and hell has done a great disservice to Christians in that it has not given clear reasons to excel as a Christian. Many preachers teach about heaven as if “just getting in” is what matters. While it is true that there is no greater blessing anyone can have than having everlasting life, there is a lot more to consider. For one thing, we will not spend eternity in “heaven,” but on earth, and we will be subjects in the Kingdom of Christ on earth [see Appendix 3: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”]. Our “jobs” in the Kingdom will be assigned in relation to how we have lived our life on earth. If we have not been faithful, we will be there, but as Corinthians says, with nothing, just as someone who has survived a fire (cp. 1 Cor. 3:15; see commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:10). It is quite possible that a person living in the Kingdom with nothing, as if he had barely escaped a fire, is much worse than Christians generally imagine.

6:8. “whose end is to be burned.” Land that was blessed by God with rain but produces thorns and thistles was burned so the weeds would have less chance of reproducing. This is a statement of fact, and not a pronouncement that believers who sin will be burned. That is clear from 6:9, which says, “But, beloved, we are persuaded of better things about you, even things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.” The whole book of Hebrews has a very serious tone to it. This should alert us to the fact that it is very important, much more important than many people take it to be, to first get saved and then obey God so that we are rewarded and not punished (1 Cor. 3:7; 1 Thess. 4:6; 1 John 2:28).

This verse was also likely in the text because Hebrews is to the “Hebrews.” There is no verse in Hebrews that is the equivalent of Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:2, Ephesians 1:1, etc., that say the epistle of the Hebrews is to those Hebrew people who are saved. While it makes sense that many Hebrews reading Hebrews would be Christians, there is no reason to believe many of them would be unsaved, and a verse such as 6:8 would remind them that they had partaken of the goodness of God in the food and blessings He had provided, and if they defied him throughout their life, they would be burned. The “beloved” get better things (Heb. 6:9), but the unsaved need to fear God and His Lake of Fire.


6:16. This is a difficult verse to translate because of the various phrases in the Greek that can be placed in different positions. This accounts for the differences in the English translations, which all seem to say the same thing in slightly different ways. A strictly literal rendition of the Greek is so awkward that it is hard to understand. The point of the verse is that people swear by things greater than themselves, and when an oath is given
for confirmation, (such as “I swear by God”) that brings an end to the dispute. The Greek, not in the order of the Greek text, could be structured as follows:

καὶ αὐτοῖς ὁ ὥρκος εἰς βεβαίωσιν πέρας πάσης ἀντιλογίας

and for them the oath [given] for confirmation [is] an end of every dispute

6:17. “more convincingly.” The Greek is more literally, “more abundantly,” but in the context of convincing people of His intentions, “more convincingly” is a good translation (cp. ESV; Sterns, Complete Jewish Bible).

“guaranteed it.” The Greek word is mesiteuō (#3315 μεσιτεύω), and means to act as a mediator, or peacemaker, or to guarantee (BDAG).

6:18. “two unchangeable things.” The promise, and then the oath that confirmed the promise.

This verse has been translated many different ways, in part due to the large number of phrases that can be moved into different positions in the verse. We feel that the way the Greek text has the phrases gives us significant insight into what God is trying to tell us. One of the major differences in the translations revolves around the verb “to flee” (often translated “who have fled”) and how it relates to the phrase about the hope. Compare the ESV, “we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope,” with the NASB, “we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us.” The NASB and similar versions have us fleeing for refuge in the hope, while the ESV has us fleeing for refuge, but leave open the questions, “Flee from what,” and “what is the refuge?” We feel that these questions are answered in the context if the verse is translated in the natural word order of the Greek text, as the NASB and REV has done. We flee for refuge (which can also be translated, “found refuge,” (Lenski; BDAG lexicon) in our hope.

The chapter has been speaking of the destruction of the wicked, and the hope of the righteous (cp. vs. 8, 11). But the hope with its promises (v. 12; which is the hope in its fullness, including rewards for the faithful) is not always easy to maintain, especially in the light of the earthly persecution we endure. We must have faith and longsuffering (v. 12) to firmly hold it. Therefore it helps to know that the hope is not a “maybe,” but rather a sure thing, so sure, in fact, that God guaranteed it by not just one, but two “unchangeable” things. And why did God swear by those things? “In order that…we may have strong encouragement.” The sad truth is that many who at one time in their life find refuge in our wonderful future hope, lose their confidence in it and abandon it, even sometimes returning to hopelessness. But we have no need to abandon our hope, no matter how difficult our lives are, because it is sure; after all, God guaranteed its coming with two unchangeable, or immutable, things.

6:19. “soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; and attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here psuchē is used broadly. While it could be understood as the person himself (“we have this hope as an anchor for our lives” HCSB), here the word “soul” certainly includes our attitudes, feelings, and emotions. The Hope anchors us mentally and emotionally. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

“extending.” The Greek word is eiserchomai (#1525 εἰσέρχομαι), which is more properly “entering,” and is usually used with people or animals entering someplace. However, occasionally, as here, it refers to an object entering someplace, and in this case,
that “entering” is by virtue of the anchors “extending” all the way to behind the veil of the holy of holies in the Tabernacle or Temple. In the ocean, an anchor is “sure and steadfast” if it firmly grips the bottom, and our anchor and hope are sure and steadfast because it grips the work of God that is even in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. It is the anchor (the hope) that extends, see Lenski.

Chapter 7

7:3. “for all time.” The Greek is dienekes (#1336 διηνεκής), meaning “uninterrupted,” “continually.” The word occurs four times, only in Hebrews (7:3; 10:1, 12, and 14).

7:6. “promises.” Abraham was blessed by God, and given many promises. Certainly the greatest was that from his seed would come the Christ (Gen. 12:3), but he was also promised the land of Israel, hence the name, “the Promised Land” (Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 15:18-21; 17:8), and that he would be a great nation (Gen. 12:2), and would have a great name (Gen. 12:2), and be blessed by God (Gen. 12:2).

7:8. “in the one case...in the other case” The Greek hōde (#5602 ὥδε) is an adverb, which usually means “here” “a position or point that is relatively near, here; and also, “a reference to a present event, object, or circumstance; in this case, at this point, on this occasion, under these circumstances” (BDAG).

7:15. “in the same way as Melchizedek.” This seems clearly to be the meaning of the Greek in this verse. See BDAG lexicon. “Likeness” is more literal, but misses the point here. Jesus’ priesthood was conferred by God “in the same way as” Melchizedek’s was.

7:22. “covenant.” The Greek word is diathēkē (#1242 διαθήκη). This word was used in the Septuagint over 250 times as the translation of the Hebrew word berith, covenant. A covenant was usually an agreement between two or more parties, and the Greek word can have that meaning (cp. Kittel; Theological Dictionary). There are theologians who say that a covenant with God was one sided, and that is why diathēkē, which was most often understood to be the will of one person (such as a last will and testament) was used to translate berith. However, although there are one-sided covenants, that was the exception, not the rule. In fact, the “Old Covenant” was clearly an agreement between God and the people (Exod. 24:5-8), with the people agreeing to obey God and follow His commands. The Greek word diathēkē was translated as testamentum in the Latin Versions, and our English word “testament” comes from that Latin root.

7:25. “for all time he is able to save.” The versions are split over the translation of the word panteles (#3838 παντελής), whether it means here save “completely,” “to the uttermost” (cp. ESV; NIV; NET; KJV; ASV) or save “for all time,” “always” (cp. NASB; NRSV; HCSB; NAB). As usual, the context should be our guide, and in this case the context favors the understanding that Christ is able to save for all time. Verses 23-24 lay a the problem with the old priesthood; namely, that the former priests were prevented from continuing in their office because they died. This is contrasted with Christ who holds his office permanently, and so he, unlike the former priests, can save us for all time.
Chapter 8

8:5. Quoted from Exodus 25:40.
   “This is why.” The Greek is kathōs (#2531 καθόσ), here relating the cause, which is why many modern versions use “for” or “this is why” (cp. NIV, Nyland; cp. Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary).
   “divinely warned.” From chrematizō (#5537 χρηµατίζω). The word has the connotations of divine instruction and/or warning. The context makes it clear that here warning is the stronger meaning—and, interestingly, in all other instances of the word in the book of Hebrews (11:7, 12:25). For more on this word, see commentary on “divinely instructed” in Matthew 2:12.

8:8-12. Quoted from Jeremiah 31:31-34.
8:8. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).
8:10. “So this.” The hoti at the start of the phrase is a “consecutive hoti,” giving the result of what had gone on before. In this case it does not mean “because” (cp. Lenski).
8:13. Quoted from Jeremiah 31:31

Chapter 9

9:4. “having a golden altar of incense.” At first reading this seems clearly to be an error, because the golden altar of incense was in the Holy Place, not the Holy of Holies (cp. Exod. 30:6). However, it is clear from reading the book of Hebrews that the author is very familiar with the Old Testament and Jewish history, and would not have made such a mistake. To understand this verse we must be “sympathetic listeners,” people who are looking for the lesson in what is being said.
   The word “having” is echō, which is the common Greek word that means “to have.” But “have” has lots of meanings and a wide semantic range, and those meanings include “having to do with,” or as we would say, “having something to do with” (Liddell and Scott Greek-English lexicon). All one has to do is read the Old Testament about the golden altar of incense to see that, although it is physically in the Holy Place, its function was tied to the Holy of Holies. When it is first described in Exodus, it is not associated with the Holy Place and the menorah and table of the bread of the presence, but is associated with the ark of the testimony (Exod. 25:22; 40:38).
   Although the altar of incense was to be burning every day, it was the burning incense from the altar of incense that the High Priest was to take with him into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. The smoke from the incense would conceal the mercy seat of the ark, which had the cherubim on top (Lev. 16:12, 13). Thus, the golden altar of incense was intimately connected with the Holy of Holies.
9:5. “cherubim of glory.” This does not mean “glorious cherubim,” but rather is a genitive of possession or relation: the cherubim that are related to, and belong to, the glory of God that was his presence that lived between the cherubim (Exod. 25:22; 40:38).
9:8. “the Holy Spirit,” literally, “the Spirit, the Holy one....” This refers to God, who was the one who established the Tabernacle and its rituals. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’.”]

“The way into the Holy of Holies.” Literally, “the way [road] of the Holy,” a genitive of relation. The High Priest would take a path (not a specific path, but the path he would walk” through the Tabernacle court, through the first curtain and into the Holy Place, through the second curtain and into the Holy of Holies (or Most Holy Place; Exod. 26:33, 34) where the ark of the covenant was kept. The “road of the Holy of Holies” was not revealed to those standing outside the Tabernacle. What went on behind the curtain was not clear to them.

“revealed.” The Greek is phaneroo (φανερόω), to make manifest, or known, or to be revealed or disclosed. It was not just that the Holy of Holies was not open to the people yet, they could not even see inside it.

9:11. “good things to come.” There is a variant reading that is very well attested that reads, “good things that have already come” (thus the ESV, HCSB, NIV, etc.), but the reading in the REV, NASB, NET, etc., is well attested also.

Several things militate against the reading “have already come.” The context of the chapter is the new covenant and the heavenly sanctuary, which, although they have been ratified spiritually, are not as yet a reality for those of us on earth, so, since we are not currently enjoying the New Covenant promises, it is hard to see how they can be said to be already here. Secondly, Hebrews 10:1, which continues the subject, is not in dispute and it refers to the things that are to come, not to what is here now.

9:14. “through the age-abiding spirit.” This is a reference to God’s gift of holy spirit, which has been helping people since Genesis, age after age. The “the” is latent in the preposition dia “by,” (see commentary on Matt. 1:18). The gift of holy spirit that Yahweh put upon people in the Old Testament helped people from Genesis to Pentecost (at which time a different quality gift of holy spirit was poured out; see The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be Like Christ, by Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit). That holy spirit helped Moses and the leaders of Israel (Num. 11:17). It helped the Judges of Israel walk with God in power (Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29); it helped David rule (1 Sam. 16:13). Jesus told the apostles that the spirit would guide them (John 16:13). Jesus himself needed the spirit of God, and received it at his baptism, when it came in the form of a dove. He walked in the guidance and power of that spirit, and so it was that by that spirit he was able to offer himself as a lamb without blemish.

“without blemish.” See commentary on Ephesians 1:4.


9:15. “in the Age to Come.” This is the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

9:19. “of the Law.” The Greek has the preposition kата (κατά), which in this case receives the action of what was spoken. In this context it is not “according to the Law,” for that would mean that the Law told Moses to speak, which it did not. Moses spoke the Law, not “according to the Law.”

“the Book.” Exodus 24 never mentions that the Book of the Law was itself sprinkled with blood, but it must have been. Even though the words were the Word of God, the book was the made by man, and as such needed to be cleansed with blood.

Chapter 10

10:7. “Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).
10:8. Quoted from Psalm 40:6
   “Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).
10:10. “By that same will.” By the same will of God of verse 9 that had Christ offered for a sacrifice, we have been sanctified.
   “once and for all.” Competent scholars differ as to what this final phrase modifies. Some say that it modifies “made holy,” and that believers are made holy “once and for all.” These scholars point to the other verses that say Jesus was a one time offering to support their position (cp. 10:14). Others say it modifies Christ’s offering of himself, which happened “once and for all” (cp. 9:28). Given the context and scope of Scripture, there is no reason that it cannot apply to both, which would explain its ambiguity in the sentence. If God had wanted to write the text in such a way was no doubt as to what the “once and for all referred to,” He could have. The Christian, once he is made holy by the presence of holy spirit born inside, is holy once and for all, and that was due to Christ’s sacrifice, which also, unlike the animal sacrifices that are mentioned in the chapter, happened once and for all. Given the ambiguity of the Greek phrase, we felt it best to leave it where it occurs in the Greek text; at the end.
10:15. “the Holy Spirit.” “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8. [For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]
10:16, 17. Quoted from Jeremiah 31:33, 34
10:18. “no more offering for sin.” This verse can cause confusion to those people who believe in a Millennial Kingdom on earth [see Appendix 3: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”]. A plain and literal reading of the Old Testament leads us to conclude that in Jesus’ Millennial Kingdom, there will be a temple and sacrifices (Ezek. 41-46 ). However, that very fact is one of the strongest reasons that many theologians think Ezekiel’s vision of a future temple is allegorical, not literal. However, there is no need to take Ezekiel’s temple as allegorical, as we will see. Furthermore, if Ezekiel’s vision is allegorical, what is it representing?
   Some theologians say the vision that Ezekiel had represents the ideal worship, with the glory of God and the presence of Christ, but that explanation does not account for the tremendous amount of detail in Ezekiel. Some theologians say Ezekiel’s temple represents the post-Babylonian temple the Jews should have built after the Babylonian captivity. But that explanation hardly seems credible since the people who returned from captivity built their temple on the model of Moses’ Tabernacle, and the old men wept because the new temple was not as magnificent as Solomon’s Temple, not because it was different from the way Ezekiel said it was supposed to be. Furthermore, there are many
things mentioned in Ezekiel, such as the Messiah ministering, or water flowing from the
temple, that never occurred in the post-captivity temple. Some theologians say Ezekiel’s
temple is really just anticipating what John saw in Revelation 21, but John saw a “city,”
and there was “no temple.” The most reasonable, and the most literal, explanation of
what Ezekiel saw, is that he saw the Millennial Temple, complete with sacrifices.

Ezekiel’s temple has sacrifices, but the Bible does not say why. Theologians
surmise various reasons: For example, they are memorial sacrifices, reminding us of the
death of Christ (like the communion we do today). Or, they are sacrifices that make
“real” how much our sin costs us and God, because people will still sin (the Millennial
Kingdom has natural people). Or, they are sacrifices that in some way cover for the sin of
the natural people there, just as our confession of sin does for us today. Or also, that most
of them are sacrifices of which a portion is eaten by the people, thus providing a
fellowship meal.

It seems we can best understand the role of sacrifices in the Millennial Kingdom
if we understand the purpose of sacrifices in the Old Testament. For example, the burnt
offering speaks of total dedication to God, something that will still be needed. The
fellowship offering (sometimes called a “peace” offering; Lev. 3; 7:11-38), was an
expression of praise and thanksgiving, and a portion of it was eaten in a fellowship meal.
The sin and trespass offering pointed out that there had to be some kind of payment for
sin, and God had to provide some way for people to become “right” with God again. The
grain offering reminded people that God was the source of life. No offering under the
Law could actually take away sins, instead, they provided a covering for sin, and they
pointed to Jesus Christ as the ultimate sacrifice for sin. That could well be the reason for
the sacrifices in the Millennial Kingdom. Just as the Passover celebration pointed
backwards to the Exodus, so the Millennial sacrifices could point back to the work of
Christ just as, before the death of Christ, they pointed forward to him. It helps us to
remember that Hebrews tells us that it is “impossible” for the blood of bulls and goats to
take away sin before Christ (Heb. 10:1-4); those sacrifices just pointed to Christ. In the
same way, in the Millennial Kingdom they will point back to Christ.

10:20. “newly made.” The Greek is prosphatos (#4372 πρόσφατος), and originally
meant “freshly killed.” By the time of the New Testament it had the everyday meaning of
“newly made.” However, given the context of this section of Hebrews, the choice of
prosphatos should not be missed. The way into the presence of God was indeed freshly
made. Furthermore, it was because Jesus was “freshly killed.” It needs to be pointed out
that “newly made” is not in contrast to an old way that had been around awhile. Before
Jesus’ death made entrance to God available for everyone (symbolized by the tearing
of the Temple veil which separated God from the people), people did not have open access
to God. The overtones of the death of Christ are very much in the verse, because Jesus
Christ both died (was freshly killed) and had risen from the dead in order to make the
way to God available.

10:21. “great priest.” Great is from megas (#3173 μέγας), which does not mean “great”
in the sense of wonderful, or “doing a good job,” rather, it refers to “being relatively
superior in importance.” F. F. Bruce (New International Commentary) notes that this is
the “commonest Hebrew title for the High Priest.” Thus some versions render the phrase,
“great high priest” (cp. HCSB), or “high priest” (KJV; NJB).
10:22. “having our hearts sprinkled.” This is a clear reference to what was required of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement in order for him to enter into the Holy of Holies. He had to have his body washed with water (Lev. 16:4, 24), and then he sprinkled the atonement cover and in front of the atonement cover (Lev. 16:14, 15) and thus made atonement for himself and all Israel (Lev. 16:17).

10:24. “spur.” The Greek is paroxusmos (#3948 παροξυσμός) and it has three distinct definitions: 1. A rousing to activity, stirring up, provoking. 2. A state of irritation expressed in argument, sharp disagreement. 3. A severe fit of a disease, attack of fever, esp. at its high point: convulsion (BDAG). Here, in Hebrews 10:24 it means to stir up to action, while in Acts 15:39. it means a sharp disagreement (see commentary on Acts 15:39).

10:25 “assembling together.” It is not completely clear why the author of Hebrews used episunagōgē (#1997 ἐπισυναγωγή) in this verse. Historically scholars have brought up two major reasons. First and most likely, the noun sunagoge is used in the Bible many times for Jewish meetings, or the place the Jews met, i.e., the synagogue. At the time Hebrews was written, there would have still been many Christians going to synagogue services, and so commanding people not to forsake the sunagoge, might be misinterpreted and taken to mean that God was commanding Jewish Christians (to whom Hebrews was at least in part addressed) to go to synagogues. By saying episunagoge a distinction is made between Jewish meetings and Christian ones. Other commentators point out that the prefix epi would emphasize that there was a place to meet, in contrast to simply "hanging out" wherever people happened to see each other and calling that a Christian meeting.

10:27. “a fury of fire.” This phrase personifies the fire, as if it is angry and zealous to devour those who defy God. This seems appropriate, because it is as if the fire has a life of its own, and it refuses to be quenched until every one who is thrown into it, into the “lake of fire,” is burned up, at which time it will be appeased and die out [for more on the annihilation of the wicked, see Appendix 5: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”].

“which is about to devour the adversaries.” It is taught by some people that this verse supports the premise that a person can be saved, born again, and then lose that salvation. We believe the evidence in the rest of the Epistles solidly shows that is not correct [see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation”]. However, this verse and its context are severe warnings for Christians not to take their lives, and their salvation, lightly. When verse 26 speaks of sinning willfully after receiving the truth, it is reflecting back to the Mosaic Law, which had sacrifices for unintentional sin, but not for intentional sin (Num. 15:22-31, esp. 30, 31). We are told in 1 Corinthians 3:15 that there is a day of Judgment coming even for Christians, but the raging fire on that day will not consume the Christian, but rather will consume any accomplishment that is not built on Christ. The fire will consume the enemies of God and the works of any Christian who has not built upon the foundation of Christ. A Christian, no matter how disobedient, is still a child of God and not an “adversary” of God. God promises that He will love His children in all situations (cp. Rom. 8:31-39). Nevertheless, God’s love for His children does not mean that He does not notice the evil that they do, and on the Day of Judgment, both the enemies of God and the ungodly works of Christians will be consumed.

10:28. “not to atone for sin.” The Greek is more literally, “with reference to sin,” but it is clear from the context that it means that Jesus dealt with sin, or atoned for our sin,
during his first coming, and now we are waiting for our salvation; being rescued from our mortal bodies and this present evil age.

10:30. Quoted from Deuteronomy 32:35, 36.

10:36. “the promise.” The “promise” is put by metonymy for that which was promised. We will receive what God has promised us.

10:37. This verse is quoted from Isaiah 26:20 (Septuagint) and Habakkuk 2:3.

“(How little! How little!)” This is the figure of speech *interjectio* (interjection), which is a form of parenthesis in which an exclamation, whose sense is dependent upon the context, is thrown into the sentence. It is also the figure *epizeuxis* (duplication), a repetition of the same word in the same sense for emphasis. The Greek text reads *micron hoson hoson*, which would literally be translated, “a little, how very! How very!” We get our English “micron” from the Greek *micron* (little). Bullinger translates *hoson hoson* as “How little, how little,” picking up “little” as part of the meaning of the word in this context (Figures, p. 198). Rotherham does something similar and translates the verse, “For yet a little while, how short! How short! The Coming One will be here....” The point should be well taken. To those who are suffering trials in life, Jesus seems to be in heaven for a very long time, but compared to the eternity we will spend with him, our suffering, and his not coming yet, is “How little! How little!”

“the Coming One will come.” This is the figure of speech *polyptoton* (many inflections. Bullinger; Figures).


“soul.” This is more than just saying, “I will have no pleasure in him.” See commentary on Hebrews 6:19.

10:39. “resulting in.” The Greek preposition is *eis* (#1519 εἰς), and this is the *eis* of result. When a person has faith, it results in him obtaining everlasting life.

“keeping.” The Greek word is *peripoiēsis* (#4047 περιποίησις), and it means to keep, to preserve, to acquire, to obtain. The person who has faith in Christ will keep his life and live forever. The person who rejects Christ will lose his life, and be annihilated in the Lake of Fire. [For more about annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 5: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”].

“life.” The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here the context shows it refers to the life of the body, which is why quite a few versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. This is one of the many verses that shows that *psuchē*, soul, is not immortal. If a person does not have faith, his life, his “soul,” is not preserved, it is annihilated in the Lake of Fire.

It can be confusing to translate this verse as “saving of the soul” as in the KJV, because of the common belief that the soul can live on after the human body dies. This verse is not saying that a person’s “soul” can be saved or kept without the person being alive. That belief is not from Scripture, but comes in large part from the doctrine of the immortal soul, which though traditional, is not biblical. [For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].
Chapter 11

11:1. “faith.” The Greek is pistis (\#4102 πίστις), a noun. In both ancient secular Greek and in the Bible pistis means “confidence, trust, assurance.” When the Greek New Testament was translated into Latin, fides was the natural choice as a translation of pistis, because fides means “trust, confidence, reliance, belief.” As the English language developed, our English word “faith” came from the Latin word fides. There should be nothing mysterious about pistis, fides, or “faith.” We know what trust is. Merriam-Webster defines it as “assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something.”

It needs to be clearly understood that the ancient and biblical definition of pistis differs from the modern definition of “faith.” If both pistis and fides mean “trust,” how did “faith” come to be defined in our modern culture as “firm belief in something for which there is no proof” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11th edition)? The actual historical process is long and tedious, but the concept is simple. The Church asked people to trust doctrines that were neither logical nor clearly backed up by Scripture. People were asked to accept “by faith” doctrines for which there was no biblical support. Over time, belief in something for which there is no proof became the most accepted definition of “faith.” This is harmful because people then import that made-up definition of “faith” back into the Bible, although that is not what “faith” means when used in the Bible.

If we put the biblical definition of faith into Hebrews 11:1, and say, “Trust is firm confidence in things hoped for,” the sentence makes perfect sense. Christians should have trust in God’s promises about salvation and everlasting life in new and wonderful bodies because we trust the God who made those promises. Furthermore, based on our trust of God, we should have a firm confidence in those things that we hope for daily. [For more on “faith,” see commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:7].

11:2. “commended.” The great men and women of faith were commended by God in His Word, by others, and also their deeds were recorded in the books of heaven.

11:4. “by which trust.” The Greek reads, “by it,” or “by which,” but it is not the sacrifice that is the focus of why he was accepted, but his trust in God.”

11:5. “moved.” The Greek word is metatithēmi (\#3346 μεταθίθημι), and it means “to convey from one place to another, put in another place, transfer” (BDAG). The record of Enoch is in Genesis chapter 5, and this verse specifically refers to Genesis 5:24.

There are a few things to consider when studying Enoch. First, the word metatithēmi means “to move from one place to another.” It does not mean “take up,” or that Enoch was taken up into heaven. That is theological tradition, not what the Bible actually says. Similarly, to say that Enoch was “translated,” is only confusing. We do not use that word today of anyone or anything being moved.

It is also theological tradition to say that Enoch was taken into heaven, where he still is living. The Bible does not directly say where he was “moved” to, but we know from the scope of Scripture it cannot be into heaven. We know this for a couple reasons: First, Hebrews 11:13, speaking of the heroes of the Faith who were mentioned in the chapter, says, “These all died....” It does not say that most of them died, or that all except Enoch died, it says they all died. So Enoch did not live forever in heaven. Secondly, if Enoch (or Elijah) could go to heaven and live forever before Christ paid for their sin, then...
anyone could live forever without Christ paying for their sin, in which case Christ died for nothing; he did not need to suffer and die. The truth is that no one could go to heaven until Christ paid the price for their sin. Enoch lived three generations before Noah and was prophesying of judgment to come upon the wicked people of his time (Jude 14). Just as wicked people tried to kill Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Jesus himself, and many others who prophesied boldly for God, so Enoch’s evil contemporaries tried to kill him. God protected him from an untimely death by moving him from place to place, just as God moved the boat that Jesus and the apostles were in (John 6:21), and as he moved Philip to Azotus (Acts 8:39, 40). In spite of the fact that God was able to protect Enoch on earth for a while, he eventually fell asleep even as all the others listed in Hebrews 11.


11:6. “trust.” Traditionally, the Greek word pistis is translated “faith,” but we believe “trust” is a better translation. [For more information, see commentary on Hebrews 11:1 and on 2 Corinthians 5:7].


11:13. “the promises.” The “promises” is put by metonymy for what was promised; they did not receive what was promised. However, the metonymy is so clear there is no need to change the English to accommodate the figure of speech.

“saluted them.” The Greek word is aspazomai (#782 ἀσπάζομαι). It appears in the Greek writings of a person who salutes another person or his homeland from afar. That the word patris, homeland, appears in v. 14, while in this verse the people are called “foreigners and temporary residents,” or foreigners and people living in a foreign land. As people away from home, we can see why the believers would “salute” their homeland from afar.


11:21. “each of the sons of Joseph.” Jacob blessed the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, and the record is in Genesis 48. He adopted them as his own, (Gen. 48:5), which is why the two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, were reckoned among the 12 tribes of Israel.

“bowed…in worship.” See commentary on Matthew 2:2.

“over the top of his staff.” A reference to Genesis 47:31. The word proskuneō can mean to prostrate oneself on the ground, but that would have been too difficult for Jacob at his age and physical condition, so he bowed while leaning over his staff. Some versions, such as the NASB, supply “leaning,” (“leaning upon his staff”) and that was what Jacob was doing, but it does not have to be supplied for the verse to make sense.

The book of Hebrews clears up a problem for us. The Hebrew text of Genesis 47:31, as it is currently pointed, says that Jacob leaned on his “bed,” but the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament done about 250 BC and abbreviated LXX)
says “staff.” Since the unpointed Hebrew text can read “staff” if pointed differently, and the LXX reads “staff,” and the NT clearly reads “staff,” that is apparently the true record.

11:23. “a well-pleasing child to God.” This is referring to the record in Exodus 2. The word “well-pleasing” is from asteios (#791 ἀστεῖος), which in the New Testament occurs only here and in Acts 7:20. In the Septuagint it has the connotation of physical beauty and charm. The words “to God” are added from the wording in Acts 7:20. It is not that they saw their child was good looking—what parent wouldn’t think that?—or worse, that God cared about how “well bred” (BDAG) Moses was. Rather, the connotation is that the child was something special. As the NIV captures with their translation: “they saw he was no ordinary child.”

11:37. “sheepskins and goatskins.” It took a stable lifestyle to raise the sheep or grow the flax that was then made into wool or linen garments. People who were constantly persecuted and had to move from place to place had to make do with rough clothes made from animal skins. It has been taught that the reference of skins is to a person being tied up in a skin when it was fresh, and then letting it shrink and asphyxiate the person. However, there is no evidence anything like that was ever done, and the vocabulary of moving from place to place does not support that conclusion.

11:39. “having been commended.” The Greek is martureō (#3140 µαρτυρέω), and it is an aorist passive participle. As an active verb, martureō means, to bear witness to, or to be a witness. However, in the passive voice it means that someone bears witness of you. Also, the word often has the connotation of a good witness, or good testimony, as it does here. The reference is to the record of people’s lives that is being kept in heaven, and these people have a good report that has been entered into God’s books. This is a good example of why the reader has to have a wide scope of the teachings of Scripture and the biblical culture to clearly understand what the verse is speaking about. One scholar loosely translated the Greek word in this context as “having had their names entered on the record” (F.F. Bruce, New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Hebrews).

“The promise.” The subject of what God promised is a major theme of Hebrews. In fact, the Greek word epaggelia (#1860 ἐπαγγέλα; pronounced eh-pan-gel-ee ‘a’), which means “promise,” occurs more in Hebrews than in any other book in the New Testament. Hebrews 4:1 is the first use of epaggelia, and it is associated with the promise of everlasting life. In fact, most of the uses of the plural “promises” in Hebrews include the gift of everlasting life, although they also include other things that were promised, such as the Promised Land, and the promised blessings. Hebrews 9:15 shows us that the work of Christ opened the door for people to receive the promise of everlasting life. Here, as in 9:15, the word “promise” is singular. Although the other promises are important, the gift of everlasting life is the pinnacle promise.

The “promise” is put by metonymy for what was promised; they did not receive what was promised. However, the metonymy seems clear enough not to modify the phrase to “they did not receive what was promised.”

Chapter 12
12:1. “let us lay aside every weight.” This phrase brings the mind of the reader to the races that were held throughout the Roman world, especially when the bigger games, such as the Olympic Games, Isthmian Games, etc., were held. The runners ran nude, and stripped themselves of all their clothing and anything else that might impede them or weigh them down. So here our lives are being compared to a race, and if we are going to finish, and finish well, we need to discover and set aside the things that entangle us and weigh us down such that we are not as effective in doing God’s will as we should be.

“easily entangles.” The Greek is euperistatos (εὐπερίστατος). It only occurs here, and Robertson (Word Pictures in the New Testament) notes that there are probably a dozen ways to translate it. Here we have a word that only occurs one time and can be translated many different ways. Note the variations in translation: “clings so closely” (ESV); “so easily entangles” (NASB); “so prone to be ensnared” (God’s New Covenant); “easily hampering” (Lenski); “the sin which controls (us) so tightly” (Louw Nida Lexicon); “so readily (deftly and cleverly) clings to and entangles us” (Amplified). The context of the verse is that of a runner who needs to set aside everything that would slow him down. Thus he sets aside every weight. He also sets aside sin, which like the long robes that people wore, were taken off by the Greco-Roman runners. If left on, the robes would readily (even cleverly) cling to the runner and surround and entangle them, hindering them. This is exactly what sin does in the life of a believer. In this case, one could be tempted to conflate the translation as the Amplified Version does, but we have felt it best to go with “easily entangles.”

“let us also run.” Hebrews 12:1 begins with an initial kai umeis (“and us” or “us also”) that connects the modern day believers to the great cloud of witnesses mentioned in chapter eleven. The kai umeis goes with the verb of the sentence, let us also run, and not with the participles “having” witnesses or “throwing” off sin. The point is, since these great men and women of faith persevered even though they have not yet received the promises (11:39), let us also run with perseverance to the finish line where we will be “made perfect” together (11:40). The point is not “we also have a great cloud of witnesses” (as though the saints in chapter eleven had great witnesses too), nor is it “let us also throw off sin” (as though the context of chapter eleven was about how the saints threw off sin, so we should too). Rather, the author is urging us also to run with perseverance as these great witnesses ran. Surprisingly, most of our versions get this wrong. The ESV, NASB, NRSV, NJB, and ASV make the latter mistake, and the KJV and HCSB make the former.

12:2. “leader.” The Greek word is archēgos (#747 ἀρχήγος), from archē, “beginning, origin, first; when referring to a person: leader.” Archēgos refers to one that takes the lead in anything and thus is an example. Thus it has meanings that include: a predecessor, a pioneer, the chief leader, a prince, or an author. Balz and Schneider correctly point out that Jesus being called the “‘originator of eternal salvation’ in Heb. 5:9 is not synonymous with ἀρχήγος; [Hebrews] 12:2 is hardly to be translated as ‘originator and perfecter of the faith,’ for Jesus is the originating source neither for the °®mûnâ of the OT witnesses nor for Christological πίστις; rather, God effects faith in Jesus as the leader” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament). We agree that Jesus is properly the leader when it comes to trust, not the “author.”

“finisher” (see Lenski); “the faith” (Greek text and see Lenski); “enduring” because of the similar “endurance” in verse 1.
“because of the joy.” The word “because” is translated from the Greek preposition anti (#473 ἀντί), which, like most prepositions, has a very large range of meanings. Anti includes meanings in several groupings: 1) over against, opposite to, before; 2) for, instead of, in place of 3) for that, because, for this cause. In this case, it has the meaning “for, because of, for the sake of, in consideration of,” which is the same meaning it has in verse 16 where Esau sold his birthright “for,” or “because of,” a meal. Jesus endured the cross “because of,” “in consideration of,” the joy that was set before him. Jesus often spoke of reigning as king in his future kingdom, and looked forward to that, and providing salvation for God’s people, with great joy (cp. Matt. 19:28, 25:31). Other translations of this phrase include: “because of the joy” (BBE, NLT), “in view of the joy” (Darby), “for the sake of the joy” (NAB, NJB), “in consideration of the joy” (Rotherham).

Because the word anti can mean “instead of,” some very knowledgeable theologians (including the authors of the BDAG lexicon) think the meaning of the verse is that Jesus endured the cross “instead of” experiencing the joy set before him. The main reason for asserting that is that grammatically anti seems to usually be used in the sense of “instead of” in the New Testament. The response to that argument is that while the may be true, anti is not always used in the sense of “instead of,” and in fact is not even in Hebrews 12:16, later in the chapter. In any case, theologians who say anti means “instead of” here say that Jesus had a choice of having the “joy” set before him, or he could endure the cross. Many of them say that the joy Jesus gave up was the joy of living forever in heaven with God and not experiencing the cross. However, other theologians, such as William Lane (The Word Biblical Commentary), feel the joy Jesus gave up could not be the eternal joy of being in heaven, but would have had to have been some temporal joy he could have had on earth that he gave up for the cross, but what that particular joy was is not exactly known. We feel that the majority of the commentators, and almost every English version, is correct in saying that Jesus endured the cross “for” or perhaps more clearly, “because of” the joy that was set before him of purchasing redemption for mankind and earning his place as “king of kings and Lord of lords.”

“thinking nothing of.” The Greek word translated “thinking nothing of” is kataphroneō (Strong’s #2706 καταφρονέω), and it has a range of meaning that encompasses looking down on someone or something with contempt or aversion; considering something not important and thus disregarding it; and not caring about, or ignoring, someone or something. It is surprising that many modern versions continue to use the word “despise” in this verse even though it gives most readers the wrong impression. In defense of “despise,” it is true that one of the primary meanings of the English word “despise” is to look down on with contempt or to regard as worthless. However, the much more well-known use of “despise” is an intense dislike and even loathing. Given that fact, “despise” is not the best translation in Hebrews 12:2 or in the other places kataphroneōs used in the New Testament. A better translation is “to ignore,” or “to think nothing of.”

Jesus did not endure being crucified, “despising the shame,” as if he hated the shame. It was indeed a shameful thing to be crucified, but Jesus did not “hate” it, he ignored it. In doing that he set a wonderful example for us to follow. Many times we will find that if we are to be a true follower of Jesus, we will have to ignore the shame and mistreatment we endure.
There are other times when *kataphroneō* is usually translated “despise” that can give us the wrong impression of what the verse is saying. One is when Paul writes to Timothy and says, “Let no one despise you for your youth” (1 Tim. 4:12 ESV). No one would hate someone who was young; the better way to understand the verse is that Paul told Timothy not to let anyone ignore him just because he was young. Matthew 6:24 about the two masters is another place we need to properly understand *kataphroneō* (see commentary on Matthew 6:24).

“*sat down.*” That Jesus sat down at the right hand of the throne of God shows his royal status. Nehemiah 2:6 shows the royal status of the queen in that she sits beside the king. In the ancient world much more than the modern, the position of sitting or standing demonstrated one’s position in that particular situation. James 2:3 shows the favoritism that could be wrongly showed to a wealthy person versus a poor person by giving the wealthy person a seat but having the poor person stand (James 2:3). Rulers sat while those of lower status stood before them. This protocol starts with God, who sits on his throne while His army stands before him (1 Kings 22:19; cp. Isa. 6:1), and extends to earth. Rulers are often specifically depicted as sitting (1 Kings 22:10). The ruling elders of a city are often said to be sitting in the gate (Gen. 19:1; 2 Sam. 18:24; 19:9; Esther 2:19; 21). One stood before the Kings as a mark of respect and recognition of the power of the King versus one’s own lower status (cp. Esther 5:1). It is still part of courtroom protocol that when the judge enters the room everyone stands up in respect.

“*right hand.*” In the ancient world in general, certainly in the biblical world, and still in many parts of the world today, the right hand is the hand of honor. In the ancient world before the invention of modern conveniences, the custom was that people washed themselves with their left hand after going to the bathroom. Furthermore, it was the custom (understandably!) that people ate with their right hand. Thus culturally the right hand was the hand of honor (cp. Ps. 110:1). Jesus told the High Priest and those with him that they would see him seated at the right hand of “Power,” a title of God, after which they accused him of blasphemy. The Bible says in a number of different places that Jesus is at the right hand of God ([Mark 16:19] Acts 2:33; 7:55, 56; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1; 1 Pet. 3:22).

That Jesus “sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” is very strong evidence against the Trinity. For one thing, Jesus is depicted as being at the right hand of “God,” not “the Father.” In fact, “right hand of the Father” never appears in Scripture. This is good evidence that “God” and Jesus are two separate beings and Jesus is not “God.” (Trinitarians say that “God” in these texts is the Father, but that is an assumption based on their theology. It is not what the Bible says, nor is that point of view ever explained in the Bible). Second, there never is a “person,” “the Holy Spirit,” when Jesus is at the right hand of God. We would expect, if the Trinity was correct, that Jesus would be at the right hand of the Father and the Holy Spirit, but we never see that in the Bible. Also, in this verse, Jesus is at the right hand of the “throne” of God. That phrase only makes sense if Jesus is not “God.” If he were God, it would be demeaning to say he was at the right hand of the “throne of God,” because if he were God he would not be beside his own throne, and if he were co-equal with the Father he would not be depicted as beside his Father’s throne. The scene is simple and straightforward. Jesus is not God, he is the Son of God, and he has been exalted to the right hand of God, which is also the right hand of the throne of God.
12:3. “Yes.” The Greek word \(\text{γάρ} \) (γάρ) in this context is the “confirmatory gar,” and could be translated, “yes,” “indeed,” etc. Many English versions omit it altogether.

“think carefully about.” The Greek word is \(\text{ἀναλογιζόμαι} \) (ἀναλογιζόμαι), where the Greek prefix \(\text{ανα} \) (“again,” “up”) is combined with \(\text{λογιζόμαι} \) (“to consider, reason, take into account, deliberate”), such that it means to go over and over something in the mind, thus to consider it carefully or think about it carefully, to think something over thoroughly or completely. Although the English word “consider” does technically mean to think about something carefully, the more common way it is used is to “take into account,” or keep in mind as an option. For example, “I’ll consider the person’s age when rendering my judgment,” or “I will consider walking instead of riding my bike.” That being said, “think carefully about” seems more on point for the modern reader.

“souls.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is \(\text{ψυχή} \) (ψυχή), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is used more broadly of the individual himself with an emphasis on his thoughts and emotions. Thus, while the verse could read something such as, “so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (NIV; cp. HCSB, ESV, NASB, NET), the inclusion of the word “soul” points us to the fact that the thoughts, feelings, and emotions are specifically being emphasized. If we are going to stay mentally and emotionally strong in the spiritual battle, we have to keep Jesus Christ and what he did firmly in our minds. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

12:5. Quoted from Proverbs 3:11.

“Have you completely forgotten.” This can be a statement or a question. The tone of the epistle seems to favor a question. The Author is not demeaning the hearers, but challenging them to look inside themselves. The Greek word \(\text{ἐκλανθάνομαι} \), in the middle voice, so here this compound verb means “to completely forget” (cp. BDAG Greek-English Lexicon).


12:15. “Oversee others.” The Greek verb translated “oversee” is \(\text{ἐπισκοπέω} \) (ἐπισκοπέω), and in this context it means to oversee, to accept responsibility for the care of someone, oversee, care for (BDAG). The word is built from \(\text{ἐπί} \), “over, on top of” and \(\text{σκοπός} \), “to watch, to see in the distance.” The noun \(\text{ἐπισκόπος} \) is the person who is the “overseer,” and the job he does is to “oversee,” \(\text{ἐπισκοπέω} \). If a congregation is to remain godly, the “Overseer” (today we might say “Pastor”) has to make sure that people do not infiltrate the flock and turn them from the Lord. The people to watch out for covered in this section fall into three categories. The first is people who have turned away from the grace of God and turned to legalism. Hebrews was written to Hebrews, so when a person turned away from grace, the normal path was a return to legalism. Just as Paul warned the Galatians against legalism, so here those in congregations are warned against legalism.

The second type of person a leader should watch for is bitter people who defile others (see “root of bitterness” below). The third type of person leaders should watch for in a congregation is godless people, people like Esau who are spiritually immoral and secular; who are irreligious. This kind of person can infect a congregation with a desire for, and focus on, the godless, secular, things of the world.
“root of bitterness sprouts up.” This phrase has great depth of meaning because it can refer both to the person who is the “bitter root,” and the process that leads to the root of bitterness. The primary meaning in this context does not refer to a bitter thought, but a bitter person. In that sense, the translation would be something like, “that no one is a ‘bitter root’ springing up and causing trouble, and through him many become defiled.” The context is about people, and how believers (in particular leaders) should exercise oversight so that 1) no person is falling away from the grace of God, 2) no person is a bitter root who defiles others, and 3) no person is immoral and irreligious like Esau. However, the text about the “root of bitterness” is written in such a way that it can also refer to the thoughts that are behind the behavior of the bitter person, and how a “root of bitterness” can grow up inside a person and eventually lead to many being defiled. Behind the person who is a “bitter root,” is the thought process that leads to bitterness—and this is something that each of us must be aware of and be prepared to deal with in our own lives, and help others deal with in their lives.

When a person becomes unthankful, selfish, angry, etc., that person’s brain neurons grow in a way that reinforces those thoughts. Over time as a person thinks bitter thoughts, the once loosely connected (or associated) neurons that produced occasional angry or bitter thoughts become more and more tightly associated, and nerve cell fibers, like the roots of a tree, actually grow and strengthen that thought process. We understand this growth and strengthening process when it comes to our ordinary memories. A memory we do not often access is fuzzy and vague, and we have a hard time “remembering” it. In contrast, a memory that we access regularly becomes stronger and stronger as we continue to access it. Two thousand years ago, the God who formed our brain knew that bitterness, like any other attitude or memory, would increase as the behavior continued. If we do not make up our minds to obey God and stop our anger, the angry thoughts we rehearse in our minds become more and more like a strong root, becoming more intertwined with emotions, which we then feel simultaneously with the thought. Eventually the now strong root of anger and bitterness breaks forth out of our thought life into the open, where it can defile many. A thought in the heart is like a root in the ground, it will spring out in the open eventually, unless it is killed off or rooted out. The brain is wonderfully designed by God so that we can, if we desire, stop the harmful thoughts of anger and bitterness, and that is what Christians are called to do.

“become defiled.” The subjunctive mood in the Greek sentence comes from the word “lest.” The point is not lest some might become defiled,” but rather, lest some become defiled.”

12:16. “worldly-minded.” The Greek word is ἐβηλὸς (bebēlos), and it refers to something that is accessible to everyone, and therefore devoid of any real spiritual significance. In religious contexts, an area that was ἐβηλὸς was available to anyone, religious or not, and therefore not special in any way. It was used literally to refer to things or areas that, although in or used in the Temple, were not special in any way. It was then also used for things that were pointless or worthless. It was also then used for things that were not valued or valuable spiritually, or were held in opposition to holiness (that which was separated for God) and thus were common, worldly, godless, irreligious, etc., depending on the context.

“like Esau.” Esau was raised in the godly home of Isaac and Rebekah. However, Scripture shows him doing some godly things, but making some important decisions that
showed his disregard for God and family. Chief among these was he sold his birthright, which included the right to be the family patriarch and priest, for a bowl of lentil soup. He also chose to marry two Hittite women (Gen. 26:34). When they proved to be a great distress to his mother, he married a daughter of Abraham’s son, Ishmael, but reading the record in Genesis shows that Esau was not focused on a godly life. The point in this record in Hebrews seems to be that some people are just not interested in being godly, but are profane, secular, worldly. That attitude can infiltrate a church and cause a lot of damage, and the vigilant leader will watch out for such people.

12:17. “found no opportunity for his repentance.” The Greek phrase, μετανοίας τόπον εὗρεν is a well attested Greek idiom for someone who looks for a chance to repent and thus come into different circumstances, but finds no such opportunity (cp. BDAG lexicon; William Lane, Word Biblical Commentary: Hebrews 9-13). Furthermore, the common translation of the word metanoia (#3341 μετανοία) in the New Testament is “repentance.” Some commentators think that the verse is saying that Esau could not bring about a “repentance” or “change of mind” in his father. While it is true that metanoia can mean “change of mind,” there is no need for that rare an understanding of the word: “repent” just does not seem to be used as eliciting repentance or a change of mind in someone else. It was Esau who repented and was sorry for the mistake he made, but there was no opportunity for his repentance to change anything. He had sold his birthright and the deal was done. No amount of his tears could change what had happened. This should be a huge lesson for everyone. On the Day of Judgment many people will be judged as to their salvation, and the prophecy is that many will weep and wail, but it will be too late. Now, when they have the chance to get saved, they mock and reject it. Later their tears will not change their fate. Similarly, people who are saved will be judged for rewards, which will be given out based on what the person did in life. Many people will rue their wasted life and will wish they had done more for the Lord to earn more rewards in the Kingdom, but again, it will be too late. Now is the time to get saved, and now is the time to work hard and obediently for the Kingdom. No one needs to be ashamed on Judgment Day. [For more on rewards, see commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:10. For people, even Christians, being ashamed when Jesus comes, see 1 John 2:28].

12:18. “not come to what can be touched.” Some manuscripts add the word “mountain,” but the manuscript evidence is clear that it was a later addition to the text. To the person familiar with the record of the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, this verse can be difficult to understand at first reading. The commandment in the Old Testament was that if any person or animal even touched Mt. Sinai, he was to be killed (Exod. 19:12, 13). So why does this verse speak of “what can be touched,” instead of “what cannot be touched,” i.e., what they were not allowed to touch. The answer lies in reading the entire context and the two sentences in contrast to each other. The first sentence is verses 18-21, and it speaks of things in the flesh, things that can be touched. The second sentence is verses 22-24, and they speak of heavenly things such as God; Jesus; angels; and the heavenly Jerusalem that are spiritual in nature and cannot be touched. Thus the section is saying, you have not been dealing with things in the senses world like the Old Testament believers did, you are dealing with heavenly things, so “see that you do not refuse him who spoke” (12:25).

12:19. “the voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further word should be spoken to them.” This statement is easy to understand for those people who really know
the Old Testament, but an enigma to those who do not. The common, but erroneous, teaching is that the first time the Ten Commandments were given, they were written on stone and given to Moses. That is not correct.

After the Exodus, Moses went up and down Mt. Sinai 7 times, and they all are recorded in the Book of Exodus.

- **1st time up:** 19:3; **1st down:** 19:7.
- **2nd time up:** 19:8; **2nd down:** 19:14.
- **3rd time up:** 19:20; **3rd down:** 19:25 [it was right after Moses’ third trip down the Mountain, when Moses was down with the people, that God spoke the Ten Commandments audibly to the people].
- **4th time up:** 20:21; **4th down:** 24:3.
- **5th time up:** 24:15; **5th down:** 32:15 [on this 5th trip Moses had been on the Mountain 40 days and nights. During that time he received the revelation about the Tabernacle, and also the Ten Commandments on stone. He had the tablets of stone with him when he came down, but he broke them when he saw the golden calf].
- **6th time up:** 32:31; **6th down:** 32:34.
- **7th time up:** 34:4; **7th down:** 34:29 [this 7th time Moses was again with Yahweh for 40 days and nights (34:28), and came down with a new set (the second set) of the Ten Commandments].

On Moses’ 2nd trip up Mt. Sinai, God told Moses to put boundaries around the Mountain so no one would touch the mountain. Then on his 3rd trip up the Mountain, God again told Moses to warn the people about not touching the Mountain. Thus, Exodus 19:25 says that Moses went down Mt. Sinai to the people (3rd trip down), and that is where he was, at the bottom of Mt. Sinai with the people, when God spoke the Ten Commandments audibly, in a loud voice so everyone could hear (cp. Exod. 20:2). It was later, on his 5th trip up the Mountain, that he got the first set of the Ten Commandments on stone.

When the people heard the voice of God shouting out the Ten Commandments, they were terrified, and asked that they not hear the voice of God any more (cp. Exod. 20:19). God honored that request and after that time spoke to Moses, who then communicated the Torah to Israel.

At the end of the forty years of wandering, in the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses recounted with Israel that God had given them the Ten Commandments by speaking with them.

**Deut. 4:10-13 (ESV)**

“…on the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, the LORD said to me, ‘Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me…And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire…Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice. And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments.…”

Again in Deuteronomy 4:15 God said that Israel had heard his voice, and again in 5:4, 22, and 23.
After Moses came down Mt. Sinai the 7th time, the Tabernacle was set up, and it was finished on the first day of the first month, of the second year of the wanderings, less than a year after Israel came out of Egypt. Once the Tabernacle was finished and set up, Israel only stayed in the area of Sinai for a little more than a month and a half, because on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year God moved them to the desert of Paran (Num. 10:11).

12:22. “that is.” Here the Greek word kai, often translated “and,” is used as an “even,” or “that is,” identifying “Mt. Zion” with the city of the living God.

“an uncountable number.” This is translated from the Greek word μυριάς (from which we get “myriad”), and it refers to an uncountable number.

“who are gathered for a festival.” The Greek word is πανήγυρις (pronounced pa-nay-goo-ris), and in both Jewish and Greek sources it was used of joyful gatherings for the feasts and festivals. The Greeks would have festal assemblies to celebrate the games, to honor a god, for special days, etc. The Jews would have festal assemblies at the times of the feasts on their calendar. This word was not understood in 1611, so the KJV starts the next verse, v. 23, before it and translated it “general assembly,” but the syntax best fits if it is used as part of the whole phrase that speaks of an uncountable number of angels in joyful, festal assembly (see William Lane; Word Biblical Commentary: Hebrews 9-13). What a great picture! Sometimes we think of the things of God as so serious, solemn, or somber that no one has any fun or a good time. It is wonderful to know that even angels gather at times in joyful assemblies, and it would seem from the word that just as God gave feasts to Israel, so there are specific feast times for the spiritual world as well.

12:23. “firstborn.” The Greek word is πρωτότοκος (from which we get “firstborn”), which means “firstborn.” There has not been general agreement as to what group this is referring to. It does not refer to Jesus because it is plural. Some scholars see this as a reference to the angels, who are the first ones created by God. In support of that is the structure, which has three things that refer to the heavenly Jerusalem which would be followed by three things that refer to angels. However, the phrase “whose names have been written in heaven” militates against the interpretation. Much more likely is that it refers to the Jews, who were God’s chosen people, and the word πρωτότοκος is used in the Septuagint of the Jews when God led them out of Egypt (cp. Exod. 4:22; Jer. 31:9). That would especially make sense because this is the book of Hebrews, written to the Jewish people.

“whose names have been written in heaven.” These saved people are not up in heaven, but are assured a place in heaven. The sense of permanence comes from the use of the perfect participle; their names have been written there and remain there. The people do not have to be in heaven to have their names written there, as Luke 10:20 makes clear.

“the spirits of righteous people who have finished their race.” The phrase, “the spirits of righteous people” was a way of referring to righteous people who have died.

The phrase “who have finished their course” is from the Greek verb is teleiōō (prōtotokos), which means “firstborn.” There has not been general agreement as to what group this is referring to. It does not refer to Jesus because it is plural. Some scholars see this as a reference to the angels, who are the first ones created by God. In support of that is the structure, which has three things that refer to the heavenly Jerusalem which would be followed by three things that refer to angels. However, the phrase “whose names have been written in heaven” militates against the interpretation. Much more likely is that it refers to the Jews, who were God’s chosen people, and the word πρωτότοκος is used in the Septuagint of the Jews when God led them out of Egypt (cp. Exod. 4:22; Jer. 31:9). That would especially make sense because this is the book of Hebrews, written to the Jewish people.

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up, reach the end of one’s labors, etc., and there can also be meanings specific to something; for example, in the Roman mystery religions it was used of consecrate or initiate (because the person had reached the end of the requirements). Furthermore, the Greek Sophocles used the word in the sense of “come to the end of one’s labors,” which also makes sense in this verse.

Most theologians believe that dead people are alive and go on as a soul or spirit to live in heaven or “hell.” From that perspective, people who have died righteous have “been perfected” and live in heaven. But the Bible teaches that dead people are not alive in any form, they are dead in every way [see Appendix 4: “The Dead are Dead”]. Thus, these people have not “been perfected” in the sense that they are now alive in perfect spirit bodies, but they have “finished their course.” Actually, the wide range of how this phrase could be translated can be much more easily seen in Luke 13:32, which speaks of the death of Christ and also uses teleioō in the passive voice. The KJV, following its standard way of translating teleioō as “perfected,” has: “And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected” (Luke 13:32). However, other versions have very different translations of teleioō and end Luke 13:32 very differently.

- HCSB, CEB, and NET: “I will complete my work” (the NRS has, “I finish my work”).
- ESV and RSV: “I finish my course.”
- NASB and CJB: “I reach my goal” (the NIV has, “I will reach my goal”).
- NLT: “I will accomplish my purpose.”

If we translated Hebrews 12:23 as those verses are translated, then we see that it is speaking of the spirit of righteous people who have “finished their work,” “finished their course,” “reached their goal,” “accomplished their purpose,” and, from Sophocles, “come to the end of their labor.” All of those choices make sense, and we went with “finished their race” in the REV because God gives each person a ministry and work to accomplish on this earth, which changes to a certain degree as life and circumstance change. In 2 Timothy 4:7 Paul writes that he had “finished his race,” and was now at the end of his life.

Hebrew chapter 11 opened its review of people who had stayed faithful and died in faith, and mentioned that even though Abel is dead, he still speaks, that is, his life stands as an example to us. Similarly, those righteous people who have died before us are an example and constant reminder to live a godly and obedient life, and “not refuse him who speaks” (12:25).

12:24. “sprinkled blood.” This is the figure of speech Antimerieia (Bullinger, Figures). The Greek reads, “blood of sprinkling” moving the adjective into a nominative position for emphasis.

“better.” Abel’s blood cried out of the ground for vengeance, and Cain was cursed (Gen. 4:10-12). In contrast, the blood of Christ speaks better things, and brings forgiveness, reconciliation, and salvation to those people who trust Christ.


“from the earth.” The Greek reads, “on earth,” but it is referring to God who was on earth and who warned the people from the top of Mount Sinai. The Israelites gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai and God spoke audibly to them from off of the top of the mountain (see commentary on Hebrews 12:19). God was “on earth,” on the top of Mount
Sinai, and Moses and the elders of Israel saw Him there (Exod. 24:9-11). The problem we have with a strictly literal reading of the Greek if we do not know the context of the verse or the history of Israel is that we could think the phrase “on earth” referred to the people of Israel who were “on earth.” For example, the NASB reads, “See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth,….” That reading makes it seem like the people on the earth were being warned, and that is not what the verse is saying, as we can see from the last half of the verse when God warns from heaven. The point of the verse is that if the people whom God warned from earth did not escape punishment, then we will certainly not escape punishment if God warns us from heaven but we ignore Him.

If we wanted to stick closer to the literal Greek without losing the idea of the verse, we could move the prepositional phrase: “For if they did not escape when they refused the one who, on earth, divinely warned them,….”


12:28. “be thankful.” One of the times that grace is used of gratefulness or thankfulness (Vincent’s Word Studies).

“reverent submission.” This word is only used twice in the NT, here and Hebrews 5:7. See the note there.

12:29. “our God is a consuming fire.” An allusion to Deuteronomy 4:24 in the Septuagint.

Chapter 13

13:1. “brotherly affection.” The Greek is philadelphia (#5360 φιλαδελφία, pronounced phi-la-del-phee’-a) a compound Greek word made up of philos (a strong liking, a friendship; see commentary on John 21:15) and adelphos (#80 ἀδελφός), which means “brother.” It is the strong bond of friendship that exists between brothers.

13:3. “Remember.” The Greek word is mimnēskō (#3403 μμνήσκω (μμνήσκομαι) pronounced mim-nace’-koe), and it means, “remember,” but in the ancient cultures it did not mean just mentally “remember,” but to keep in mind and do something for. Thayer’s lexicon has, “remember and care for.” Samson called out to God, “Remember me,” meaning, “Help me.” The thief on the cross said to Jesus, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42), meaning “Take care of me; let me be a part of your kingdom.” Abigail asked David to remember her when David became king (1 Sam. 25:31).

13:4. “Marriage.” The text moves from verses 1-3, which are about loving others (vv. 1-2) and especially remembering and caring for other Christians who are suffering (v. 3), to respecting others via respecting the marriage. The word “honor” is the first word in the sentence in the Greek text, and it made emphatic by its position in the sentence, and the adjectives are emphatic, thus the word “must” in the REV translation (cp. HCSB; NET. See also William Lane, Word Biblical Commentary: Hebrews).


13:9. “for it is good that the heart be established by grace, not by foods.” The use of “foods” here, although it can be generalized to all foods, more specifically refers to
ceremonial foods. Ritual sacrifices and ritual meals required by the Law caused some people to set and establish their heart before God by whether or not they did all the sacrifices correctly, and not due to the love, mercy and grace in their lives. It is easy to get caught up in religious practices and miss the real heart of God.

13:13. “let us go.” The verb is imperative, and so it can be an invitation, “Let us go,” or a command, “We must go.” There are versions that support both readings, and indeed, the is a place where both meanings are in play. We believe the invitation, “Let us go,” is in better accord with the tone of the epistle as far as the English translation goes, but we have to realize that if we are going to be saved and serve God, we “must” go to him outside the camp. We must go to him, we cannot remain in our ungodly, comfortable lifestyle and serve God; we must go to him outside the camp, and then follow him where he leads us.

13:17. “Yield.” The Greek verb is peithō (#3982 πειθω, pronounced pay’-thoe). The common meaning of peithō in the active voice is “to persuade.” Thus in the passive voice it means to allow someone to persuade you, to win your favor. It is used in the Greek literature of obeying or following a leader, of being confident in a leader, to listen to and obey a leader. The point we must keep in mind in translating this word would be how a native Greek speaker would read it. There were specific words that meant to “obey” a leader. For example, Titus 3:1, which speaks of obeying the government, uses the verb peitharchēō (#3980 πειθαρχέω), which is a compound verb using peithō with the word for “rule.” There have been too many times in history when Christian leaders have abused their authority and hurt Christians, using verses such as Hebrews 13:17 and demanding that other Christians “obey” them. According to this verse, Christians are to yield to their leaders, but not “obey” them no matter what they demand or say. The leaders are to persuade their followers and lead by example and by making reasonable and believable requests.

“souls.” See commentary on Hebrews 12:3

13:18. “since we desire.” The participle is causal.


“in connection with.” This verse is saying that when God led Christ out from among the dead, he did it in connection, or association, with the blood of the eternal covenant. The dative phrase en haimati (“in/with the blood”) cannot be understood as instrumental or means, which would make God using the blood as the means to raise up the Son. (Cp. Lenski).
James

Chapter 1

1:5. “generously.” The Greek word is haplōs (#574 ἅπλος), and literally means, “simply, sincerely, openly. It pertains to being open and above board, not hiding anything. Here it is used idiomatically for “generously,” and is the same basic idiom Jesus used in Matthew 6:22, when he said if your eye was “single,” then your whole body would be full of light. Idiomatically, the “single eye” is the generous eye. Christians are to give generously, liberally (see commentary on Matthew 6:22).

1:7. “Indeed.” This is the confirmatory gar, and has the force of “indeed,” or “yes.”

1:11. “burning heat.” The Greek is kausōn (#2742 καύσων), and means heat, burning (sun). This is not the scorching east wind, which is the usual meaning of kausōn in the Septuagint. The sun does not bring the wind from the desert. See BDAG.

“face.” The use of “face” is a Semitic idiom showing itself in the NT.

“pursuits.” Cp. Robertson, Word Studies. From an old word for “journeys,” thus “pursuits” is appropriate here.


1:17. “giving…gift.” The Greek word we translate “giving” is dosis (#1394 δόσις). The word dosis is a verbal noun, and can be translated either “gift” or “giving.” Scholars, and hence English versions, differ as to whether the verse should be translated “every good gift and every perfect gift” (cp. ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV) or, “All giving that is good, and every gift that is perfect” (cp. HCSB; NAB; NET; NRSV; Rotherham).

The two words in the verse that are sometimes both translated “gift” are different, dosis and dōrema, which will be handled below. It was a typical Hebraic pattern, especially a poetic pattern, to say something two different ways for clarity (cp. Prov. 2:1-4, which repeat the basic concept in the first and last phases of the verse). For that reason many scholars think that the two phrases are parallel and should both be translated “gift.” Other scholars think that the emphasis should be that both good giving, and perfect gifts, are from God. This would make sense because God created man in His image, and put in his heart the knowledge of good, to which was added the knowledge of evil at the Fall (cp. Gen. 3:5, 22; Rom. 2:14). Also, although dosis and dōrema could be used together purely for emphasis and both mean “gift,” the fact that dosis can refer to giving while dōrema was a common word for a gift, a free gift, seems to place a difference between dosis and dōrema that we should recognize in our English versions.

Anyone reading the Greek text immediately sees both meanings of dosis and realizes that it could be saying that both good giving and good gifts come from God above, as to “perfect gifts.” We assert that God chose the word dosis knowing full well that both its meanings were true and important for the two reasons: making a difference between giving (dosis) and the perfect gift (dōrema), and also as a repetition and thus a confirmation and emphasis that all good gifts were from God.

When a word or phrase can mean two different things, and both are true and can apply in the context, that can be the figure of speech amphibologia (see Bullinger;
Figures of Speech Used in the Bible), and we believe that is the case in this verse. Given that both meanings are true but only one can be represented well in English, we felt that it was better to put the “giving” in the text so that it could be seen along with the “gift.”

By telling us that all giving that is good and every good gift is from above and comes down from the Father of Lights, this verse is making some very important points. One is that not all giving or all gifts are good. Much giving and many gifts can be harmful. The wise Christian knows how to give good gifts, and also when someone’s giving and the gift they give are not a blessing, but actually cause harm.

“Father of lights.” Although this phrase can be seen as a simple appellation for “God,” it is very profound and should catch our attention. God is not the only light, although He is obviously the dominant and unchanging light. But it was always God’s desire to have a family, and His family has His nature. Thus even humans who are “lights.”

“Shifting shadow cast by his changing.” The Greek word translated “changing” is tropeē (τροπή; pronounced trop-ā), and it occurs only here in the New Testament and is a word that generally refers to the turning of heavenly bodies, like the moon around the sun. It is in the genitive case, and we, along with scholars like R. C. H. Lenski, assert that it is a genitive of cause, “of changing” means “by changing,” that is, as the sun “turns” through the sky.

The exact metaphor is uncertain, but since the context is the God being the “Father of lights,” meaning the most prominent light and the source of all the other lights in heaven, it is likely that this is a reference to the way the heavenly bodies move and vary in the way they cast light and hence cause a shifting shadow. God is a stable, steady, light, and does not cause shifting shadows like other heavenly lights that vary due to time of month, time of day, weather, etc. Of course, other lights of whom God is the Father include spiritual beings and us as the children of God. We are also light (cp. Matt. 5:14: “You are the light of the world”), but unlike God shine brighter some days that others.

The meaning of James 1:17 is clear even if exactly how to translate that idea from the text is somewhat challenging due to the grammar of the phrase—something that can be seen simply by checking a few different English Bibles, many of which differ as to exactly how to bring the phrase into English. The word “changing” (or “turning”) is in the genitive case, which, as we noted above, we assert is a genitive of cause. James Adamson (The New International Commentary on the New Testament) thinks it is a genitive of description (genitive of apposition), which would make the verse read more like, “with whom there is no shadow, that is to say, changing.” The meaning of the verse is that God, the Father of lights, does not change like other lights and therefore does not cast a shifting shadow.

1:18. “Gave birth.” apokueō (ἀποκύεω; Strong’s #616) from the Greek prefix apo, “away from,” and kueō, “to be pregnant.” It means “to give birth to.” In this context it refers to the new birth that Christians get when they are “born again” and receive holy spirit. It is one of the three words used for the individual new birth of a Christian that guarantees him everlasting life (see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:23).

“A kind of firstfruits.” There are many kinds of firstfruits. The firstborn child was the firstfruits of the family (Gen. 49:3; Deut. 21:17). There was also the firstfruits of the harvest (Exod. 23:19; Deut. 18:4), the firstfruits of the wine, oil, and honey (2 Chron. 31:5); and the firstfruits of the gift of holy spirit (Rom. 8:23). Epaenetus is called, “the
firstfruits of Asia” (Rom. 16:5), because he was one of the first Christians to be saved in the Roman province of Asia. Similarly, the household of Stephanas is called “the firstfruits of Achaia,” which is today southern Greece. Jesus was the first person raised from the dead to everlasting life, and so is called, “the firstfruits from the dead” (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). In the New Testament, Christians are referred to as the firstfruits here and in 2 Thessalonians 2:13 (see commentary on 2 Thessalonians 2:13). Because there are many kinds of firstfruits, we are referred to as “a kind of firstfruits.”

1:19. “You know this, my beloved brothers!” This phrase goes with verse 18. James is referring to what the people know about what God has done. R. C. H. Lenski correctly observes: “…the unexpressed object of what the brethren know or are to know (and thus to act on) is what James has been saying in the preceding verses; it cannot be what follows because this consists of more imperatives” (The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James).

1:20. “a man’s.” The Greek word is anēr. The book of James uses both the Greek word anēr (#435 ἄνηρ), used generally for a male, a man, a husband; and also the word anthropos (#444 ἄνθρωπος), which is the generic term for “man,” mankind, and can include men and women. The word anēr occurs six times in James (1:8, 12, 20, 23; 2:2; 3:2). The word anthropos occurs seven times (1:7, 19; 2:20, 24; 3:8, 9; 5:17). Various explanations have been given as to why James goes back and forth between anēr and anthropos. In some verses one clearly seems to fit better than the other. However, in general, anthropos always has generic implications of mankind, and implies aspects of the character, rights, duties, and limitations of human nature (cp. James Adamson, The Epistle of James). In contrast, the word anēr can refer to a male, but it also sometimes has a more generic implication but always with an individualizing influence, as if it read “each man” (each one) or to emphasize the individual, just as when we say, “That person is ‘someone,’” or “She is a ‘somebody.’” In those examples, the words “someone” or “somebody” mean someone important. This presents a problem for translators. Just as 2000 years from now people unfamiliar with English might miss the meaning of our sentence, “She is really a somebody,” we can miss the meaning of anēr and think that it always excludes women. At the same time, it does often refer to males or male characteristics, as seems to be the case here. Thus, while many versions have something like, “For human anger does not produce the righteousness of God,” and that is certainly true, it likely misses the cultural overtone that in the Greco-Roman culture (and the Jewish culture too) a man becoming angry and using his voice and strength to accomplish something was both common and accepted, and this was considered to be typically male, not female trait. Women were generally expected to be more subdued in how they acted.

1:21. “wickedness (of which there is an abundance).” The Greek for this phrase literally means, “abundance of wickedness” or “overflowing of wickedness.” However, it is clear that James is not saying that the Christian can be involved in a little wickedness but not an abundance or “overflowing” of it. Sophie Laws writes: “James’ meaning is clear although he uses his words imprecisely.” Also, “His fondness for cadence and alliteration has produced a difficulty in translation. The noun perisseia normally means an excess or surplus. James is hardly counseling merely the discarding of surplus malice!” (Black’s New Testament Commentary: The Epistle of James). By using the word perisseia (#4050 περισσεῖα), James is saying, perhaps even by using hyperbole, that we have to get rid of wickedness, and there is an abundance of it! Every serous Christian
realizes how much wickedness lives in them. It is a herculean task to rid ourselves of the evil that seems to come up from within our hearts. Every Christian must be constantly vigilant to rid ourselves of the abundance of wickedness that arises in our lives.

“The word that has been planted in you.” The word of God was planted in us by our teachers. The word was planted in us, but now we have to nurture it and make it grow into fruition in our lives. It is important to see that we are to receive the word with meekness.” Meekness is coachability, the willingness to change when taught, coached, and corrected. Our natural minds are at opposition to the Word, and so it is imperative that we receive it with a mind that says, “Teach me and I will change.”

“souls.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is ψυχή (ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is used more broadly of the individual himself with an emphasis on his thoughts and emotions. Thus, while the verse could read something such as, “which can save you” (NIV; cp. HCSB), the inclusion of the word “soul” points us to the fact that the thoughts, feelings, and emotions are being considered as well.

There is a deep truth imbedded in this verse. Although the primary meaning is certainly that the Word of God is able to “save us,” give us everlasting life, the word “save” is used of being rescued in this life also, and the word “soul” can refer to our mental and emotional state. Thus while the most dominant meaning in the verses is that the Word of God is able to save our lives from death; a secondary and imbedded meaning is that it is also able to give wholeness to our mental and emotional life. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

1:23. “man.” The Greek is ἀνήρ (#435 ἀνήρ), which is specifically used of a person of the male sex. The word “man” in this verse does not stand out as much as it should because in most English versions the Greek word anthropos is usually translated “man” or “men,” when, although it certainly was used of men and the biblical culture was male dominated, anthropos generally refers to “people” in general, including of both sexes. Here, however, the Bible specifically speaks of a “man” who looks in a mirror and immediately forgets what he looks like. This is a male-typical trait. Most women look at themselves in mirrors with more care, and more frequency than men do, and usually do not immediately forget what they look like. For more on “man” and ἀνήρ, see commentary on James 1:20.

1:25. “looks intently.” The Greek word is parakuptō (#3879 παρακύπτω), and it means to stoop down or towards something in order to look at it, or to look at something with the head bowed forward or with the body bent over. It is also used metaphorically for looking at or into something carefully or intently. There is a metaphorical use of the verb in which it is used for a rapid or cursory glance, and some commentators have taken that to be the sense in Scripture. However, the only place that meaning may fit in Scripture is 1 Peter 1:12 (see commentary on John 20:5).

Chapter 2

2:7. “defame.” The Greek verb blasphēmeō (βλασφημεώ) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].


2:10. “…stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all of it.” Occasionally someone will say this verse proves that all sin is equal in the eyes of God. That is clearly not the case. James is speaking in the context of people who would ignore or minimize their sin, and he points out that even one sin makes us as sinful as if we had broken the whole Law. While it is true that committing one sin makes us as sinful as if we had broken the whole Law, because sin is sin, that is not the same as saying that all sins are equally serious. It is clear from both Scripture and logic that some sins are more serious than others.

That not all sins are equal should be clear from the words of Jesus. Speaking to Pilate, he said, “The one [Judas] who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin” (John 19:11). Here the Lord explicitly said that Judas’ sin of handing Jesus over was a “greater sin” than Pilate’s. Further, that there is such a thing as an “unforgivable sin” ought to give us pause to consider that not all sins are equal (cp. Mark 3:28-29).

In the Law, the consequence of some sins was the death penalty, while the consequence for other sins was only a beating, and some sins were only punished by fines. The seriousness of the penalty reflected the seriousness of the crime, and it is obvious that God considered some sins more serious than others. This is also true in the New Testament. Everyone sinned, but some sins were so serious that people who committed them were put out of the church (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20). Furthermore, Ephesians 5:5 notes sexual immorality and covetousness as sins that will keep a person from having an inheritance in the future Kingdom of God.

Also, Paul told us that if someone sinned against us in a small, or “trivial,” way, we should not go to court (1 Cor. 6:2 NIV, ESV, NET, RSV, NRSV, NJB, etc.). However, if someone sins against us in a way that was not trivial, the implication is that we can go to court, because the civil authorities are for our good, and carry out God’s wrath on evildoers (Rom. 13:4). We all know this from the common experiences of life. If we loan a fellow Christian $250 because we know them and trust them, but then they refuse to pay us back, we would not sue them. But if someone was a Christian but acted in a dangerous and criminal way by murdering, raping, stealing a car, or committing a crime that was not “trivial,” we would call the police or even sue to regain our property. Both Scripture and logic tell us that some sins are “trivial,” while some are serious. The consequences of trivial sins are minimal, while the consequences of serious sins are serious.


2:19. “There is one God.” This reading, or the reading, “God is one,” are the two most likely readings from the manuscripts. The reading “God is one” “…agrees with the common Jewish orthodoxy of the time regarding the unity of God” (R. Omanson, A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament). There are a half dozen or so variations of this phrase, some of them obvious changes made by the Church to conform the verse to the beliefs of the day.


Chapter 3

3:4. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).
3:5. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).
3:6. “cycle of human life.” Vincent (Word Studies) correctly observes that this is “a very obscure passage.” Even exactly how to bring the Greek words into literal English is difficult, due to the multiple meanings of the words. Thus, trochos (τροχός), properly “wheel,” was also used of anything circular, including “course,” “pattern,” or “cycle.” The Greek word genesis (γένεσις), most literally “birth,” was also used of existence or human life. Thus the commentators vary greatly as to how to translate the phrase. For example, “wheel of birth” (Vincent), “wheel of existence” (Lenski), “course of nature” (YLT), “course of human existence” (NET).

Most commentators like “life” or “existence” better than “birth” (see Lenski) and believe the tongue defiles one’s course of life, which of course it does. However, in using the word genesis, the verse points to the effect of the tongue being multi-generational. The verse already says that the tongue “defiles the whole body.” Sadly, the tongue that is set on fire by Gehenna destroys not only the life of the man with the fiery tongue, but generations after him.

“Gehenna.” See commentary note on Matthew 5:22. [For information on annihilation in the lake of fire, see Appendix 5: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”.

3:9. “curse.” Cursing others was very common in the biblical world. For more on curses, see commentary on Luke 6:28.
3:15. “merely of the soul.” [For more on psuchikos see commentary on 1 Corinthians 2:14, “natural”].
3:18. “the fruit of righteousness” is a genitive of apposition, “the fruit that is to say, righteousness.

“by those who make peace.” This seems to be the most natural reading, although the text can also be translated, “for those who make peace.” While it is true that those who sow peace reap it, thus it is sown for them, it seems more the case that those who sow in peace are the ones trying to make peace. This is a case where the Greek can encompass both meanings in one word.
Chapter 4

4:1. "wars." The Greek is polemos (πόλεμος) and it means a war, an armed conflict, a fight, a battle. It was used of a dispute, strife, or quarrel, but in a lesser sense. This is the figure of speech Hyperbole, exaggeration. There were not armed conflicts between believers, but because God wants believers to live in peace, any sharp conflict is exaggerated.

“fighting.” The Greek is machē (μάχη), and it is a battle or a fight, but not as widespread as polemos (πόλεμος), “war.”

“desires for pleasure.” The Greek reads simply hedonē (ἡδονή) in the plural, or “pleasures.” This is the figure of speech metonymy, where “pleasures” is put for the desire for pleasures (Cp. Bullinger, Figures).

4:4. “Adulteresses.” This exclamation is typical Jewish thinking. The people of God were married to God and were accused of adultery toward their husband, God, when they sinned against Him (Cp. Jer. 3:6-8; 5:7; Ezek. 16:32; Hos. 1:2).

4:5. “spirit.” Robertson (Word Pictures in the New Testament) and other commentators ask the question, “Does the “spirit” in the verse refer to God’s spirit or man’s “spirit” (i.e., his sin nature, attitudes, etc.)?” There seems to be more evidence for the fact that this use of “spirit” refers to our attitudes and emotions. People, yearm enviously, and especially so in light of this context, which is about people living by their lust. “The evil spirit is the evil impulse…in us. …There is a spirit in us which longs to envy and thus inclines us to fight each other…..” (David Stern, Jewish New Testament Commentary). If we understand that the spirit in this verse is the sin nature and fleshly attitudes, then we can understand the very next phrase, “But he gives a greater grace.” We all need the greater grace of God to overcome the evil desires that emanate from our fleshly nature.

“caused to dwell in us.” “Caused” is better than “made.” We humans were “made” with a “human spirit,” that is, our inner attitudes and disposition of mind, but that original making was changed when Adam sinned and as a result God “caused” (Hebrew idiom of permission; see commentary on Romans 9:18) the spirit to envy when it became tinted with sin nature.

4:6. Quoted from Proverbs 3:34. There is so much teaching on “free grace” and “God loves everyone,” that this verse is basically ignored by everyone. God does love everyone, and God does show grace to everyone, but that does not mean that God also has conditional love and conditional grace that He only gives to some people.

Any parent with lots of children knows that each child is loved. However, if one child is rebellious and another one is helpful and obedient, the parents will often do things and extend themselves a little more for the obedient child than they will for the rebellious child. That is the case with God. Everyone gets some grace from God, but those who humble themselves before him get special grace, special help from God, that rebellious people just do not get. That is what this verse says, and the statement is repeated for emphasis 1 Peter 5:5.

We see the principle of God giving special grace to those who are humble all through the Bible. People who dedicate themselves to God get blessings in ways that people who do not serve God never get. A good example is Daniel, who dedicated himself to God throughout his life. He was blessed with the visitation of an angel, who addressed him by saying, “O Daniel, man greatly loved,” (Dan. 10:11). The Bible even
makes the point that Jesus himself was heard by God “because of his reverent submission” (Heb. 5:7; see commentary there). If we want our prayers answered consistently, we must become reverently submissive to the will of God, like Jesus was.

4:7. “the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

Chapter 5

5:3. “treasured up wrath for the last days.” Most modern translations miss the figure of speech Ellipsis in this sentence. It is usually translated as if “have heaped” is the verb and “treasure” is its noun object. However, there is only a verb in Greek, which could be translated “heaped up” [as a treasure is heaped up] or perhaps better, “treasured up.” But if the sentence is, “You have treasured up for the last days,” we are left needing to know what has been treasured up. From both the context and the scope of Scripture (Rom. 2:5), we can supply the Ellipsis: “You have treasured up wrath for the last days” (the 1899 Douay-Rheims version correctly supplies “wrath”). The way God has artfully written the verse with the figure of speech Ellipsis de-emphasizes the wrath that God will mete out, and emphasizes that the wicked will get what they deserve because they themselves are the ones heaping and treasuring up the wrath.

5:4. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“Lord of the Armies.” The Greek is Sabaoth; Σαβαώθ, and is a loan word transliterated from the Hebrew sabaoth which means “armies,” or “hosts.” It is used in the OT in the title for God Lord of hosts, and then also appears in the NT as Lord of the armies (Romans 9:29; James 5:4). There has been debate among commentators about whether this refers to the armies of Israel, the heavenly armies, or both. It is unfortunate that the phrase “Lord of hosts” has come in to our modern versions, because the word “hosts” is not used now like it was 400 years ago in the days of the KJV. Today a “host” is usually assumed to be the person who is in charge of a party, or somehow involved in serving others at a party or social event. The Hebrew and Greek word mean “army,” and God is the “Lord of the army.” He commands the army of heaven, although some scholars believe that the phrase originated with him commanding the armies of Israel; but that does not seem to be correct, although, when Israel was obeying God, He certainly was the commander of its army.

5:7. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“early.” The early rain comes in the autumn, even during the planting season (most grain in Israel is planted during the fall, like our winter wheat, and is mostly dormant over the winter, then ripens in the early spring). The late, or latter, rains, come in the spring and bring the bountiful harvest.
5:9. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδοւ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

5:11. “Take notice!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδου), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).


5:15. “and the prayer of trust will save the one who is sick.” This verse has been a cause of confusion to many believers. The question we must ask and answer is, “What is the prayer of trust.” There are some important keys in the verse, context, and scope of Scripture that will help us understand what it is, and we will see that “the prayer of trust” refers to a prayer that a person prays by revelation while operating the “manifestation of trust.”

Before we begin our analysis of the phrase, “the prayer of trust,” it is important to realize that the use of “save” in James 5:15 refers to healing, not to eternal salvation. The Greek word is σῴζω (#4982 σῴζω), and it was a commonly used word with a range of meanings that included to rescue from danger or destruction (cp. Matt. 14:30; 27:40), and to save from sickness and disease, thus to make well, make whole, or heal (cp. Matt. 9:21; Mark 5:23, 28; 6:56; 10:52). At some point in history the word σ_WORDS[383] became used for being rescued from God’s judgment and wrath (cp. Joel 2:32, Septuagint) and so it is used in the Bible, particularly the New Testament, in the special sense of giving someone everlasting life.

When most Christians today hear the word “save” they only think of “have everlasting life,” but that is in large part because many modern versions have translated σ_WORDS[394] as “save” only in the context of having everlasting life, and translate it as “heal,” “rescue,” “restore,” etc., in other contexts. That is the case here in James 5:15, where, to avoid confusion, many modern versions translate σ_WORDS[394] using words that refer to healing (cp. CJB and NLT “heal;” GWN “cure;” NASB “restore;” NIV “make the sick person well”).

The Greek word for “prayer” is euchē, (#2171 εὐχή) and it has two primary definitions, “prayer” and “vow.” In the other two places euchē occurs, it means vow (Acts 18:18; 21:23), but here it refers to a prayer. Euchē was commonly used in Greek literature for prayer or petitions to the gods.

Also, it is very important that we understand why the REV translation has, “the prayer of trust,” when almost every other version says “the prayer of faith.” The Greek word we translate “trust” is pístis, (#4102 πίστις). Pístis was a commonly used Greek word, and it means “trust,” “confidence” or “assurance.” When the Greek New Testament was translated into Latin, pístis was translated as the Latin fides (pronounced fee-dace). Our English word “faith” comes from the Latin fides. Sadly, through the years the definition of the English word “faith” changed from its simple biblical meaning of “trust” to what it is today: “firm belief in something for which there is no proof” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary; 11th edition). Thus, when religious people have no proof for what they believe, we often hear them say, “You just have to take it by faith.” It is vital to understand that “belief in something for which there is no proof” is an unbiblical definition that developed over the years because the Church told people to believe in things for which there was no proof, such as the wine becoming the blood of Christ in a communion service.
Jesus never asked anyone to believe he was the Messiah without proof. He fulfilled the Messianic prophecies, healed the sick, raised the dead, and did miracles, and he asked people to believe the miracles that he did (John 10:38). Similarly, God does not ask us to believe Him without proof. He has left many evidences that He exists and that His Word is true. Thus when God asks us to have trust (“faith”), He is not asking us to believe something without proof. God proves Himself to us, and that is why we trust Him. Since “trust” is the biblical definition of *pistis*, the REV version translates *pistis* as “trust.”

Another reason the REV uses “trust” instead of “faith” is that in our modern times in some religious circles the word “faith” has come to refer to a power that people have within themselves to accomplish things, but biblically such power does not exist. God is the Power, and has the power, and we accomplish things with His power, not ours. We trust God, who then supplies the power to make things happen.

The reason James 5:15 is so confusing is that although it says “the prayer of trust will save the one who is sick,” through the years many very committed Christians who believe in divine healing and genuinely have great trust in the Lord have prayed for people to be healed but not gotten results—some individuals remained sick while others even got worse. This situation is made even more confusing because some of the people who were prayed for did get better, sometimes immediately and clearly miraculously, while sometimes more “naturally,” the body healing itself, as it most often does. But if the “prayer of trust” will heal the sick, why does it not work every time?

One of the keys to unlocking what James 5:15 is saying is that the previous verse, James 5:14, made it clear that the person or persons praying the “prayer of trust” is not the sick person himself, but a committed member of the Church, who is therefore called an “elder.” It is vital to understand this because even though Scripture teaches that the trust of the sick person is important for healing, that is not what “the prayer of trust” in James 5:15 is referring to. The context shows us that the “prayer of trust” is a prayer that someone prays for the one who is sick.

The most important key to understanding James 5:15 is knowing that the “prayer of trust,” refers to the manifestation of trust, which is one of the nine manifestations of the gift of holy spirit. Most Christians have not been taught about the difference between “trust” and “the manifestation of trust” that is spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12:9. It is therefore important to briefly talk about “the manifestation of trust” so we understand it. The manifestation of trust is a manifestation of the gift of holy spirit, and it is a person having the confidence or trust that what God or the Lord Jesus Christ has revealed to him by revelation will come to pass at his command. [For more information on the manifestation of trust, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:9, and for more on what revelation is and how it works, see commentary on Galatians 1:12].

Regular “trust” is different from the manifestation of trust. All of us have regular trust in a large number of things. In fact, ordinary life would be impossible without trust. A person would not sit down on a chair if he did not trust it would hold him or take a drink of water if he did not trust it was safe. This trust that we use in everyday life is the trust that we have that Jesus was raised from the dead. At some point in our life we had “enough proof” to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, and we trusted in him and were saved.
In contrast to ordinary trust, the manifestation of trust is necessary to accomplish the special tasks that God, by revelation, asks us to do. For example, Jesus said that a person with trust could tell a mountain to be cast into the ocean and it would be done (Mark 11:23). Well, all of us have seen mountains, and we know that we do not have the human power to move them, so how can we just “trust” that we can cast a mountain into the sea just by commanding it to happen? We need to access the power of God to move the mountain. To be able to “trust” that God’s power is available to us to perform a miracle we need God to tell us by revelation that we can do it.

The way the manifestation of trust works is that God first tells us to do something by revelation. Then, having the revelation from God that we can do the miracle, we trust the revelation and command the miracle to happen. The trust we have in what God told us by revelation is “the manifestation of trust,” and when we trust what God has revealed to us—no matter how difficult it seems—miracles happen, just like they did in the Bible.

Learning about the manifestation of trust is made more difficult by the fact that often the Bible just says “trust” (“faith”) when the context dictates it is the manifestation of trust that is being referred to, and that is the case in James 5:15. While there are many records in the Bible that show God giving revelation first and then the person operating the manifestation of trust and accomplishing the miracle, there are also many records that do not explicitly state that God gave revelation first. Although this might seem confusing, it is simple to understand. God expects us to understand how the manifestation of trust works by studying the whole Bible. If we cannot do something by our natural human ability, then we need God’s power, and that means we must have a revelation from Him that we can trust in. Once God gives us the revelation, we can then trust what He says and command the miracle, which God’s power then brings to pass.

When we understand the manifestation of trust we can see how inseparably it works with the other manifestations of the spirit. First, God tells us what we can do. He does this by giving us revelation, which He does via the manifestations of word of knowledge and word of wisdom (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:8). Then we, operating the manifestation of trust, trust without doubting what God just told us, no matter how impossible it seems. Then God brings the miracle to pass. This pattern occurs throughout the Scripture. For example, God told Moses what to do to split the sea. Moses then trusted without doubting and God provided the power for the miracle and the sea split so Israel could pass through. Similarly, God told Joshua what to do to defeat Jericho. Joshua trusted God completely and God provided the power that brought down the walls of Jericho.

Before we can do a miraculous healing, we have to hear from God that He will provide the power to heal. That explains why Jesus, the apostles, and people with great trust for healing never healed every sick person. For example, in John 5 Jesus went to the Pool of Bethesda, where there was a great crowd of sick and lame people, but Jesus only healed one person—a lame man. Why only him? The Bible does not say, but God knows the situation of every person, and if He does not give us the revelation to heal a person, we cannot “just heal” based on our regular trust.

How do we know that the trust referred to in James 5:15 is the manifestation of trust and not “regular trust?” One way is that the immediate context mentions Elijah, who prayed for it not to rain in Israel (1 Kings 17:1), and for three and a half years there was no rain or dew in Israel. Without revelation from God Elijah never would have, nor could
have, done that miracle. He never would have done it because without revelation Elijah
would never have been sure that causing such hardship for the entire nation was the will
of God. He never could have done it because even though Elijah was a man who trusted
God, human trust alone cannot stop the forces of nature like rain and dew that God put in
place to keep life on earth alive. Those kind of results require the power of God, which
means that God first has to give revelation to us about what He wants to happen, and then
we operate the manifestation of trust to access the power of God and bring the miracle to
pass.

In summary, we know that the “prayer of trust” referred to in James 5:15 cannot
simply be referring to the prayer of an elder with trust since there are so many times
when healing does not occur that way. The “prayer of trust” must be referring to a prayer
prayed by revelation while the person praying is operating the manifestation of trust,
because whenever a person ministers healing on the basis of revelation with the
manifestation of trust, healing always occurs.

James 5:15 is a wonderful and encouraging verse because it reminds us that if
God gives us revelation to heal, the prayer of trust will heal the person no matter how
sick he is, like the lame man in Acts 3, or even if he is dead, like Tabitha in Acts 9. We
cannot heal by our own trust, but “the prayer of trust” will heal the sick.

5:17. “prayer he prayed.” A beautiful polyptoton emphasizing the fervency of the
action. See Bullinger, *Figures of Speech.*

5:20. “soul.” In this context, “soul” refers to the life of the body. See commentary on
Romans 11:3.
1 Peter

Chapter 1

1:2. “sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ.” This sprinkling of the blood of Christ is not referring to the new birth, or the cleansing of sin when one gets saved. Rather, this is speaking of a continual cleansing of sin throughout a believer’s life. The Greek of 1 Peter 1:2 literally reads, “In sanctification of spirit resulting in [eis # 1519 εἰς] obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” The obedience and sprinkling of the blood is the result of sanctification. If sanctification means the act of being made holy by God, this verse would be very confusing; we usually think of this sanctified state as the result of being washed by the blood of Christ, forgiven of our sins, and not the other way around (1 Cor. 6:11). Sanctification is not used only in this sense in scripture, however. It can also refer to the progressive holiness in the believer’s life as he sets himself apart from the world (1 Thess. 4:3-7; 1 Tim. 2:15; 21). This is its sense in this passage; this sanctification results in obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

That the sprinkling of Christ’s blood on believers is not merely a one-time salvation event can be seen in
1 John 1:7-9 (NIV):

(7) But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (8) If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

In the context of 1 John, to walk in the light is to acknowledge (confess) that one has sin (1 John 1:6); when we do this Christ’s blood purifies us from all sin.

The connection of obedience and sprinkling of blood in here in 1 Peter is an allusion to the Old Testament record of Moses sprinkling the Israelites who claimed they would obey all the words of the covenant (Exod. 24:7-8). The sprinkling of blood in the Old Covenant was not a one-time event either, but had two stages. First, there was the Day of Atonement, the yearly festival when the high priest would sacrifice for his own sin then sacrifice and sprinkle blood for the guilt of the people (Lev. 16). This was done to cover all the sins of the people that year. Secondly, there were all the other offerings that could be done throughout the year—burnt offerings, trespass offerings, guilt offerings—when one has sinned and felt separated from God. The blood of Christ in the New Covenant parallels this twofold purpose of sprinkling in the Old Covenant—there is the one-time sprinkling that covers the guilt of our sin and there is the continual sprinkling of forgiveness for sins throughout life. The difference between the Old and New covenants is that instead of a yearly offering, Christ offered himself once-and-for-all to redeem the people, and instead of cleansing our conscience with the blood of bulls and goats we can appeal to the blood of Christ (Heb. 9:25-26; 10:1-14). 1 Peter 1:18-19, which speaks of Christ’s blood “redeeming” us, is referring to a Day-of-Atonement-like function of Christ’s sacrifice, while 1 John 1:7-9 speaks to the continual sprinkling that has made the various sin offerings obsolete.
1:3. “who.” The Greek has the article ho (#3588 ὁ) before the active participle translated “given us new birth;” this is done for emphasis on “the one” who is doing the action. An expanded translation would read, “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the one who… has given us new birth” (emphasis added).

“mercy.” Cp. Ephesians 2:4. We do not deserve life, but God gives it in His mercy.

“new birth into a living hope.” For the New Birth to be seen for all that it is, we must see it in relation to the Hope. The New Birth gives us many blessings now, but they are small if all we have is this life without an everlasting future. We are still in our flesh bodies and have many problems. Yet, we have new birth into a living hope—we shall one day have new bodies and live forever in Paradise.

Another possible translation, although less readable, would be “birthed us again.” The NASB, ESV reading, “caused us to be born again” gives the wrong impression. God did not “cause” us to be born again, although He was the One who gave birth in us. The decision to get “born again” was ours.

The Greek word for “new birth” is the active voice, aorist tense, participle of anagennaô (#313 ἀναγεννάω). The active voice shows that God is the one begetting us again, he is performing the action of producing the new birth. But this does not show that he caused us to be born again, only that he performed the action of new birth once the cause was fulfilled. The scope of scripture indicates that it is our faith and free choice that causes us to be saved; once this prerequisite condition is fulfilled God gives us new birth into his family (cp. Eph. 1:13). [For more on our spiritual birth, see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation”]

“out from among the dead.” See Romans 4:24. Wuest: “out from among those who are dead.”

1:4. “in heaven.” It is important to realize that the inheritance is only said to be stored up in heaven because we have no way to access it now. It is in God’s keeping. This verse is not saying that when we die, we will be in heaven, but just that the treasure is in the hands of God now (see commentary on Matt. 5:12). Our inheritance will be realized when Christ comes back to earth and sets up his kingdom (see commentary on Matt. 5:5, “the meek will inherit the earth”). When Jesus sets up his kingdom on earth, people will be rewarded or punished according as they deserve (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10).

1:9. “souls.” Here it refers to saving one’s life. See commentary on Romans 11:3.

1:10. “this salvation.” This is not referring to our new birth salvation, given at the time of believing the gospel, but the “salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1:5), “at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1:7).

“who prophesied of the grace.” The grace they mention will be part of the Millennial Kingdom, and it has now come to Christians unexpectedly as part of the Sacred Secret, the “Grace Administration.”

1:11. “searching for what or what kind of time.” The Millennial Kingdom is not well defined in the Old Testament, so the prophets searched for how long it was and what manner of period it was. By the grace of God, many blessings of the Millennial Kingdom, such as the holy spirit, have been given to Christians now.

1:12. “by the holy spirit.” The REV has “by the spirit,” adding the word “the” even though the Greek text does not have it. The Greek reads en pneuma (“in spirit”), but the definite article is not needed in prepositional phrases to make the noun definite. Daniel Wallace writes: “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a
1 Peter

“look.” The Greek word is parakuptō (#3879 παρακύπτω), and it means to stoop down or towards something in order to look at it, or to look at something with the head bowed forward or with the body bent over. It is also used metaphorically for looking at or into something carefully or intently. There is a metaphorical use of the verb in which it is used for a rapid or cursory glance, and some commentators have taken that to be the sense in this verse. Is this verse saying that angels want to be able to look intently into how God planned it so that people before us actually served us via their obedience and faith, or is it saying, like the NET translation, that since angels cannot really see how God planned it all, these are “things angels long to catch a glimpse of.” Since it is difficult to make a choice, it seemed better to go with the middle ground meaning of parakuptō, to look, which can mean to look intently or to glance at (see commentary on John 20:5).

1:13. “gird up the loins of your mind.” It is difficult to translate this idiom. It comes from the biblical culture in which standard outer garb for men was a long, ankle-length robe. The robe provided warmth, shelter from the elements, and could be (and often was) a blanket at night (cp. Exod. 22:27). Merchants would pull up the robe at the waist, tuck it in, and create a kind of pocket they could keep things in. The long robe would get in the way when a person needed to move fast or work hard, so he would gather it up and tie it at the waist so it would be short and out of the way. That is why so many versions have a translation such as, “prepare your mind for action,” or “prepare your mind for work.” Those translations are certainly acceptable, but we thought it preferable to keep the idiom, because the picture applies in so many instances. The point seems much deeper than just “prepare for action.” It is looking at the things that are hindering you and figuring out how to deal with them so you can be effective for the Lord.

1:14. “be conformed.” The word translated “be conformed” comes from the Greek suschēmatizō (#4964 συσχηµατίζω) in the middle voice. Usually we think of the middle voice as the subject performing the action upon itself; e.g., “he hanged himself” (Matt. 27:5). However, this is the permissive middle where the subject allows or permits something to be done to itself, or for itself (cp. Wallace, Exegetical Syntax). The sense would then be, “do not allow yourselves to be conformed to your former lusts.”


1:17. “Since.” The Greek reads “if.” This is a first class conditional sentence in Greek, which assumes the “if” clause to be true for sake of argument. Cp. NIV translation. See commentary on Ephesians 1:4.


1:22. “soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is used more broadly of the individual himself while including his thoughts and emotions. Thus, while the verse could read something such as, “having purified yourselves” (HCSB; cp. NAB, NIV), the use of the word “soul” points us to the fact that the godly
person has worked hard to purify his mental and emotional life. Romans 2:9 contains a similar use of ψυχή. [For more complete information on ψυχή, see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

This verse makes it clear that we purify our mental and emotional life by obeying the “truth,” which includes the written Word of God as well as any direct revelation we have received, and also includes things that we discover from science (genuine science!) are true about God’s creation. Many mentally and emotionally unstable, insecure, or uncertain people have been greatly helped by adjusting their lifestyle and acting on the truth that they know.

“brotherly affection.” The Greek is φιλαδελφία (#5360 φιλαδελφία), a compound Greek word made up of φιλος (a strong liking, a friendship; see commentary on John 21:15) and αδελφος (#80 ἀδελφος), which means “brother.” It is the strong bond of friendship that exists between brothers.

1:23. “seed.” The Greek word is σπορά (#4701 σπορά), and it means “the sowing of seed,” and by extension, “seed” or that which is sown. When a person acts on Romans 10:9, and confesses that Jesus is Lord and believes that God raised him from the dead, he is “born again.” This birth is real, and involves God spiritually sowing his nature (or His seed), holy spirit, into the individual. Like God who gave it, the spiritual seed is “imperishable.” This should be a great source of comfort to every Christian, because the New Birth is irrevocable— it cannot be undone, and it guarantees salvation and everlasting life. God sows His imperishable seed into each Christian by creating it in him, which is why, upon being born again, each Christian is a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17).

“born again.” Through the centuries of the Christian era, there has been a huge debate about whether a Christian can lose his salvation. We assert Scripture teaches that when a person is born again of God’s holy spirit, his salvation is guaranteed, and he is not in danger of the “Second Death” (Rev. 20:12-15). Salvation is of ultimate importance to every human being, since those who are saved will live forever and those who are not will be annihilated in the Lake of Fire [For annihilation, see commentary on Rev. 20:10]. Therefore, God has spent considerable time on the issue of the permanence of salvation and has approached it from many different angles, so we must do the same, and take some time to expound the issue. [For more information on the permanence of Christian salvation, see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation.”] 1:24. Quoted from Isaiah 40:6-8.

Chapter 2

2:1. “and.” Figure of speech, polysyndeton, “many ands” (See Bullinger, Figures).
2:2. “the pure milk of the word.” The Greek adjective λογικός (#3050 λογικός) is related to λόγος, word. There is quite a controversy over this word, with some commentators and versions attesting it should be translated “spiritual” (ESV, NIV, RSV), while some holding that “spiritual” does not make as much sense here and thus asserting that it is related to the Word (KJV, NASB, YLT). Robertson simply gives arguments from both sides without drawing a conclusion. Lenski argues quite forcibly that “Word-milk” (i.e., the milk of the Word) is the correct meaning, and the one to be preferred in this context, which refers to the Word in 1:23 and seems to make more sense in reference
to the babies in the verse, who were in need of “the milk of the word.” We have gone with “the pure milk of the word” because it does seem to fit the context well, and is more concrete than “spiritual milk,” which is not clear in its reference. It should be noted that the only other occurrence of this Greek word is in Romans 12:1, where it is most often translated “spiritual” service. However, first, if it is “spiritual” in the context of Romans 12:1 it need not necessarily be “spiritual” here. Second, perhaps “service related to the Word” would be better in Romans 12:1 also.

“pure.” The Greek word is *adolos* (#97 ἄδολος), which means, regarding people, “without guile, honest” and regarding things, “pure, unadulterated.” Interestingly, verse 1 tells us to put away “guile (dishonesty)”, and this verse, verse two, tells us to desire the “guileless, honest” milk of the Word. The Word of God, unlike the words of man, contains no guile, no dishonesty.


“Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“put to shame.” See commentary on Romans 9:33.

2:7. Quoted from Psalm 118:22.

2:8. Quoted from Isaiah from 8:14.

2:9. “chosen people.” Quoted from Isaiah 43:20. The word for “people” is *genos* (#1085 γένος) and it could be translated “family,” “class/kind,” or “group” (Cp. BDAG). The sense of the word simultaneously points to our common heritage from God as our Father, that we are within our own class as we are the Church, and that together we form a distinct group. The translation “race” is incorrect and unhelpful; the people of God are not set apart based on any racial terms (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11).


“a people for God’s own possession.” An allusion from Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, and 26:18.

“glorious attributes.” The Greek is *arete* {ar-et'-ay} (#703 ἀρετή), which is a word with many meanings, including, “a virtuous course of thought, feeling and action; virtue or moral goodness; any particular moral excellence, as modesty or purity. Due to the many different meanings and shades of meaning in the word, translations vary greatly. “Praises” (KJV; NIV); “excellencies” (ESV, ASV); “mighty acts” (NRSV); “fame” (Lenski). “Glorious attributes” is contributed by Meyer (Meyer’s Commentary). “Greco-Roman publics would in the main be conditioned to hear a stress on performance, which of course would elicit praise” (BDAG lexicon).

2:10. “not a people.” The Greek phrase is, *ou laos* (οὐ λαός; pronounced oo lah-os’), which, because Greek does not have the indefinite article (“a”), can mean either “no people” or “not a people.” The impact of this can only be fully understood when we realize that Israel was “the People of God,” and were referred to as “the People” (cp. Matt. 2:4; 26:3; Luke 19:47; John 11:50; Acts 4:8, 25; 12:11; 13:17; 21:28; 26:17, 23; 28:17; Rom. 15:10, 11; Heb. 7:11; 2 Pet. 2:1). While Israel was “the People,” in stark contrast the Gentiles did not even classify as people; they were “no-people,” and certainly not “a people.” The double meaning of the Greek makes exact translation into English difficult. If we translate the phrase as “no people” or “no-people” (cp. ASV, ERV, Rotherham, RSV), we get the extra-derogatory sense that a non-Israelite did not even
classify as a person. If we translate the phrase as “not a people” (ESV; HCSB; KJV; NASB; NET) we get that before the saved Gentiles were brought into God’s family, they were not “a people,” not a group that God even recognized. Both “no people” and “not a people” apply in this situation, and the Greek has the advantage that the one phrase means both things, so a Greek reader could see both meanings at once. In contrast, we in English have to pick a reading to go in the text, and explain that there can also be a second meaning.

2:11. “soul.” In this verse, the word “soul” encompasses several of its meanings. Fleshly desires wage war against our mental state, our attitude and emotions, and against “us,” against our persons.

The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (\#5590 \textit{ψυχή}; pronounced psoo-kay'), and psuchē has a large number of meanings. Any good Greek lexicon will show many of the ways that psuchē can be translated. For example, some of the meanings in the BDAG Greek-English lexicon are: that which animates animal and human life; life; that which possesses life; the person himself; and the seat and center of the inner human life in its many and varied aspects, which includes desires, the seat of enjoyment, and the emotions and feelings. As well as our emotions and feelings, psuchē includes our attitude. [For more information on “soul” and its uses, see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul.’"]

2:12. See commentary on 2:15, “of foolish men.”

“make sure.” The verb is technically “having,” thus, “having good behavior,” but because it is linked in the sentence with the imperative apechesthai (abstain; v. 11), it also has an imperative force (cp. J. R. Michaels, \textit{The Word Biblical Commentary}.

2:15. “of foolish men.” This is referring back to the Gentiles in verse 12, who speak evil against Christians as evildoers. The Greek has the article, the foolish men (Vincent, \textit{Word Studies}). In their ignorance, men like this will speak against the church as evildoers in order to justify not becoming Christians. God tells us to live in such a way that evil speakers may see our righteous behavior in the very areas they are speaking against us, and that by our doing good we may silence their accusations and rob them of their excuses.

2:16. “Live as free.” The grammar of this phrase is difficult because the Greek phrase simply starts “as free.” Scholars have suggested many different translations and ways of constructing the sentence, including tying it back to verse 13, or connecting it with the next verse, verse 17. Thankfully, the point of the verse is clear. A common, and logical, construction is that the opening phrase is a kind of ellipsis, the verb being left out to emphasize “free.” In that case, “Live as free” is a good translation.

The Roman world was acutely aware of the value of freedom and the burden of being a slave. Peter uses that awareness very powerfully here. He starts in 2:13 by saying we are to be subject to, or submit to, human authorities such as kings and governors, which would indicate we were like slaves, but then he moves forward to “as free people” in verse 16 to emphasize that we are actually free, but then makes the seemingly ironic statement that we are slaves of God. Christians live in the irony that we are “free” in Christ but “slaves” of God, bought and paid for with the blood of his Son.

“slaves.” The Greek word is doulos (\#1401 δοῦλος), and it was used both of slaves and servants. Here, “slaves” fits best since it is being used in contrast to people who are “free.” [For more information on doulos, see commentary on Romans 1:1, “servant”].
2:18. “Household slaves.” The Greek word is oiketēs (#3610 οἰκετής), and it literally means one who is a member of a household (from oikos, house). However, it was used of household slaves and servants. In this context it seems to clearly refer to slaves, because it is contrasted with “masters” (despotēs). Furthermore, the situation with the oiketēs seems to be that he or she is not free to leave, but has to endure the harsh, perverse, and even dishonest ways of the master.

“masters.” The Greek is despotēs (#1203 δεσπότης) means master or lord, and it refers to someone who has legal control and authority over others, such as subjects or slaves (cp. 1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:9). See commentary on Luke 2:29.

“reasonable.” See commentary on 1 Timothy 3:3.

“unfair.” The Greek word is skolios (#4646 σκόλιος), and it literally means “crooked” or “curved” and was used of roads and rivers [it is the origin (via new Latin) of our English word scoliosis, a curvature or crookedness of a body part, often the spine]. However, skolios was widely used metaphorically to refer to people who were “crooked.” Exactly how any given person who was being discussed was “crooked” was usually easy to tell from the context of the conversation. However, in this verse an exact meaning is not being referred to, but rather the verse is referring in a general way to any “crooked” way a master was being toward a household slave. This makes the verse very difficult, and accounts for the multitude of different ways that different English Bibles translate the word. The meaning includes: being unfair, unjust, dishonest, unscrupulous, surly, harsh, unreasonable, cruel, etc. The Theological Dictionary of the NT captures the meaning in this verse: “In 1 Pet. 2:18 the term is perhaps a general ethical concept denoting the perverse master to whom slaves must still show respect. Yet there may also be a specific reference to pagan masters who are still enslaved in idolatry.” The immediate application in this verse is household servants, most of whom were slaves. However, we must see the wider Christian application of this verse, which is anyone who is subject to another according to the laws of God and man. This would include children, employees, etc. Christians are to submit to, and show respect to, those who are over them, even if those people do not actually deserve that respect by the way they live.


2:24. Quoted from Isaiah 53:5.

“Tree.” The Greek word is xulon (#3586 ξύλον pronounced zoo'-lon) and it means a tree, log, a piece of timber (1 Cor. 3:12), a piece of wood (Rev. 18:12), or something made from wood such as a beam, a cross, a club (Mark 14:48), or even the stocks that Paul’s feet were placed in (Acts 16:24). However, xulon can mean “tree,” and Peter is making the point that the religious leaders had taken the Messiah and hanged him on a “tree” as if he was accursed of God. That does not mean it was a literal tree that Jesus was crucified on, and Peter’s audience understood that. (See commentary on Acts 5:30, “tree”).

“by whose stripes you were healed.” This is a quotation of Isaiah 53:5 and a promise of future healing. It is a fairly common idiom in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages that when an event was absolutely going to happen in the future, it was spoken of as if it had already occurred in the past. This linguistic feature may been started due to the fact that it is sometimes hard to express that a future event is certain to happen. Many times when we simply say something “will” happen, it does not happen. One way the Semitic languages avoided that problem and comunicated that a future event was really...
going to happen was by idiomatically speaking of it as if it already had happened. In the Old Testament, dozens of verses about future events are written in the past tense, and that is the case here in 1 Peter 2:24 and also with some other New Testament verses such as Ephesians 2:6 [For more explanation and examples of the prophetic perfect, see commentary on Ephesians 2:6].

The phrase, “And by his bruises we were healed” (Tanakh; Jewish Publication Society) is Isaiah’s prophecy and promise of future healing. Peter’s quotation of Isaiah is not word for word, and for example he changes “we were healed” to “you were healed,” but that is presumably so the Gentiles in Peter’s audience were included. Nevertheless, the quotation is exact enough to be clearly recognized as a genuine quotation.

Isaiah’s statement was a promise to Israel that in the future everyone would be healed by the Messiah. At the time Isaiah wrote (around 700 BC), Jesus had not yet paid for the sins and sicknesses of mankind. Israel was awaiting their Messiah, and knew from their own Hebrew language and idiom that Isaiah was promising that at some point in the future the Messiah would heal everyone (that is, every saved person who was in the Messianic Kingdom). Isaiah’s promise that the Messiah would heal people was an “absolute” promise, that is, it was a promise that in the future the Messiah would heal everyone, period. He would not just heal “those who had faith to be healed,” or those for whom God had a special purpose. He would heal everyone. This point becomes very clear when all the prophetic books—Isaiah and all the other Old Testament prophets—are read.

It is very important to understand the prophetic perfect idiom and what Isaiah was saying because Peter is quoting Isaiah and bringing the force of what Isaiah was saying forward to us. Thus 1 Peter 2:24, in quoting Isaiah, is saying that everyone’s healing is still assured. Peter was not changing what Isaiah said. Isaiah was making a promise that at some point in the future everyone would be healed, and Peter is reaffirming that promise. It is important to understand Isaiah’s promise because many people in the “Faith Movement” believe that 1 Peter 2:24 gives people a right to claim healing now. That is not true. That “right” did not exist in Isaiah’s time, and it does not exist now just because Peter quoted Isaiah. The evidence of that fact should be apparent because many people, even those who have demonstrated great trust in God throughout their lives, get sick and are not healed by “faith” (trust). In fact, many people who have been miraculously healed in their lives and therefore should have great faith for healing, are not healed of subsequent sicknesses. Neither the grammar of the text, the context, nor human experience support the teaching that Christ’s work on the cross means people can now “claim their healing by faith.” That does not mean that Christ does not heal some people now—he certainly does (more on that later), but 1 Peter 2:24 does not confer upon people the right to “claim healing;” it is a promise that in the future everyone will be healed.

When we read what Isaiah and the other prophetic books say about healing, it is clear that they did not promise healing at the time they were written, but promised that healing would come in the future, in the Messianic Kingdom. In fact, the prophecies of physical healing are part of the larger prophetic picture of “healing” that will happen in the Messianic Kingdom. According to the prophecies, in Jesus’ kingdom, people, animals, the land, and bodies of water will all be healed, and earth will become a Paradise once again. Furthermore, this will not happen piece by piece over a long period of time as people have faith, but happens all at once on “that day,” the Day when Christ establishes
his kingdom on earth. Note, for example, how Isaiah 29:17-20 ties together the healing of people, the land, and even social ills.

**Isaiah 29:17-20**

17 In a very short time, will not Lebanon be turned into a fertile field and the fertile field seem like a forest?  
18 In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.  
19 Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.  
20 The ruthless will vanish, the mockers will disappear, and all who have an eye for evil will be cut down—

The prophets painted a wonderful picture of the future Messianic Kingdom on earth.  
- There will be no war (Isa. 2:4; 9:4–7; 60:18; Hos. 2:18; Mic. 4:3, 4; Zech. 9:9, 10).  
- The believers will be healthy, not sick (Isa. 29:18; 32:3,4; 33:24; 35:5,6; 57:19; Jer. 33:6; Mal. 4:2).  
- The land will be healed so there will be no hunger (Isa. 25:6; 30:23–26; 32:15; 35:1–7; 41:18–20; 44:3; 51:3; Jer. 31:5,11–14; Ezek. 47:1-12; Hos. 2:21,22; Joel 2:18–26; Amos 9:13).  
- The house of Israel will know God (Isa. 29:23, 24; Jer. 31:33, 34; Ezek. 11:18–20), and Christians will “know fully” (1 Cor. 13:12).  
- The gift of holy spirit will be poured out from heaven (Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28, 29; Zech. 12:10).  
- The people will be holy and blessed, and there will be joy (Isa. 4:2–5; 35:10; 51:3; 60:1–22; 61:4–11; 62:1–12; 65:17–25; Jer. 30:18,19; 31:4,12–14). [For more on Christ’s wonderful kingdom on earth, see commentary on Matthew 5:5, “the meek will inherit the earth”].

But how was that wonderful kingdom to come to pass? How were these promises to be made available? After all, the world is in the sad shape that it is because of the sin of Adam, and how could that sin be atoned for? That is where the great prophecy of Isaiah 53 comes in, because it tells us that the Messiah would pay for the sins of the world and make healing available.

**Isaiah 53:4, 5, 6, 10,11 (ESV abridged)**

4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows…
5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed…
6 the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all…
10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him…
11 by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall
bear their iniquities...he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many...."

Even though the ESV quoted above does not exactly follow the tenses of the Hebrew text, it is helpful to notice how much of the prophecy of Isaiah 53 is in the past tense as if it had already happened. However, as was stated above, that is not because the promises were somehow fulfilled in the past, before 700 BC, but rather because of the prophetic perfect idiom, which is in the text to show us that the promises are guaranteed to come to pass.

Although neither Isaiah 53:5 nor 1 Peter 2:24 somehow confer the “right” to “claim” healing today, God and Jesus do heal. We see that in the book of Acts, and 1 Corinthians 12:9 mentions “gifts of healings.” Many factors play into healing, including trust (faith), the law of sowing and reaping, the spiritual battle, the fallen nature of the world, and the will of God. That is one reason people, even people who have great trust in God, are sometimes healed and sometimes not.

Another reason we know we cannot just “claim” healing is that sickness is a consequence of sin, and we cannot just “claim” that our sins have no consequences. When we read 1 Peter 2:24 we see that the first phrase in the verse, which is about sins, and the second phrase, about sicknesses, are parallel. Jesus bore our sins and healed us by his stripes. The fullness of both of these phrases will be seen in the future.

When Jesus went to the cross, he certainly bore our sins. Yet this does not mean that right now we do not sin, or have no consequences for Adam’s sin and our own sin. The fullness of Christ’s work in atoning for sin will be seen in the future. Furthermore, if a person sins and is in jail, he cannot “just claim” that there would be no consequence to his sin and immediately somehow be out of jail. Similarly, a couple that sins and commits adultery leading to the woman’s getting pregnant cannot “just claim” the sin has no consequence, or a person who sins and commits murder cannot suddenly repent and “just claim” that the sin have no consequence and that life return into the dead body. We cannot “just claim” that sin have no consequence. Sickness is a consequence of sin: sometimes our own sin, sometimes our parent’s sin, sometimes someone else’s sin, and sometimes just Adam’s sin. So just like with the consequences of other sins, we cannot “just claim” that sickness be gone.

Many people who are sick have been made to feel badly about themselves, as if they have no faith, simply because they have not been divinely healed. Job’s miserable comforters had personal beliefs that led them to conclude that Job had a “secret sin,” and they berated him for it even though Job was innocent—it was their beliefs that were wrong. Similarly, many people who belong to churches that teach “if you have faith you will be healed” end up acting like Job’s miserable comforters and, although their intentions are good, they badger, berate, criticize, and even attack other church members who do not get healed of physical and/or mental ailments. Paul warns us: “But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another” (Gal. 5:15).

Another confirmation that we do not have the “right” (the ability) to “claim” healing at will is that the language that would support that kind of doctrine is not in the Bible. For example, it is common to hear people who think they can claim healing and other blessings from God say, “I am believing for....” But that language is not in the
Bible. The simple fact is that phrases such as “believe for,” “believing for,” or “believed for” do not occur in the Bible. In contrast, the phrase “pray for” occurs many times. The difference between “believe for” and “pray for” is important. If I can “believe for” things, then I have the power, which is what the Faith Movement teaches. But if I have to ask God for things and “pray for” them, then He has the power, which is what the Bible teaches. Thankfully, when we pray to God and trust in his power and mercy, God can move in the spiritual world and get us what we are praying for. Actually, many people who receive from God do so, not because of “their believing,” but because they so faithfully prayed for what they wanted.

Someone might say, “But often when people got healed in the Bible, Jesus said, ‘Your faith has made you whole,’” so the person’s faith healed them.” We would answer that “faith” is “trust,” and to be healed, healing has to first be made available by God, which we usually know via revelation. Once healing has been made available to a sick person (which he will usually know by receiving revelation about it), he must then have faith (have trust) in order to appropriate the healing to himself. Jesus did not heal people without revelation first, and we cannot “just claim” healing for ourselves when we are sick. If that were the truth of Scripture, then life would testify to it. However life shows us that even people who are known for their godliness and faith are not able to “just claim” healing for themselves or others, but that they sometimes get sick and must be healed by doctors and/or let the body heal itself.

The truth is that we usually do not understand why one person is healed and another is not, or why a person is healed of one illness but not a subsequent illness, or why a person who is immediately divinely healed of one illness, say the flu, does not also have his teeth and eyesight completely restored at the same time. But this we know: the Word of God has promised many times, and 1 Peter 2:24 is one of them, that there will come a time in the future when every single person will be healed of every single sickness, and we should look forward to that great day with great anticipation. (A very helpful book in understanding the modern “Faith Movement” and how and why it differs from the actual teaching of the Bible is: A Different Gospel by D. R. McConnell).


“soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is used more broadly of the individual himself, but including life and his thoughts and emotions. Jesus watches over every aspect of our lives. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

Chapter 3

3:1. “In the same way.” The Greek word is homoioīs (#3668 ὅμοιος, pronounced hō-moy-ōs), and it means “in the same way, likewise, in like manner.” This is one of the places where starting a new a chapter (Chapter 3:1) can detract significantly from the meaning of the Bible. Most people read, “In the same way,” but seeing the new chapter act as if there is a new subject and do not really take the time to ask themselves, “in the same way as what,” and then read back to the start of the subject, which is 2:18,
“household slaves.” The section of 2:18-25 is about household slaves who have “crooked” masters, and how those slaves should behave in a godly manner in less than ideal circumstances. So now 3:1 starts “in the same way,” and instructs women in how to behave when they are married and are in less than ideal circumstances. Thus what is said about the women in 3:1-6 is in addition to how God has told the household slaves to behave in 2:18-25.

3:2. “respectful.” The Greek literally reads, “in fear.” We feel it is most likely a dative of manner and thus is functioning as an adverb. Lenski, however, takes it as the general “fear of God” spoken in 1 Peter 1:16-18. He is right, though, that the behavior of the wife is not necessarily directed solely towards the husband but is also an act of reverence to God.

3:7. “You husbands.” This verse starts a new subject, that of “husbands.” The section and subject, living godly in less than ideal circumstances, started speaking about household slaves in 2:18, then referred to wives in 3:1, and now is referring to husbands.

“In the same way.” The Greek word is homoiōs (#3668 ὁμοίως, pronounced hō-moy-ōs), and it means “in the same way, likewise, in like manner.” When we read, “In the same way,” we must stop and ask ourselves, “in the same way as what?” To answer that question we will have to go back and find the start of the subject and then read to ascertain what God is trying to tell us at that point. Then we add that understanding to our understanding of what God is telling us in 3:7. In this case, the start of the subject is all the way back to 1 Peter 2:18, “household slaves.” The section of 2:18-25 is about household slaves who have “crooked” masters, and how those slaves should behave in a godly manner in less than ideal circumstances. As we continue to read, we find that 3:1 also starts with, “in the same way.” That section of Scripture (3:1-6) is instructing women on how to live godly lives in less than ideal circumstances, such as with an unbelieving husband.

We might be confused at first when we see that this section of Scripture written to husbands begins, “in the same way.” This is due to the fact that there does not seem to be a connection between husbands and household slaves and wives, because the slaves and wives seem to be in a submissive position that husbands are not in. In fact, some commentators have tried to explain away the natural meaning of “in the same way,” by saying in this verse the phrase is only transitional and does not have its ordinary meaning. Commentators such as those assert that husbands are not to submit to wives (cp. notes in ESV Study Bible). However, the Bible says that husbands are to submit to their wives in some areas of the relationship. For one thing, in the Church, husbands and wives are to submit to one another (Eph. 5:21), and although men lead the family, the woman is the “house despot,” (see commentary on 1 Tim. 5:14; oikodespoteō, #3616 οἰκοδεσποτέω, which means to rule a household).

In any marriage, the man has certain authority and accompanying responsibilities, and the woman has certain authority and accompanying responsibilities. A man who has an unbelieving or ungodly wife has to learn to live with her in a godly way just as a Christian household slave or godly wife has to learn how to be respectful to an unbelieving or ungodly master or husband. Also, if a husband is simply a tyrant in the house, and does not care about the family or listen to the wife and children, although there may be obedience in the household, there will not be warmth and the family love that really makes life enjoyable and places the husband and wife in agreement, something
important in light of the last phrase of the verse about prayers. In fact, if the husband acts like a tyrant in the house and does not show the mutual submission that the Bible says is part of the family structure, he is in fact ignoring this verse by not living with his wife “in a knowledgeable way,” and certainly not showing her honor, which he could do in part by recognizing the authority God has given her in the house and submitting to that authority.

“in a knowledgeable way.” The Greek is kata gnōsis (κατὰ γνῶσις); literally “according to knowledge.” The idea is “according to what you know and understand about your wife and her situation.” This can be ascertained from the context. The word gnōsis means both knowledge and understanding, the exact meaning depending on the context. It would not be a bad translation lexically to simply have “live with your wives with understanding.” However, in our culture today, to have “understanding” of someone in the context of an intimate relationship places the emphasis on the mutual mental agreement, accord, and understanding that the couple has for each other. Thus, the modern way we would think about the verse, it would mean the man would “understand” the woman, i.e., what makes her happy, what upsets her, etc. That is one of the meanings in the verse, but there are other important meanings that must not be overlooked. The problem in this verse is that “knowledge” must be understood in light of the biblical culture, not our present one.

The unspoken context of this verse is the biblical culture, which was very hard on women, and especially any women who did not have the support of a husband or strong family, and this is confirmed by the use of the phrase “weaker vessel.” The woman was the “weaker vessel,” the one who was less capable of sustaining herself without the support of a husband and family (see commentary on “weaker vessel”). For most of history women have been abused and ignored by men. At the time of Christ, for example, a woman’s testimony was not even valid in court. That kind of thinking about women ignores the very reason for their creation, that they were to be a helper suitable for man (in contrast to the animals that had been created earlier on day six and were not suitable helpers to man). The New Testament teachings of Christ and the other apostles elevates women in a way that they had never been elevated before. For example, the NT formally recognized that a woman had her “own” husband (1 Cor. 7:2). This negated the polygamy of many ancient cultures, and turned the acceptable sexual dallies of the men in the Greco-Roman culture into “sexual immorality.”

The husband is to live with the wife “in a knowledgeable way,” that means a true knowledge, not the so-called knowledge of women that was accepted as truth in the pagan culture of the first century, that women were inferior to men. The husband who is a man of God must ascertain God’s perspective and heart for women, and also know and act upon that knowledge. In Christ there is neither male nor female because when a person, either male or female, gets born again, that person receives the gift of holy spirit and becomes a spiritually powerful child of God. It is the gift of holy spirit inside a person that gives him or her a holy nature (cp. 2 Pet. 1:4) and enables him or her to walk in the power of the manifestations of holy spirit as set forth in 1 Cor. 12:7-10 (see commentary on those verses). To be truly knowledgeable of his wife, the husband must understand her physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. If he does, he will honor her naturally. If he does not, he should honor her because this verse commands him...
to until his knowledge grows to the point the honor is an effortless outflow of his knowledge of her.

In one of the sad turns in history, as the Church developed, the Christian men gradually again reduced the women to subservient roles in the Church, society, and even their own house, and these views were supported by misunderstanding of the text of Scripture (see commentary on Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 7:2, 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12).

“giving.” The Greek is apomenō (#632 ἀπονέµω), and the definition given in BDAG captures the sense very well: “to grant that which is appropriate in a relationship, assign, show, pay.” It is appropriate for husbands to give honor to their wives for who they are and what they do even as it is appropriate for women to respect and submit to the husband (1 Pet. 3:1ff). This word, “give,” or “grant that which is appropriate,” again strikes out against any culture or system that says women are of little value. It is one more way God elevates women: He shows that they are worthy of honor, and it is a serious mistake, with serious consequences in the Church, family, and society, to fail to see that women are worthy of the honor God says they should be given (see commentary on “honor”).

“honor.” The Greek word is timē (#5092 τιµή, pronounced “tee-may”), and it has meanings that relate to price and “honor.” It means the price or value of something, ascribing a value to something, or the price that is paid for something, and it also means “honor,” the honor that someone has or is given, the honor a person has because of their rank or position, or the honor that someone is shown out of respect or reverence.

In the first century culture, which was an “honor-shame” society, honor was a major part of the fabric of society. To be worthy of honor was a tremendous privilege, while to be dishonored was a huge disgrace. For example, to be asked to “move down” in place because you had taken the seat of one more honorable than you was a big disgrace (Luke 14:8-10). The Pharisees and experts in the Law loved the places of honor in the synagogues and at the feasts (Matt. 23:6; Mark 12:39). God will honor those who serve Jesus the Son (John 12:26). Christians are to honor those who deserve honor (Rom. 13:7), and elders who serve in the Church well are to be considered worthy of double honor (1 Tim. 5:17).

Because we do not live in an “honor-shame” society, it can be difficult for us to understand how it worked, but since the first century culture was an “honor-shame” society, we will not really understand the Bible until we do understand it. John Dickson writes: “Honor was universally regarded as the ultimate asset for human beings, and shame the ultimate deficit. ...humility was rarely, if ever, considered virtuous. ...Much of life revolved around ensuring you and your family received public honor and avoided public shame....Humility before the gods, of course, was appropriate, because they could kill you....But humility before an equal or a lesser was morally suspect. It upset the assumed equation: merit demanded honor, thus honor was the proof of merit. Avoiding honor implied a diminishing of merit. It was shameful” (Humilitas: A Lost Key to Life, Love, and Leadership, p. 86, 88, 89).

In the Semitic and Greco-Roman culture of the time of Christ, it was dishonoring (a shameful act), for a person to lower himself before someone who was of equal or lesser status. The thinking of the NT era towards a humble person was expressed well by Aristotle, who thought of a humble person, not as someone who was virtuous, but as “the weak and insipid man who poses no threat” (Humilitas. p. 89). When we understand the
“honor-shame” society of the first century and see it in light of this verse in Peter, we can see that this command of God for men to give “honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel,” went totally against the grain of the culture. By giving honor to the woman, the woman must be honorable. If a woman was not honorable, then to give her honor was a shameful act.

Women were generally held in dishonor in both the Semitic culture and the Greco-Roman culture. They were considered to be physically, mentally, morally, and emotionally inferior to men. Thus, for a man to “honor” his wife in the biblical culture would lower the man in the eyes of the society around him. Thus this verse became one more command of God that caused Christians to have to make a choice between obeying God and following their culture (cp. commentary on Rom. 12:2).

We must realize that when God said in this verse that husbands were to give “honor” to their wives, the words would have had a huge impact upon both the men and women—a much larger impact that they have in Western societies which are not honor-shame societies and which do not think of women as inferior. For the women, this command elevated them in the eyes of their family and society. For the men, it usually dishonored them in the eyes of the society around them. But for both the men and women who were believers, it taught that humility was not a weakness, but a virtue.

Sadly, historically, this command to honor wives was ignored. We would expect that the pagan culture would pay no attention to it, but it did not take long after the original apostles died for the Church to again take the attitude of the surrounding culture. Thus, by the time of the post-Nicene Church fathers, women were again considered inferior to men. Any supposed “honor” they were shown, which usually showed up as either decoration (i.e., fancy clothes, etc.), protection, or the respect demanded of children and/or people of less status in society, was not the real honor of actual participation in the Church, society, and the family that God intended.

Men and women, and husbands and wives, are to honor each other, for we are all “vessels” created by God, each with its own abilities and purposes, none more valuable to God that another (cp.1 Cor. 12:22-25; Rom. 12:10).

“weaker vessel.” The Greek translated “weaker” is așthenēs (#772 ἄσθενής), which means “weak, sick, infirm,” and the Greek word for “vessel” is skeuos (#4632 σκεῦος), which literally can refer to a container of any material, the context determining the meaning of the container, and it can also refer more generally to “things” or possessions (cp. Matt. 12:29). Skeuos was used figuratively for the human body, which holds the soul (life), and that is its use in this verse and others in the NT (cp. Acts 9:15; Rom. 9:22; 2 Cor. 4:7; 2 Tim. 2:21). We must notice that in this verse, both the man and the woman are “vessels,” and thus the creations of God who need to be obedient to Him.

In this verse, the woman is referred to as the weaker vessel, and the meaning of that phrase is simple and straightforward: the woman is not as physically strong as the male. However, also the phrase was used in the Greek culture for the effect of that weakness; the woman was less capable of making a living on her own without family support (cp. notes in A. Nyland, The Source NT). Thus a woman without the support of a family or husband was often forced to survive by prostituting herself.

In the era before force-multiplying devices such as engines, and equalizers such as guns, brute strength was essential for most of the things that led to survival: personal protection, plowing, transportation, and building houses. The need for protection was
especially acute in ancient societies because police forces were almost unknown. People survived by being physically strong and by being part of a strong social system, usually a family. Thus, it made perfect sense culturally to compare a person or nation that was weak and unable to protect itself to a woman, as Egypt is in Isaiah 19:16. A woman on her own was very likely to be molested, which is why Boaz had to tell his reapers not to touch Ruth, a woman without family protection (Ruth 2:9).

We need to understand that the Bible referring to a woman as the weaker vessel was not derogatory in any way. It was a simple truth, and it was designed to get the attention of the husbands who were reading this passage of Scripture and point out in a gracious way that a women needed and deserved the help and support of her husband to be safe and supported. Thus in this passage we see God’s love for women and His desire to see them supported in areas where they need it so that they can then graciously and fully contribute the things that they have to offer the family, the Church, and society. In contrast to the ancient culture (and many modern ones) in which men do not take the time to understand their wives, or make the effort to genuinely support them, 1 Peter 3:7 commands men to get to understand their wives and the situation they are in and honor them, rather than using them or abusing them.

One of the terrible things that has happened in the Church when it comes to women is that the male-dominated Semitic and Greco-Roman culture surrounding the Christians was more influential than the actual text of the Bible. For example, Aristotle asserted the women were in every way inferior to men except sexually, and that kind of teaching and belief permeated the culture at the time of the early Church. Thus it did not take too many years for the Church to be dominated by men who once again reduced women to practically the status of slaves. Women were considered physically, emotionally, and even morally inferior to men (the writings of the Church Fathers make this abundantly clear), and thus women were excluded from positions of authority in all facets of life, even in their own homes. As the Church developed in the early centuries, it was even thought that sexual intercourse with a woman negatively impacted a man’s spirituality, which was a primary reason that the Church (later the Roman Catholic Church) came to have a celibate clergy.

Sadly, the attitude that women are inferior to men still continues in the Church. For example, based on Church tradition and the mistranslations of verses such as Romans 16:1, 1 Corinthians 14:34, and 1 Timothy 2:12, in many denominations women cannot be ordained or teach. Furthermore, there are Christian commentaries that assert that because the Bible says the woman is the weaker vessel, women are inferior to men in ways other than just physically (“‘Weaker’...refers to physical or emotional weakness”; Bible Knowledge Commentary, 1983; “Women are weaker in body than men, weaker also in mind...;” The Biblical Illustrator, 2006).

If the Church is ever to operate in the love of God and power of the holy spirit, we must recognize women as the gift they are and that God created them to be. God created people either male and female (Gen. 5:2), and both sexes have giftings, responsibilities, and certain authority in the Church and family. The Church, the family, and society will never be everything God intended it to be until both men and women can and do walk in the fullness of what God has given them.

“So that.” The Greek phrase is eis to mē (εἰς τὸ μῆ), a phrase which, in this context indicates result, not purpose. It is perhaps more literally rendered, “to the end that,” but
“so that” expresses the meaning well. The point is not that the man shows honor to the wife just so his prayers will be better answered, but rather as he lives with his wife in knowledge and honor, the result will be that his prayers are better answered.

**“prayers are not hindered.”** It is clear in both the Old Testament and New Testament that if a person lives in disregard of God and His commands, that person will not receive the blessings of God (cp. Deut. 31: 16-18; Isa. 1:11-15; 58:1-9; 59:1-8; 66:1-4; Jer. 7:21-29; 14:10-12; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 3:9-12; 6:6-8; Rom. 2:13-16; James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). Jesus understood that, and so he told people that if they were making an offering at the altar in the Temple, but remembered that someone had something against them, they should stop making the offering and go be reconciled to the person. Then they could come back and finish offering the gift. (Matt. 5:23, 24). From that we see that Jesus understood Amos 5:24 and Micah 6:8, that righteousness and justice far outweighed sacrifice (i.e., religion, and all its “requirements”). Malachi 2:13-16 made it clear that if a man did not treat his wife in a godly way, God will not pay attention to his offerings, or accept them (Mal. 2:13).

Not only is the Bible clear that God will not look with favor on the offerings of anyone who disregards righteous and just behavior, the Bible also says that there is more effectiveness in prayer when more than one person is praying for something. “Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they ask, it will be done for them by my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 18:19). A husband who does not live with his wife in knowledge and honor will definitely be hindered in his prayer life both because he is not obeying God, and also because he is not “in harmony with” his wife, so they will not pray well together. It is a “happy coincidence” of language that the Greek word translated “agree” in Matthew 18:19 is *sumphōneō* (#4856 συμφωνέω) “to agree together,” and our English word “symphony” comes from the Greek word *sumphōneō*. When the husband and wife live together with love, respect, honor, and knowledge and understanding of each other, then they are like a beautiful symphony, each instrument different, but playing in tune with the other and making music together that is more wonderful than either instrument could make on its own. In light of the truth revealed in this verse, it is stupid for a man to live in disharmony with his wife if something could make the marriage better (sometimes this means the marriage needs the help of a trained counselor).

The context of this verse shows that “prayers” (*proseuchē*; #4335 προσευχή, the general word for prayer to God) is everything that any husband and wife would pray for in the course of marriage and life. Some commentators have suggested that the context dictates that the primary meaning of prayers here is prayers for the salvation of the wife (since 3:1-6 seem to be primarily about an unsaved man, so this must be prayers for the wife), but that is not the meaning of the verse. The women were living in a culture that already elevated men, so Peter would not have to make the point that husbands deserved honor. Verse seven notes that the wife is already an “heir together of the grace of [everlasting] life.” The men were living in a culture which so disregarded women that it would not occur to the man to give the woman honor, or consider his wife his primary prayer partner, which of course she is. She and the husband are “one flesh,” and in the eyes of God there is no more perfect prayer partner, nor are two people supposed to be more in agreement, more “in harmony,” than a man and his wife. This verse is not saying the man is to honor his wife so his prayers for her salvation are answered, it is saying that
a man is to dwell with his wife in knowledge and honor so that she is in fact in harmony with him and his (and her) prayers are not hindered.

It is stated in the verse in the word “your” (plural in the Greek), that if the man and wife are not in harmony, her prayers are hindered too. But it should not be lost on us that as the head of the family, God places upon the husband the primary responsibility for there being harmony in the marriage. Nevertheless, wives can be disobedient too, and if a wife is in disharmony with her husband, she should not resist God, but do what it takes to come into harmony with him.

In closing the commentary on 3:7, it bears repeating and clarifying that it is commonly taught that the New Testament is oppressive towards women. Nothing could be further from the truth. Especially in light of the non-Christian first-century cultural attitudes toward woman, the New Testament liberated women and elevated them to a status that they had never enjoyed before.

3:10-12. Quoted from Psalm 34:12-16.
3:10. “deceitful speech.” Cp. BDAG’s translation, “speak deceitfully” and NIV: “deceitful speech.” Literally, the Greek reads, “keep your lips… from not to speak deceit.” The word for deceit, dolos (#1388 δόλος), is a noun, so the sense is, do not speak any deceitful thing. The translation “keep your lips from deceitful speech” captures the meaning of “do not speak any deceitful thing.”
3:13. “zealots for that which is good.” In the Greek the word for “zealots” is a noun and not the verb form. However, most versions read something like, “be zealous for what is good.” Instead of calling us to a state of mind, “being zealous” (verb), He is calling us to the identity of being a zealot (noun)—not in the sense of being ultranationalists, but rather, enthusiasts for what is good.
3:14. “do not fear them.” There is a question as to whether the genitive in this phrase is subjective (“their fear,” cp. KJV; NASB; NIV) or objective (“fear them,” cp. ESV; NAB; NET). The context of 1 Peter, however, strongly points towards the objective meaning, “do not fear them.” The book is very much about being persecuted and enduring under suffering, in the immediate context Peter is speaking of those who would “harm you” for doing good and “suffering for righteousness sake.” It would be a strange break in thought to say “do not fear what they fear,” but an encouragement to not fear them makes perfect sense. Interestingly, this phrase is alluding to Isaiah 8:12, which clearly has the subjective sense of not fearing what other people fear. In this case Peter is not directly quoting from the O.T. passage but using its language to make a new point in his own context (Lenski).

Quoted from Isaiah 8:12.
3:17. “if the will of God should will it.” It may sometimes be the will of God for one to suffer for doing good. The next verse, 3:18, explains why by using an explanatory “for,” showing how it was God’s will for Christ to suffer to bring about the much greater good of bringing us to God (cp. 4:1). The Greek of this phrase employs the figure of speech polyptoton—“if the will of God should will it” (Cp. Bullinger, Figures of Speech). This structure deemphasizes God’s role in willing that one should suffer for doing good; it could have easily been written with theos (God) as the subject, “if God wills.” But by not making God the subject but rather the will of God the subject, He is a step removed from the action, giving the sense that He is slightly distanced from the statement. The philosophical notion of primary and secondary will is helpful for understanding this
verse—God’s primary will is that no one should suffer, ever; but His secondary will is that, given the fallen situation, suffering must be permitted at times to achieve the greatest good. It is not contradictory for one to hold both wills simultaneously. Interestingly, God can will for one to suffer for good but not want it to happen.

Furthermore, the verb for “will,” *thelō* (#2309 θέλω), is in the optative mood, expressing scant possibility. Specifically, this is an instance of the Conditional Optative, “used to indicate a possible condition in the future, usually a remote possibility” (cp. Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax*). This verse shows us that it may be the will of God that one suffer for doing good and yet simultaneously portrays this as a remote possibility, reminding us that we must never be too quick to claim God’s will as the cause of our suffering. (See also 1 Pet. 4:19).

3:19. “heralded his victory.” Jesus was “put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit” as per 1 Peter 3:18. This is in accordance with the pattern revealed in 1 Corinthians 15, which says that the flesh, which is corruptible, is changed (1 Cor. 15:52) The natural body is sown in death, and what is raised is a spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:44). Jesus was raised from the dead as a “life giving spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45), or “in the spirit” (1 Pet. 3:18). What did Jesus do when he was raised from the dead and had a new, spiritual body? Sometime after he was raised from the dead, he went to the “prison” where the spirits who had defied God before the Flood of Noah were held (the prison is called Tartarus; see commentary on 2 Pet. 2:4). In Tartarus, Jesus “heralded” his resurrection and victory to the imprisoned demons. The word “heralded” is the Greek word *kerussō*, “to be a herald; to officiate as herald; to proclaim after the manner of a herald…to publish, proclaim openly something which has been done” (Thayer). To “proclaim victory” (Gingrich).

It is sometimes taught that Jesus went to see the spirits in prison during the three days and nights between his death and resurrection, but that is clearly not the case. During that time he was “dead;” not alive in any form. 1 Peter 3:18 and 19 teach that he went “in spirit.” He got his spiritual body and became a life-giving spirit at his resurrection (1 Cor. 15:45), so it was after his resurrection that he went to Tartarus. Furthermore, he did not “preach” to these imprisoned demons, as if they could have believed and been released. They had defied God in the days of Noah by working to create a fallen race (the Nephilim; see commentary on “when they sinned” 2 Peter 2:4), and were imprisoned as a result. They did their best to keep the Messiah from coming and to defeat God, but the Messiah came and achieved victory for God, so Jesus went to the prison and heralded his victory to the demons there.

3:20. “souls.” Here, “souls” refers to people. This is similar to Acts 2:41. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

Chapter 4

4:1. “the same way of thinking.” The Greek is *ennoia* (#1771 ἐννοια), and means “the content of mental processing, thought, knowledge, insight (BDAG Lexicon). For this verse BDAG has “same way of thinking.” This general definition is very good in this context. The KJV “mind” is not as good, because “mind” is generally translated from the Greek *nous*, and refers to the mind itself, not specifically the products of the mind. Also,
while good, “purpose” (NASB); “attitude” (NIV); and “intention” (NRSV); all seem too specific, although the use of one English word to translate one Greek word is always a valuable goal and should be adhered to when possible.

### 4:4. “reckless actions.”

“defame.” The Greek verb blasphêmeô (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphêmeô, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

### 4:6. “are now dead.”
This verse is making the simple statement that there are people who had heard the Good News preached who have died and are now dead. The verse is only confusing to some people because so many Christians believe that when a person dies he is not actually dead, but is alive. The Amplified Bible does a good job with the translation, and has a simple and accurate footnote. The text of the verse reads, “…the good news (the Gospel) was preached [in their lifetime] even to the dead…. The footnote reads, “Most commentators interpret this preaching to be a past event, done not after these people had died, but while they were still alive.” When people are dead they are totally dead, and cannot hear the Gospel.

### 4:7. “the end [telos] of all things.”
This is not referring to the utter end of all things, because life will go on in the new kingdom. The word teleute would have been the proper word for a temporal end; but the word here is telos, the “goal” (Lenski). BDAG defines telos as, “last in a series; the last part of a process; the goal toward which a movement is being directed, end, goal, outcome.” The last part of the series of God’s great end goal has come; we are in the last part of the process, the Grace Administration, waiting for nothing but Christ’s return. (Compare NIV’s translation of telos in 1 Cor. 10:11: “The fulfillment [telos] of the ages has come.”

### 4:8. “hospitality.”
See commentary on Romans 12:13.

### 4:9. “many-sided.”
The Greek is poikilos (#4164 ποικίλος) and means, pertaining to that which exists in a variety of kinds or various modes, diversified, manifold, varied. “Many–sided communicates very well, and was used by Charles Williams in his New Testament. A less literal, but meaningful translation, comparing the grace of God to a gemstone, would be “many faceted.”

### 4:11. “words.”
The Greek word is logion (#3051 λόγιον; pronounced log'-ee-on), and it is the diminutive of logos, “word” or “message.” Literally, it is “little words.” See commentary on Acts 7:38.

[For more information on the use of “Christian” in the New Testament, see commentary on Acts 11:26].

### 4:18. “Christian.”
Quoted from the LXX version of Proverbs 11:31. The Hebrew reads, “If the righteous will be rewarded in the earth, How much more the wicked and the sinner!” (NASB). See Lenski.

### 4:19. “according to the will of God.”
It is never the will of God that people suffer. However, it is the will of God that people obey him, and sometimes we suffer for it. For example, 2 Timothy 3:12 says that everyone who lives a godly life will be persecuted. It is God’s will that people live godly lives, and God knows that because the Devil is the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4) godly people will suffer. God would rather have His people suffer for godliness than attempt to escape the persecution and troubles by living an ungodly life, so our suffering can be said to be “according to the will of God.” There will
be a day when the wicked will be punished and God’s people will live in joy in the Messiah’s kingdom. God promises: “and he [God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more; the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4). The joy we will have in the next life is the will of God for us for all time, but it is not available now due to the evil around us.

“souls.” In this context, the “soul” refers to the human life. This is a similar use to Romans 11:3. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

Chapter 5

5:4. “the Chief Shepherd.” Jesus is the “Chief Shepherd,” shepherding both the shepherds he has appointed over others, as well as shepherding his flock in general.

When translating from one language to another, such as translating from Greek to English, there are some “happy coincidences” and also some times when literal translations can make understanding more difficult. An example of a “happy coincidence” occurs in Matthew 25:14ff in the parable of the talents. In the biblical world, a “talent” is a unit of weight (and hence money), and we understand that, but when translated into English a “talent” is also a unique ability that a person has been gifted with. So when teaching about the parable of the talents, a preacher can easily communicate to the audience that they best not waste the talents that God gave them, including both material possessions and personal abilities.

But just as there are “happy coincidences,” in translation, there are also times when the differences between the languages causes some of what the text is saying to be missed, and that is the case with “shepherd.” The noun “shepherd” (poimēn, #4166 ποιμήν) and the verb “shepherd” (poimainō, #4165 ποιμαίνω) are usually only translated that way by most English versions when the context clearly involves sheep or people metaphorically being referred to as “sheep.” This is especially the case when it comes to the verb “shepherd,” which is not translated that way by most English versions in the majority of places it appears, and instead it is translated by words such as “feed,” “care for,” “tend,” “rule,” “look after,” and “herd” (cp. Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 9:7; 1 Pet. 5:2; Jude 1:12; Rev. 2:27; 7:17; 12:5; and 19:15). Also, sadly, it has happened in English that the office of someone who “shepherds” other people is not translated as “shepherd,” but “pastor,” even though the Greek word is the same. Thus English readers lose the wonderful connection between Jesus, the “Chief Shepherd,” and the “shepherds” that he appointed to watch after his “sheep.” Ephesians 4:11 says that when Jesus ascended “he gave some to be…pastors (shepherds),” so in that verse we see the Chief Shepherd appointing other shepherds to help him with the work.

Anyone who works with sheep knows that it is impossible to look after a large flock without help. A large flock always had a “chief shepherd” and other “shepherds” who helped with the work. That is exactly the case with the Body of Christ, which has millions of individual sheep. Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, and he works closely with the shepherds (the “pastors”) he has placed in his Body. That Jesus is called the Chief Shepherd should be a great encouragement to anyone who is called to leadership in the
Body of Christ, because it is clear that any shepherd can and should look to the Chief Shepherd for help, guidance, support, information, and whatever else is needed to shepherd the flock.

1 Peter 5:2 should help us understand more completely what it means to have fellowship with Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3) and why we can have an intimate prayer relationship with Jesus Christ. When shepherding a literal flock of sheep, both the chief shepherd and the hired shepherds work hard to have a personal relationship with the sheep such that the sheep know and trust them. It is only the laziest of hirelings who do not get to know the sheep and properly care for them. The same is true with God’s flock. Every godly earthly pastor (shepherd) works hard to have a personal and intimate relationship with the people he shepherds, and in fact would not be considered a good pastor if he was removed and distant from his flock. So too, Jesus, the “Chief Shepherd,” works to have an intimate and personal relationship with his flock and is not distant from us. He promised, “I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20), and he is. We should not tackle life on our own without his guidance and help. No sheep would expect to tackle life without the shepherd’s help. Let us regularly and diligently look to Jesus for help and guidance.

5:5. Quoted from Proverbs 3:34. See commentary on James 4:6.
5:8. “opponent at law.” The Greek word is antidikos (#476 ἀντίδικος), and it has two meanings: to be constantly against as an enemy to; or to be an opponent in a court of law (thus, an “opponent at law”). The word antidikos occurs five times in the New Testament, and we translate it “opponent at law” here and Matthew 5:25 (cp. NASB in Matt. 5:25), we felt the other three times were clearly in a legal situation, and just translated it “opponent.” Although the Devil is constantly against God’s people, the context here in Peter favors the courtroom scenario (cp. BDAG Greek-English Lexicon). The Devil may be an enemy all the time, but he cannot devour everyone all the time. The Bible makes it clear that the Devil is constantly looking for people he can devour, often people who have sinned against God. These he accuses in God’s court of justice.

Contrary to what many Christians believe, the Bible does not show “God in control” of what happens in life. Instead, the Bible portrays the earth as a war zone and God’s army pitted against the Devil’s army. That is why the Bible calls God a “warrior” (Ex. 15:3), and portrays God as being angry and hurrying to fight the enemy when His people are in danger and cry out to Him (Ps. 18:1-15).

Furthermore, the Devil cannot just kill anyone he wants, there are limits to his unrighteous acts. However, in God’s court of justice he is accusing people before God day and night (Rev. 12:10), and sadly, often those accusations are deserved.

The teaching that “God is in control” has so filled Christendom that people do not see the clear teaching in Scripture that our sins sometimes cause God not to be able to protect us from the Devil. God is a just God, and the Adversary demand justice when it suits his plans. For example, Peter sinned, and the Devil “demanded” to harm him in some way. In Luke 22:31, Jesus told Peter: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat.” On what basis did Satan “demand” to have Peter? He demanded “justice” for Peter’s sins. Jesus told Peter it was because he prayed for Peter that Peter was not handed over to Satan.

The legal nature of the struggle between God and the Devil is based upon God being a just God, and the Devil knowing that and using it to his advantage. In Exodus 24,
God and Israel made a covenant that we call the Old Covenant (mis-called, the “Old Testament). When Israel broke the covenant, God brought a lawsuit against Israel. Micah 6:2 (HCSB) says: “Listen to the LORD's lawsuit, you mountains and enduring foundations of the earth, because the LORD has a case against His people, and He will argue it against Israel.” In that verse, the Hebrew word *rib* (#7379), “lawsuit, legal case, dispute, or quarrel,” occurs twice. In Hosea 4:1 the Bible says Yahweh has a lawsuit against Israel. From what we see in Job chapter 1, Revelation 12, and other places, Satan would have been an aggressive prosecuting attorney against Israel. The people of Israel would not confess their sin and change, so God dissolved his marriage covenant, divorced Israel, and sent her away (Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8). Israel “lost” her case, and the Ten Tribes of Israel were conquered by Assyria, deported, and have never returned to their land, even to this day. The Bible shows that eventually the Devil will be the one judged in God’s court, and he will be condemned (Dan. 7:10).

Christians have long known that, in general, if they obey God there are things that go well for them that do not generally go well if they disobey God. This is not an absolute rule, because there is a spiritual war going on and evil does happen to good people. Nevertheless, it is such a well-established principle that many preachers say that when we sin, we “walk out from under the umbrella of God’s protection.” The effect is certainly real, but the Bible does not use “umbrella” language. What actually happens? According to the biblical text, God has a courtroom in heaven, and the Devil is constantly in it, accusing the believers. If a believer is humble and obedient to God, the Devil has no basis for the accusation and it generally goes nowhere. However, if a believer sins willfully over and over, eventually justice demands that God cannot extend supernatural protection and the Devil is free to move against the person.

This occurs over and over in the Old Testament, although the Hebrew text does not give the Devil the credit for the evil. The language of the Old Testament hides the actions of the Devil and attributes them to God via the figure of speech, the idiom of permission [For more on the idioms of permission, see commentary on Romans 9:18]. Nevertheless, all one has to do is read the Old Testament in a cursory manner to see that when believers sinned, bad things happened to them.

What we must understand is that although we may sometimes have bad things happen to us that we do not deserve, if we ignore God and disobey His commands we will eventually have bad things happen to us. God’s justice, which enables Him to extend protection to people who obey Him, requires Him to hand over to the Devil those people who defy Him. When we sin, we break God’s heart because as our Father He loves us and wants the best for us all the time, but He cannot protect us if we insist on defying Him and doing evil.

“the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word *diabolos* means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

5:10. “restore.” *Katartizō* (#2675 καταρτίζω) can mean to “restore to a former condition” or “to prepare; to outfit” (BDAG). In this context it means to restore—“after
one has suffered for a little while,” God will put him into proper condition again, and then do more: confirm, strengthen, and establish him.
Chapter 1

1:1. “Simon.” The Greek text has “Simeon,” which is the Hebrew form of “Simon,” Peter’s Jewish name. Peter’s first-century audience would have understood that immediately and not have been confused, but modern readers might easily be confused and wonder why “Simon Peter” is suddenly being called, “Simeon Peter.” See commentary on Acts 15:14.

“God and our savior Jesus Christ.” It is standard that the New Testament Epistles open with a salutation from both God and Jesus Christ, and there is no reason to understand that 2 Peter would open in a different way. The translation, “God and our savior Jesus Christ” is perfectly legitimate and, based on the scope of Scripture, to be preferred.


1:10. “choosing you.” The Greek is eklogē (#1589 ἐκλογή), and is best translated “choosing” rather than “election.” The term election comes with undesirable Calvinist connotation—the meaning here cannot be election in the Calvinist sense. If we were to take Calvin’s view, how then could you do anything to make your election sure? You could not. Supposedly, it is wholly in the hands of God whether you are part of the elect or not, so it does not make sense to speak of “making one’s election sure.”

1:11. “kingdom… in the Age to come.” The translation “in the Age to come” is from the aionios (#166 αἰώνιος), which most versions render “eternal.” However, although aionios can mean “eternal,” this verse is not speaking of the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, but of his kingdom in the Messianic Age. [For more on this distinction, see Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”]

1:19. “(as to a lamp…).” For the parenthesis, see Bullinger, Figures, “Parenthesis,” p. 470.

1:21. “moved by holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

Chapter 2

2:1. “the People.” The designation “the People” often refers to the nation of Israel, as it does here (see commentary on 1 Peter 2:10). Peter is warning his audience that if false prophets arose from among the Jews, “God’s chosen people,” then they could arise from among God’s new chosen people, the Christians. We cannot let our guard down or be naive when it comes to our leaders—the Devil is crafty and getting a false prophet into the congregation is a great way to lead people astray.

“Master.” The Greek is despótēs (#1203 δеспότης) means master or lord, and it refers to someone who has legal control and authority over others, such as subjects or
slaves (cp. 1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:9). It is used both as a title for God (Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24), and a title for Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 1:4), and here is referring to Christ. See commentary on Luke 2:29.

2:2. “defamed.” The Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημεω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

2:4. “when they sinned.” One of the times they sinned was in the days of Noah, while the ark was being built (1 Peter 3:20). What happened was that some angels joined Lucifer and rebelled against God. They became what we know from the NT as demons. In the days between Adam and the Flood, they cohabited with women (there was a type of genetic manipulation that occurred) and formed a race known as the Nephilim, which is Hebrew for “Fallen Ones” (Gen. 6:2-4). This tainted race was wicked, and so polluted the world that God had to save the genetic line to Christ by the Flood. After the Flood the demons again tried to produce this wicked race (Gen. 6:4 “after that”), but gradually they were killed off, many by the Israelites coming into the Promised Land from Egypt. For more on this, see, Bullinger, Companion Bible, Appendix 23 and 25, and audio podcast, “The Sons of God of Genesis Six,” from STF.

“Tartarus.” The Greek is tartarōō (#5020 ταρταροω). Many translations say “hell,” as if the Greek word were hades or Gehenna, generally believing it would be confusing to add another Greek word for the place where the demons are imprisoned. However, that reflects fuzzy theology.

Hades was the Greek word used to represent the Hebrew word sheol, which was the state of being dead. When the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek around 250 BC, the Hebrew word sheol was translated by the Greek word hades. Sheol was not the physical grave itself, but the state of being dead. Thus dead people are said to be in Sheol (cp. 37:35; 42:38; 1 Kings 2:6; Job 7:9; Ps. 6:5; 16:10; Prob. 7:27; etc.). It was actually a bad choice to translate sheol as hades, because in sheol people are dead, whereas in the Greek mythology, hades was a place where the souls of dead people are alive. Thus by translating sheol as hades, great confusion about the state of the dead was introduced into Judaism and then into Christianity, and that confusion still exists today. It would have been better if the Greeks had simply transliterated sheol into Greek and brought it into the language as a loan-word. The Bible, properly translated, makes it clear that dead people are dead until the Rapture or a resurrection. [For more on Hades and Sheol, see Bullinger, A Critical Lexicon and Concordance; “hell.” For more on the dead being dead and not alive in any form, see Appendix 4: “The Dead are Dead”].

Demons are not now, and have never been, in sheol (hades) because those words refer to the state of being dead, and demons have never been dead. In contrast to sheol (hades), Gehenna is the lake of fire, where in the future unsaved people will be thrown and burned up (Rev. 20:15). The Devil and his demons will also be thrown into Gehenna and eventually destroyed there (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10). No one is in Gehenna at this time.

In contrast to sheol (hades), the state of being dead, and to Gehenna, the lake of fire that will destroy the enemies of God, Tartarus is a prison where gods (demons) who have sinned are kept, as this verse says, “to be held for judgment.” Interestingly, 1 Peter 3:19 says God put the demons in “prison,” using the standard word for prison, phulake (#5438 φυλακη). It makes sense that God has a prison for the demons who committed
specific sins. In Greek mythology, Tartarus was the deepest region of the world, placed beneath the Underworld itself. According to the Greek legends, the powerful gods locked away enemy gods in Tartarus. Thus there is a kernel of truth in these legends, as there are in most legends, because by the time the legends were formed, God had indeed locked away some demons in Tartarus so they could not sin any more, but just be held there until their time for judgment had come. Gradually Tartarus became identified in Greek legend as a place where serious criminals were tortured, but there is no reason to believe God tortures the demons in prison. (Pierre Grimal: The Dictionary of Classical Mythology (Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited, New York, 1986), “Tartarus.”).

“chains.” The Greek texts are divided, with some reading seira (#4577 σειρά), a chain or rope, and others having sirois, (σιροίς; no occurrence in the NT), which is a pit, specifically for storing grain. Scholars favor seira, a chain, because it has the oldest and widest breadth of textual witnesses, nevertheless, a number of modern versions read something such as “pits of darkness.” We have no knowledge of what kind of “chain” (or for that matter, what kind of prison) would hold a demon. The spiritual world is completely different from our physical world, but nevertheless there are spiritual realities that are as completely real to spirit beings as our physical realities are real to us. The Bible mentions many things that exist in the spirit world. They dress in clothing, have weapons (swords), worship at a Temple, sit on thrones, and much more.

2:8. “kept torturing his righteous soul.” The Greek verb basanizo (#928 βασανίζω) is in the active voice, imperfect tense. Lot kept torturing himself by his decision to live in Sodom. Some versions try to get Lot “off the hook” by translating the verb as a passive, saying something like, “Lot’s soul was tormented,” but that is clearly not the force of the text, nor is it historically accurate. Lot, when given the choice by Abraham, chose to live in Sodom. If he did not know what it was like before he moved there (he probably did), he certainly would have found out very quickly and could have moved elsewhere, even back near his Uncle Abraham. Instead, like so many people, he acted to his own hurt, and thus tortured himself. People would spare themselves a lot of hurt and pain if they would not make poor decisions that end up only hurting them.

“his righteous soul.” The Greek has no article and no pronoun, and thus would read, “a righteous soul.” Of course, the context makes it clear that the righteous soul is his own. The understatement makes the reality hit home harder.


“while continuing their punishment.” The wicked are being punished now. There are demons in chains, and even the wicked who are “free” and “powerful” on earth experience the wrath of God (Romans 1:18; The wrath of God is now being revealed…”). They have no love, or joy, or true peace, or a real hope, or anything else that makes life a blessing. Lenski, Meyer, and other commentators recognize that the verse is saying that the wicked are being punished now, and will also experience the Judgment (and eventual extermination). However, most orthodox Christian commentators think that the punishment referred to in this verse is the wicked dead being in Hell, even before the Day of Judgment. That is not the case. Even the wicked, when they die, are asleep waiting the resurrection.

2:10. “defaming.” The Greek verb blasphèmeō (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphèmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].
“the glories.” The Word is not clear about what these glories are. Some commentators say they are God, Christ, or angels, Lenski says they are the glories of Christ. They may include any or all of the various glories of God’s creation, all of which are blasphemed by false teachers and ungodly people.


“in their destruction they will indeed be destroyed.” The ultimate meaning of this verse is that when unsaved people are thrown into Gehenna, they will be totally and finally destroyed. The “destruction” of the ungodly is not temporary. It is complete and final.


2:14. “eyes full of an adulteress.” This is the literal Greek. Most versions read “full of adultery,” but the noun is concrete, “an adulteress.” This might have hit home more powerfully in the first century than it does now, because a contemporary saying was that a shameless man had harlots, not “kora” in his eyes (The Greek word kora (κόρα) was a homonym meaning “young girl” or “pupil of the eye” (Norman Hillyer, New International Biblical Commentary; and Liddell and Scott Greek English Lexicon) This verse speaks very powerfully to images that get implanted in the brain and are hard to remove. Men are visually stimulated, and pornography and other images of women stay in their mind and can be extremely hard to get rid of. A man who has been involved in sexual sin can literally have his mental eye full of an adulteress. The best way not to have to deal with that problem is not get involved in the first place.

“souls.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is used more broadly of the individual himself with an emphasis on his thoughts and emotions, and thus is similar to the use in Romans 2:9. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

2:18. “those who are just escaping from those who live in error.” (cp. Lenski; also New International Bible Commentary). The new converts are the special victims of the false teachers who entice people by the flesh. The new converts are just in the process of escaping from the world. The rendering, “barely escaped,” as many versions have, is not as clear.

2:22. “the dog returns to his own vomit.” This is similar to Proverbs 26:11.

**Chapter 3**

3:4. “asleep.” The Greek verb is koimaō (#2837 κοιμάω), to fall asleep, to be asleep. Sleep is used as a euphemism and metaphor for death. See commentary on Acts 7:60.

3:12. “earnestly desire.” The Greek word is spēudō (#4692 σπεύδω) and it can mean to hasten (transitive meaning) or to eagerly expect (intransitive meaning). Many translations say something such as the NIV, “and speed its coming,” or have a similar phrase that indicates that we humans can do something to speed the coming of the Day of God. Although many theologians support this translation, and think we can do something to make the Day of God come faster, verses that are given in support of that belief (such as Matt. 6:10; 1 Pet. 2:12 and comparing those with verses such as Matt. 13:58 where
unbelief hinders the work of God) do not in fact support that conclusion, but only indicate the Kingdom is coming sometime in the future. There is not, in fact, a single verse of Scripture that clearly says we can modify the timing of the Day of the Lord by our behavior. In fact, the Bible is clear that before the Day of the Lord, the situation in the world will get worse and worse, and many people will even turn from the faith (Matt. 24:14; 2 Thess. 2:3; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1, 13; 2 Pet. 3:3; Jude 18). Lenski writes: “We question whether the holy conduct of Christians can hasten the day of judgment, whether this is the teaching of the Bible. The decline of faith and the coldness of love would have more of a tendency to hurry that day along. The verb *speudō* is widely used in the sense of “to be eager” (see Liddell and Scott for illustrations), which fits perfectly here as an intensifying synonym of ‘expecting.’” (R. C. H. Lenski, commentary on 2 Pet. 3:12). We agree with Lenski that it seems clear that it is things on earth getting worse as mankind gets more evil, and not that believer’s get more holy, that is the harbinger of the Day of the Lord.

**3:16. “distort.”** The Greek is *strebloo* (#4761 στρεβλάω), and it means to “torture” them, to “put them on the rack.” Thus it was used metaphorically of those who distorted or tortured language. Ignorant people constantly distort Scripture, but there is coming a day when God will vindicate both Himself and what He has said.

“the rest of the Scriptures.” Cp. Lenski and the NASB. That is the sense here. The word “Scriptures” is plural.
Chapter 1

1:1. “beginning.” Occasionally someone will become confused by the word “beginning” in verse one and assume it refers to the fact that Jesus was with God in “the beginning.” The word “beginning” is very flexible in Greek, just as it is in English, and refers to the beginning of whatever is being referred to in the context. An example in English may help to clarify this. If a friend of ours walks into a movie theater after the movie has started, sits down next to us and says, “I missed the beginning; tell me what happened,” we do not think he missed the beginning of creation. The meaning of “the beginning” is determined by the context.

Before we mention some of the things that “the beginning” refers to in Scripture, we should note that the Greek word translated “beginning” in 1 John 1:1 is ἀρχή (#746 ἀρχή), which itself has many meanings. The meanings of ἀρχή include the first person or thing in a series, the beginning, the leader (a person); the first place, rule or magistracy (an office); the origin or active cause of something; and the extremity of something (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon).

In its use in Scripture as “beginning,” ἀρχή refers to many things, including: the human race (Matt. 19:4); the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:8), the world (Matt. 24:21); the Good News about the presence and message of Jesus (Mark 1:1); the signs that Jesus did (John 2:11); Jesus’ public ministry (John 15:27); the start of Jesus training his apostles (John 16:4); the Christian Church (Acts 11:15); Paul’s early life (Acts 26:4); Paul’s missionary work (Phil. 4:15); the foundation of the earth (Heb. 1:10); the teaching of salvation by Jesus Christ (Heb. 2:3); of creation (2 Pet. 3:4); and of sin (1 John 3:8).

There are also times when it is not clear exactly what “the beginning” is referring to. For example, 1 John 3:11 refers to the message which the people heard “from the beginning.” It is usually assumed that this means from the first time they started hearing anything about the Gospel, but it could also be a more general use, referring to the beginning of the teaching of the Gospel concerning Jesus Christ, as Mark 1:1 uses “beginning.”

Such is the case here in 1 John 1:1 as well, the use of “beginning” is not clearly defined, however, it most likely refers to the start of Jesus’ ministry.

1:3. “we have seen.” Although John never specifically says who the “we” is, we can glean from the context that it is the other apostles who have seen Jesus.

“so that you also may have fellowship with us.” The Greek word translated “fellowship” is κοινωνία (#2842 κοινωνία; pronounced koy-no-nee'-ä). It refers to a close association involving mutual interests and sharing; a close relationship characterized by involvement and sharing; “fellowship,” “sharing,” “communion.” From that fundamental definition, it came to refer to the love or good will that comes with a close relationship; thus generosity, sharing, participation. It also came to refer to the result of close association, which is sharing, giving, a gift, or a contribution. Here, as in Acts 2:42, κοινωνία refers to all the aspects of the word “fellowship.” there was the intimate joint participation among the believers, the love and good will that comes with that
relationship, and also sharing, giving, gifts, and contributions among the community of believers.

A very helpful definition of “fellowship” (koinōnia), is “intimate joint participation.” To help us understand “intimate joint participation” we need to understand what those words mean. In a social situation, the word “intimate” brings in an aspect of personal openness that occurs in true fellowship. Someone once defined “intimacy” as “in-to-me-see,” which is accurate and clear. It is amazing the extent to which we can be with others and never let them see into us. Many people can talk for hours without ever letting the listener “see” into them. That may be wise to do “on the street,” but it is certainly not how fellowship is supposed to work among Christians. Fellowship is also “joint participation.” We do not have “fellowship” if we are sitting by ourselves watching a preacher on TV, and similarly we do not have “fellowship” if we are sitting in a pew watching one on stage but not participating in any way. To be true “fellowship,” there must be open and honest joint participation. [For more on why we define koinonia as “intimate joint participation” see commentary on Acts 2:42].

It is often overlooked in Christian circles that true “fellowship” is based upon like-mindedness. The value of the preacher up in front of the audience, or even the preacher on TV, or John writing here to the Church about the things that he had heard with his own ears and seen with his own eyes, was that it produced likemindedness among the believers. John taught them “so that they could have fellowship,” and without some measure of likemindedness, they would not be able to have fellowship.

John was writing to fellow Christians whom he had discipled and with whom he was in an intimate relationship. This is shown by the fact that seven times he calls them “children” and six times “beloved.” When he calls them “children” (using teknon and paidion; 2:1, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21), he is using the word in the Semitic sense of someone who is beloved and is a personal disciple. John had mentored these disciples and was writing to them as a concerned father. (We should note that the meaning of “children” in 2:12 and 13 is different from the use in 2:1, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; and 5:21. In 2:12, 13, the word “children” refers to disciples who are immature in the faith. In those two verses, “children” is contrasted with “young men” and “fathers,” who are more mature in the faith. In a culture which used “children” and “father” terminology to refer to literal fathers and children, and also mentor and disciple, and lover and beloved, the change of emphasis in the word “children” in 2:12 and 13 would be easily noticed and caused no problems for the reader).

John is writing to people he has personally trained and loves dearly, so he is not writing to get them saved. His disciples have been under assault. “Many antichrists” had arisen (2:18), and “went out from us,” meaning they had once been fellowshipping with John and those with him, but had left John’s company, presumably because they did not agree with what John was teaching and doing. Some of those people were no doubt part of the “many false prophets” that were in the world (4:1). John warns his beloved children not to simply believe the “spirits,” the prophecies, that come from prophets, but to test them to see if they are true. Since no Christian would “just believe” a prophecy from a non-believer or a prophet or oracle of one of the ancient or Greco-Roman gods, the fact that John writes and tells the people not to believe every prophecy shows that the ones giving the prophecies were professing to be Christian [For the use of “spirit” as a prophecy or manifestation of the gift of holy spirit, see commentary on 1 Cor. 14:12].
John’s beloved disciples were being confused by these deceived Christians who had become false prophets and even against Christ, but still had some credibility and could demonstrate some spiritual power. Apparently some disciples were even being drawn away to idol worship (5:21). Thus John wrote to them to shore up or re-establish like-mindedness with his beloved disciples so that he and they could have “fellowship,” (intimate joint participation). John knew what many Christians apparently do not: that when Christians disagree on fundamental points of the faith, there cannot be true fellowship with one another. We each instinctively know this and feel comfortable being around people who believe like we do.

Scripture says, “What fellowship can light have with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14). However, there are Christians who try to downplay major disagreements, saying things like, “Why can’t we just get along” or “We can still worship together even if we disagree.” This kind of talk misses the point. There is great value in truth and often great harm in error. Why did John even fight for the truth of the faith if it was not important? Why did Paul say if someone taught another Gospel he should be accursed (Gal. 1:8)? Why did Jesus say over and over again in the Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard that it was said...but I say to you...,” and tell the disciples to leave the erring religious leaders alone, saying they were blind leaders of the blind (Matt. 5:21-48; 15:14)? Why did Jude say we should “contend earnestly for the faith” (Jude 1:3)? The whole Bible shows the contest between good and evil. God does not say to worship with evil or error, He says, “Come out from the midst of them, and be separate, says the Lord, and stop touching anything unclean, and I will welcome you” (2 Cor. 6:17). Obviously, we all err, and no one can claim to have the whole truth. But it is wrong to think that because of that we all can, or should, fellowship together. We can worship together to some degree, certainly, but “intimate joint participation” (“fellowship”) requires like-mindedness, and so John says he is writing to his disciples about what he has seen and heard so they could believe the same things and then fellowship together.

“with his Son Jesus Christ.” Christians are to have “fellowship,” with Jesus Christ as well as with the Father and each other. The key to understanding “fellowship” with Jesus is knowing what “fellowship” is, which we covered above (see “fellowship”).

Our relationship with Jesus is to be intimate, that is open, honest, and heartfelt. We are to be totally open and honest with him. Similarly, our relationship must be one of “joint participation,” that is, both sides participate. “Fellowship” is not one-way, with one party doing all the communication. Jesus guides and directs us, teaches us, and blesses us in countless ways. We in turn listen to his instructions; pray to him, asking him for help or direction; praise him; thank him for what he has done and continues to do for us; and in general share our hearts and lives with him. The old song goes: “I have found a friend in Jesus, he’s everything to me,” and Jesus is indeed to be a true friend to us, intimately involved in our lives on a daily basis.

It makes perfect sense that we are supposed to have intimate joint participation with Jesus because he is both our Lord and the Head of the Body of Christ of which we are individual parts. In both his function as “Lord” and “Head” it is axiomatic that he be in communication with people. He cannot function as “Lord” if he cannot communicate to those people subject to him, and he cannot be “Head” in any meaningful way unless he can be in communication with his Body, the Church. But that communication is not a one
way street. We cannot truly have Jesus as our “Lord” or “Head” if we cannot communicate to him, ask him for things, and get the information and help that we need.

At the Last Supper, only hours before his arrest, Jesus made some very powerful statements to his disciples about how he would relate to them after his death and resurrection, and some of what we can expect in the way of “fellowship” with him. We can ask him for things and expect him to respond to our requests, and if we obey him he will show himself to us, revealing himself and his ways.

**John 14:14**
If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

**John 14:21**
Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.

If we discipline ourselves to love and obey Jesus Christ, we can have, and should expect to have, an intimate and vital relationship with him and his Father, God. Although some Christians have been taught that we cannot pray to Jesus, this verse is strong evidence that we can indeed pray to Jesus. The very essence of “fellowship,” intimate joint participation, means that we could ask those people with whom we have fellowship for help if we needed it, and that certainly includes both God and Jesus. For more information on prayer to Jesus, see commentary on John 14:14.

**1:4. “in order that.”** This verse contains the stated purpose of the Epistle: “so that our joy may be made full.” The verse contains two textual variants, both concerning pronouns. (1) Instead of the pronoun “we” (#2257 ἡµῶν) with the verb “we write,” some texts change the pronoun to read “to you” (#5213 ὑµῖν), and (2) Some texts read, “your” (#5216 ὑµῖν) joy rather than “our” (#2257 ἡµῖν) joy. These differences can be seen between the KJV and ASV translations:

| ASV | 1 John 1:4 and these things we write, that our joy may be made full. |
| KJV | 1 John 1:4 And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. |

The textual reading represented in modern versions is to be preferred: “we write these things” rather than “we write to you,” and “our” joy rather than “your” joy. Both these readings not only are supported by better texts, they also conform to the textual criticism principle known as *lector difficilis*—that is, that the more difficult reading is most likely correct (cp. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*). In the first case, a scribe would be much more likely to change the text to the natural “to you” rather than change it to “we,” which is already communicated in the verb “we write.” It is likewise easier to account for the change from “our” joy to “your” joy, as it may seem more natural for John to be writing so his readers’ joy could be made full rather than his own.

Why then does John speak of “our” joy being rather than simply his readers’ joy? The answer lies in the full context of his stated purpose for writing the letter. In the first three verses John dictates that he declares what he has seen, “so that you too may have fellowship with us.” Thus, the reference to “our” joy being made full is in the context of having full sharing together as Christians, the “our” is John and the believers together.
1:5. “message.” From the Greek word *aggelia* (argentia). The messenger is the *aggelos* and the message he brings is the *aggelia*. Interestingly, this word only occurs twice, here and in 1 John 3:11.

“heard from him.” The “him” is Jesus Christ. John 1:18 says that Jesus Christ made known the Father, and he made Him known in a fuller and more accurate way than had ever been done before. In fact, Jesus so modeled the character of the Father that he said that anyone who had seen him had seen the Father (John 14:9). This statement is very profound because it not only tells us about God in an unconditional way, but it clarifies something that was not really clear in the Old Testament (and is still believed by many), that God, for reasons unknown to us, causes human suffering. The full revelation that in God was “no darkness at all” came through Jesus Christ, and it is up to us to see that both in the Bible and in our hearts. When we have doubts about the goodness of God, we cannot love Him with ALL our heart, soul, mind, and strength. [For information on the “idiom of permission,” which makes it seem like God does evil, see commentary on Romans 9:18].

“God is light.” This is the figure of speech metaphor. The meaning of “light” in the mind of the Eastern peoples was rich and multifaceted. E. W. Bullinger correctly notes: “It would require a volume to investigate and carry out all that is taught by this wondrous metaphor (Figures of Speech; “Anthropopatheia”). The importance and blessings of “light” in the biblical culture are firmly anchored in their daily life and experience. At a time before any kind of bright and reliable lamp, light, or flashlight, the “light” from the sun was essential to life and activity on the earth. It is because of the physical blessings that light brought to the people, and because it is the very foundation of life and the first thing God needed to start life on earth (Gen. 1:3), that light was compared to many things in life. Light was helpful, healing, warming, and protective (in contrast, darkness was hurtful and something to be feared). “Light” was used to portray what was good, right, just, fair, and godly, and was used to convey the concepts of knowledge and truth. “Light” was also used to express God’s favor and the joy, blessings, and the prosperity that His favor brings. The word “light” often communicates so much meaning that assigning one verse to one meaning is almost impossible. It is more accurate to understand the full cultural meaning of “light” and then see how the individual verses fit into the cultural understanding (cp. Ps. 43:3; 119:130; Prov. 4:18; 6:23; Dan. 5:14 (KJV); 2 Cor. 4:6).

The many meanings of “light” are reflected throughout the Bible. Thus, God is said to be light; the Messiah was the light of the world (John 8:12); The Word of God gives light (Ps. 119:105); people who are godly and walk in truth are said to dwell in the light and be light (Eph. 5:8); a good king or ruler was the light (2 Sam. 23:4); and even just being alive is referred to as the “light of life” (Job 33:30; Ps. 56:13). The fruit of “light” in people’s lives was goodness, righteousness, and truth (Eph. 5:9). In the days of Esther, when the Jews were delivered from the death sentence Haman had pronounced on them, they had “light” (Esther 8:16 KJV). God Himself is not only said to be light, but He covers Himself in light (Ps. 104:2), and lives in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16).

When God was present, His light often shone brightly (2 Chron. 5:13, 14 KJV).

If the light is life-giving, good, and godly, then the most ungodly times are when the light does not shine, for example, when the sun will be darkened (Isa. 13:10; Jer.
4:23; Matt. 24:29). The evil of the crucifixion is clearly portrayed by the fact that even at high noon the sun quit shining and there was darkness over the land (Matt. 27:45).

The phrase “God is light” is a metaphor (a comparison using a form of the verb “to be”). “Light” is also used in the Word of God in a simile (a comparison using “like” or “as”; Matt. 17:2) and as the figure hypostasis (a comparison by implication; 1 John 1:7; For an explanation of hypostasis, see commentary on Revelation 20:2).

1:7. “continue to walk…continues to cleanse.” The verbs for walk and cleanse are in the present tense, they are what grammarian Daniel Wallace refers to as Broadband Present, expressing continuous action over a period of time (cp. Wallace, Exegetical Syntax). Williams’ New Testament picks up on this and translates the verse, “if we continue to live in the light… the blood of Jesus his Son continues to cleanse us from every sin.” See commentary note on 1 Peter 1:2 on how the blood of Jesus can continuously cleanse us over a period of time.

1:8. “If we say that we have no sin.” This phrase has a very broad application. A major reason for it being in 1 John has to do with the Gnostics, but it has a much wider application than just that. It seems that at the time of the writing of 1 John the Gnostics were claiming they could do as they pleased and not be contaminated by sin; that is, their behavior would not affect their relationship with God. Sadly, many Christians feel the same way today, that no matter how they behave, because Jesus Christ paid for their sin their behavior does not affect their relationship with God. But it does. It is clear from the Bible that God works especially closely with certain people and not with others. For example, God picked Saul to be the first king over Israel, but withdrew Himself from Saul when Saul became arrogant and sinful (1 Sam. 15:26-28). God said, “…those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be treated with contempt” (1 Sam. 2:30 NRSV).

To “say we have no sin” comes out in many forms. The bottom line, as we have seen, is that people think they can do what they want and it not affect their relationship with God. However, there are various explanations people give as to why their behavior is not really sinful or does not count as sin or affect their relationship with God. The Gnostics believed their “special knowledge” made sin irrelevant when it came to them. Some groups have taught that since the body is fallen flesh, sin is “natural” and therefore God does not hold it against us. Some groups have taught that since Jesus paid for our sin, any sin we commit is already paid for without us having to confess it or be concerned about it. All of these groups, beliefs, and philosophies are shown false by the last phrase in the verse: “we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Let us not deceive ourselves and find out too late that there are genuine consequences for our sin. We need to obey 1 John 1:9 and confess our sins and get cleansed from them in God’s sight.

1:9. “If we confess our sins.” Christ died so we could be righteous in the sight of God. That righteousness involves, first and foremost, getting “saved,” that is, receiving everlasting life. A saved person is righteous in the sight of God. Once we are saved, we must realize that God will reward those who humbly obey and follow Him. In life we sin, and that sin affects our relationship with God and the rewards we will receive in the future. Once we are saved we are a child of God and our everlasting life is never in jeopardy. However, the position we will have in God’s kingdom, our rewards, are based on our obedience and relationship with Him [For more on this, see commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:10].
It is important to understand that when the Bible says we are to confess our sin, we do not have to remember each and every sin and confess it to be cleansed in the sight of God. If that were the case, no one could ever be forgiven. For one thing, we could never remember every sin we commit, and also, many times we sin and do not know it. The Bible shows us that we can be repentant before God for our sin and get forgiveness for them without specifically mentioning every sin. The best example of this in the Bible is the parable Jesus told of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:10-14). In the parable, the tax collector, who would have certainly had many sins, would not even approach close to the inner Sanctuary of God, but just humbled himself before God and asked for mercy. Jesus said it this way: “But the tax collector, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote his chest, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner.’ I say to you, this man [the tax collector] went down to his house righteous rather than the other [the Pharisee], for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

Notice that the tax collector did not have to confess each of his sin, but rather just confess his sins in general. We too, to be forgiven of our sin, just need to be humble before God and confess our sin to Him. When we do, we are totally cleansed in His sight.

Chapter 2

2:1. “will not sin.” Cp. NIV translation. This phrase is a hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood purpose clause (see Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled”). We went with “will” rather than “may,” because the hina clause shows Johns intention that they would not sin. On “will” vs. “may,” see commentary on Romans 8:17, “will be…glorified.”

2:2. “atonning sacrifice.” The Greek is hilasmos (♯2434 ἱλασμός), and it means an appeasement necessitated by sin, expiation or, an instrument for appeasing, sacrifice to atone, sin-offering (BDAG). Louw Nida write:

God offered him as a means by which sins are forgiven through faith (in him)’ Rom. 3:25. Though some traditional translations render ἱλαστήριον as ‘propitiation,’ this involves a wrong interpretation of the term in question. Propitiation is essentially a process by which one does a favor to a person in order to make him or her favorably disposed, but in the NT God is never the object of propitiation since he is already on the side of people. ἱλασμός and ἱλαστήριον denote the means of forgiveness and not propitiation.

The sacrifice of Jesus did not placate God, but rather was a provision that God, in His grace, made for mankind, so they would be accepted by Him and able to come into His presence. Other translations that read “atonning sacrifice” include the NIV, NRSV, Amplified Bible, and Williams. The New American Bible uses “expiation.”

2:6. “lives.” The Greek word is menō (♯3306 μένω) and its meanings include: to stay in a place, to remain, to continue to be present, to be kept continually; to endure or last, to adhere to, to not change, to wait for or await. When it comes to our relationship with God and Jesus Christ, who are alive and working in us every day, it has a deeper meaning,
which Thayer refers to as “mystic phraseology,” due to the fact our ongoing relationship with God and Christ is spiritual and thus hard to describe using words designed to describe worldly things. So it is no wonder that the English versions differ as to how to translate menō, and none of the English words are an exact fit. Some ways English translators have rendered menō in the Gospel and Epistles of John are: “abide,” “be in,” “continue,” “dwell,” “live,” “remain,” “remain attached,” “stay,” “stay united,” Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon says its meanings include: “to maintain unbroken fellowship with one…to be constantly present to help one…to put forth constant influence upon one.” Thayer goes on to say, “In the mystic phraseology of John, God is said μένειν in Christ, i.e., to dwell as it were within him, to be continually operative in him by his divine influence and energy.” According to Hass, DeJonge, and Swelliengrebel (A Translator’s Handbook on the Letters of John), it means, “to be constantly present with (or joined to), to continue in/with, ‘to keep union with.’” Stephen Smalley (Word Biblical Commentary) writes about the use of menō and says it:

“suggests an intensely personal knowledge of God; it presupposes an intimate and committed relationship with him, through Jesus, which is both permanent and continuous. To abide ‘in Jesus,’ moreover, indicates a close and personal relationship between the Father and the Son (cp. John 15:10); it guarantees eternal life; and it provides the power for living ethically as a believer.”

We are introduced to this use of menō in the Gospel of John and John used it ten times in the course of the Last Supper in chapters 14 and 15, when he spoke of Jesus “abiding” in the Father, the Father “abiding” in Jesus, the holy spirit “abiding” in the apostles and them “abiding” in Jesus (and Jesus used the illustration of the vine and the branches to make his point clear).

As we said above, the problem we face in translating menō is that in the context of this intimate and continuing relationship between God and Jesus and us, no English word really gets the full sense of it. Many versions use “abide,” but that usually indicates a passive existence, like abiding someplace while waiting on something. In contrast, our relationship with Jesus and the Father are very active. The same problem exists with “reside,” although that seems better than “abide.” Sometimes “remain” fits, but it often does not communicate the intimate and continuous relationship that the Johannine use of menō is communicating. There are verses where “continue,” is good, but it does not seem to exactly fit many of the verses. We felt the English word “live” is perhaps the best choice because it communicates both the residency that “abide” or “reside” communicates, and the continuous presence that “continues” communicates. It may communicate too active a relationship, but that seems better than no action at all. Also, there are other Greek words more suitably translated “live,” but if “live” catches the meaning the best, then we should use it. Given the options, “live” seems like a good choice for most of the Johannine use of menō.

2:8. “at the same time.” The Greek word is palin (#3825 πάλιν), meaning “again.” Here it has the meaning of “looking at it again,” that is, when returning to the thought, it turns out the command is new in quality. [Not a brand new commandment, but rather that the old commandment had a new quality to it].

2:10. “living.” For more on this translation, see commentary on verse 6.
2:13. **“Wicked One.”** The Greek is *poneros* (#4190 πονηρός), which the BDAG Greek-English Lexicon describes as, “pertaining to being morally or socially worthless; therefore, ‘wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, and degenerate.’” *Poneros* is an adjective, but it is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun; for more on substantives, see the commentary on Matthew 5:37).

The Slanderer is the fount and foundation of wickedness. It was in him that wickedness was first found, when he was lifted up with pride and decided to rebel against God. Ever since that time he has been true to his name, “the Wicked One,” and has been doing and causing wickedness wherever he can, which, since he is “the god of this age,” is a considerable amount of wickedness. [For more names of the Slanderer (the Devil) and their meanings, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].


   “lives.” For more on this translation, see commentary on verse 6.

2:16. **“pride in possessions.”** Although many versions say “life” and not “possessions,” the Greek word *bios* refers to the external trappings of life, versus *zoe*, the internal life. The lust of the flesh and eyes are toward that which is external, and the pride of possessions continues the thought. Cp. “τοῦ βίου pride in one’s possessions 1J 2:16” (BDAG). Also, the context is important. Verse 15 directs us to not love the things in the world, and verse 17 reminds us that this world is passing away.

2:17. **“lives.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on verse 6.

2:19. **“with the result.”** The Greek is a *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood result clause (that is, the preposition *hina* with a verb in the subjunctive mood; cp. the translation of NIV; NRSV; NAB; which show result). See Matthew 2:15 entry, “resulting in…what was spoken being fulfilled.” These false believers had no purpose in mind when they left. They did not intend on showing that they did not truly belong, as some translations infer: e.g., “they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us” (NASB). Rather, the revelation that they were not true believers was merely the result of their going out: “their going showed that none of them belonged to us” (NIV).

2:20. **“you all know.”** The reading of the KJV and ASV versions, “You know all things” is based on a Greek text not considered original. The original was changed from *oidate pantes* (you all know) to *oidate panta* (you all know all things), which changed the Greek word for “all” from the subject of the sentence to a direct object. The change most likely resulted from the lack of a direct object for the verb in the original reading (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*). What we know is left unspecific because it refers generally to what was “known” in the context; in verse 18 we “know it is the last hour” because of all those who are anti-christ. In the following verse, v.21, it goes on to say, “I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it”; on the other hand those who are antichrist deny the father and the son (v.22).

2:24. **“live…lives.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on verse 6.

2:27. **“lives…live.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on verse 6.

2:28. **“live.”** For more on this translation, see commentary on verse 6.

**Chapter 3**

1 John 1113
3:2. “it is revealed.” The Greek verb is phanerō (#5319 φανερόω [fan-er-o'-o]), and it means to make manifest or visible or known what has been hidden or unknown, to manifest, make visible, realized, expose to view, appear. The verb in the Greek is in the third person singular, and can be either “he,” “she,” or “it.” The context, and the sentence, favors “it.” The first time phanerō appears in the verse, it is referring to the fact that what we will be, our new glorified bodies, have not yet been revealed. The second is referring to the same thing; the revealing of our new bodies. The subject has not changed to the revealing of Christ. Reading the sentence as it appears in the REV (cp. NAB; NET; Darby), “We know that when it is revealed we will be like him, because we will see him just as he is,” makes perfect sense. The question is what our new bodies will be like, which has not yet been revealed. What they will be like will be revealed, however, by seeing what Christ looks like, because our new bodies “will be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21). We “know” that our new bodies will be like his, “because” we will be able to see him as he is in his new body, so the fact will be obvious. On the other hand, if the more standard reading is assumed to be correct, the sentence does not make good sense: “But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” How does seeing Christ as he is give us confidence that we will be like him? Many people will see Christ, in fact, the nations will mourn at his second coming, but that does not mean they will be like him.

Many competent Greek scholars have seen that the phrase usually translated “when he appears” (more properly, “when he is revealed”) should actually be “when it [our new body] is revealed” (Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament; Vincent’s Word Studies; Wuest’s Word Studies)

3:3. “fixed on him.” The hope referred to in this verse flows from the immediate context of Christ’s appearing and our new bodies. This hope is said to be “upon him,” that is, Christ; as Lenski has written, “set or resting ‘on him’ as the One who will fulfill this hope for us.” This verse is not saying, “Whoever has this hope in himself,” as the more ambiguous KJV, NRSV, and NIV rendering (“has this hope in him”) could be read to mean. Rather, it is the same Greek phrase, ep’ autō, that appears in Romans 15:12, “…the Gentiles will hope in him [Christ]” (See also: Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 Tim. 1:16; Heb. 2:13; 1 Pet. 2:6).

From verse two, we see that having this hope (the hope of our new bodies, which will look like Christ’s) causes us to purify ourselves, even as he is pure; this is because the prospect of being like Christ physically should induce in us the desire to be like him morally as well (See 4:17).

3:6. “lives.” For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

“continues sinning.” In this section the Greek is very clear, but it is challenging to translate it into English. In verses 6-9, the word “sin” when it is a verb, or the verb poieō, “to do, to make,” when it is paired with “sin” or “righteousness,” are active verbs in the present tense. The impact of this cannot be overstressed. For example, it misses the point of the Greek entirely to say, “He who commits sin is of the devil,” (1 John 3:8a RSV), as if committing a sin made a person of the devil. The Greek active present means: “He who keeps committing sin,” or “He who makes a practice of sin,” or, “He who continually commits sin,” or, “He who is continually sinning,” etc. The devil makes a habitual practice of committing sin, and those who do the same are of the devil.

“the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

“has been sinning from the beginning.” The word for “sinning” in this verse is in the present tense, though it is translated as the perfect tense in English: “has been sinning.” This is because this is an instance of what Wallace’s Grammar calls the Present of Past Action Still in Progress, or the Extending-from-Past Present (Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax*, 519-20). In Greek this is a way of showing that the action started in the past and is continuing on in the present. The devil started sinning from the beginning and is still sinning in the present. This is how the children of the devil are also; they were sinning in the past and have continued sinning into the present. In English we do not use the present tense, as the Greeks did, to convey this concept. We would not say, “The fire burns since yesterday,” but “the fire has been burning.”

“destroy.” The Greek word is luō (#3089 λύω), and it can mean to destroy or abolish, but also to undo, loose, untangle, and set free. Jesus came to do both, in our lives now, and ultimately, when the Kingdom comes into fruition. Many of the works of the devil he will destroy and abolish, such as pornography, but with other situations he will have to simply untangle the devil’s twisted perversion of things, setting them free to be how God envisioned them. In this latter case, Christ will not totally abolish these things, like the publishing industry for instance, perhaps there will still be books in the Kingdom, but will redeem them from their bondage as tools for Satan’s schemes.


“slaughtered.” There are several Greek words for kill or murder. God could have used any of these other words (e.g., ἀποκτείνω, ἀναιρέω, διαξειρίζομαι, φονεύω) but went out of his way to employ sphazō (#4969 σφάζω), a word used primarily of animals being sacrificed. Sphazō described the Greeks’ ritual sacrifices, when they would slice open the animal’s throat and pour its blood into a bowl. From this the word came to be used of human murder that was particularly brutal or bloody. It is appropriate then here for the story of Cain and Abel, which has to do with both sacrifices offered and Abel’s spilt blood.

The only other occurrences of sphazō are in the book of Revelation. The souls of the saints who were slaughtered on account of their witness appear under the altar, the place for slaughtering sacrifices (Rev. 6:9; cp. 18:24); Christ is depicted as a Lamb who was slain (Rev. 5:6; 9; 12; 13:8); one of the Beast’s heads was slaughtered, but recovered (Rev. 13:3); and people are made to murder each other when peace is taken from the earth (Rev. 6:4).

3:14. “brothers.” The object of the participle “loving” was left out of the verse, an instance of the figure of speech ellipsis (Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*). Many western texts added the word for brother to this verse to clarify the figure (cp. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*). We have decided to put “brothers” in italics to complete the thought of the participle, which is evident from the context. The figure is sandwiched between the
previous clause, which says, “We know… because we love the brothers,” and verse 15 that begins with “Whoever keeps on hating his brother…” It is clear, then, that the end of verse 14 is speaking of “Whoever does not love [the brothers].”


“lives.” For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

3:15. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].

3:16. “life…lives.” The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. This is one of the many verses that shows that psuchē, soul, is not immortal. [For a more complete explanation of psuchē, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

“for us.” This phrase comes from the Greek preposition huper (#5228 ὑπέρ), which means “on behalf of” (with the genitive, hēmōn = us), and can also mean “instead of” (Robertson, Grammar, 630-31). Christ died for us, that is, on our behalf; he took our place and died instead of us, when we were the ones who deserved the punishment of death.

“obligated.” This word, from the Greek opheilō (#3784 ὀφειλó), designates an “obligation; as debt; that which one ought to do, duty” (BDAG). It is used to describe monetary debts, duty to fulfill oaths, and other moral and social obligations. The Greek term means much more than is communicated when English versions translate the word as “ought to.” Though “ought” technically denotes a duty or obligation, it is used colloquially to express something that one “ought” to do but has no real honorific duty to do. For instance, we might say, “I really ought to mow the lawn this weekend,” which means I should do it, but I’m probably not going to. Nor do I feel any sense of moral obligation to mow the lawn; it’s just something that would be good to do. This is not at all the sense of opheilō. Rather, this word points to something that one is obligated to do.

“lives.” The Greek word is psuche (#5590 ψυχή), meaning soul. It is used as metonymy for the whole person’s being and not just their physical life. If need be, we must face physical danger to the point of death, on behalf of our brothers. But this verse speaks of much more than that; it speaks of the “laying down our lives,” which does not refer to our dying but to living sacrificially every day for others, especially those in the household. In this way it parallels Romans 12:1, although in a horizontal and not vertical way. Christ did much more for us than simply die a physical death; he lived, and lives, in such a way as to pour out himself for us. And we are obligated to do the same.

3:17. “the world’s goods.” The Greek reads, “the life of the world” using one of the definitions of “life” (bios) that means sustenance in life, the material things of life.

3:19. “assure.” This verb becomes very interesting in this context. It comes from the Greek word peithō (#3982 πείθω), which usually means persuade or convince (e.g. Acts. 18:4; 19:8), or “to be so convinced that one puts confidence in something” (BDAG). In this context, however, it has the meaning of “set at ease,” “to pacify.” We gently reason with our hearts and persuade them to be at ease and have confidence before God. Louw-Nida writes that the phrase “to convince the heart” is an idiom, meaning “to exhibit
confidence and assurance in a situation which might otherwise cause dismay or fear” (25.166). By what means do we assure our hearts? “By this” we assure our hearts: laying down our lives for the brothers (v.16), not closing our bowels of compassion (v.17), loving one another in deed and truth (v.18), and obeying his commandments (vv.22-23). Living according to God’s will sets our hearts at ease before him and give us confidence for prayer and assurance for the Judgment. Yet, if our heart does condemn us, God is still greater than our hearts (v.20), though we may not have confidence in this case. (See 4:17, note on “brought to its goal with us”).

3:22. “keep asking…keep receiving…continuously keep…keep doing.” All the verbs in this verse are in the present tense. We take these to be the usages of the iterative and customary present tenses (cp. Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax*, 520-22). The first two verbs are iterative, that is, they display actions that repeatedly happen—like the boy who “often falls into the fire” (Matt 17:15), the word “falls” is an iterative use of the present tense. We are not to just ask once for the things we seek from God, but to repeatedly ask, as the widow asked the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8). This is why Matthew 7:7 also uses the iterative present, as Wallace writes, “The force of the present imperatives is ‘ask repeatedly, over and over again…seek repeatedly…knock continuously, over and over again” (Wallace, *Exegetical Syntax*, 521). When we keep asking, we keep receiving the things we ask for.

But just asking is not enough; it should be coupled with obedience. Hence, the verse says we receive our prayers because we keep his commandments and do what is pleasing to him. The words for “keep” (his commandments) and “do” are customary presents, meaning they indicate a habitual, or regularly occurring, action. This verse is teaching us that a key to getting our prayers answered is, praying continuously and making it our customary practice to obey God, to do what is pleasing to him. Although we certainly do not have to be “sinless” for God to answer us, there are ungodly behaviors that can hinder our prayers (Josh. 7:10-11; Ps. 34:15-17; 66:18; Prov. 28:9; Mk. 11:25; Jas. 5:16; 1 Pet. 3:7).

3:23. “in the name of his son Jesus Christ.” We are not commanded here to believe in Jesus, nor simply believe that he is Christ, but to believe in the name of his son Jesus Christ. Believing on “the name” of someone is an idiom where that person’s name is taken to represent the totality of who person is: his notoriety, authority, influence, all he stands for, and the respect due him. It is similar to the English phrase, “Stop, in the name of the Law!” where the “law’s” name is invoked to represent its authority. It is not enough to believe that a man with the name “Jesus” really existed. Believing on his name is much more than this; it requires trust in what he represents and submission to his authority as the son of God and Messiah. It is this kind of believing we are required to have, the believing that is on his name. As Vincent writes concerning John 1:12, the phrase “expresses the sum of the qualities which mark the nature or character of a person. To believe in the name of Jesus Christ the Son of God, is to accept as true the revelation contained in that title” (*Word Studies*, 50). [For some other instances where name signifies one’s notoriety see: John 1:12; 2:23; 3:18; 20:31; for instances when the name means the person see: Num. 1:2; 18, 20; 3:40, 43; 26:53; Acts 1:15].

3:24. “lives.” For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

“That he gave to us.” We have translated the relative pronoun to be impersonal, “that,” (NRSV, NAB) rather than “whom” (ESV, NASB). Although the Trinitarian
interpretation, which makes the pronoun personal, is grammatically possible, that is not the way the pronoun should be understood here. Rather than referring to a person being given to us (the third person of the Trinity), this verse is speaking of the gift of holy spirit given to the believer upon new birth (Joel 2:28-29; Luke 11:13; John 7:39; Acts 2:4, 38; 8:15-19; 10:45; Eph. 1:13; 1 Thess. 4:8). See also, 4:13 note on “of his spirit” and our work, The Gift of Holy Spirit, pp. 34-40; Bullinger, Companion Bible; Word Studies on Holy Spirit.

“lives.” For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

Chapter 4

4:1. “do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits.” The Greek word translated “spirit” (and “spirits”) is pneuma (#4151 πνεῦμα), and this is the same use of “spirit” that is found in 1 Corinthians 14:12, 32 and 2 Thessalonians 2:2, and Isaiah 11:4. It is a metonymy, with the word “spirit” being put for the manifestations of holy spirit which are spoken by the power of holy spirit. In other words, that which is spoken by the power of holy spirit is called a “spirit” (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:12).

In this case the context makes it clear that “spirit” refers specifically to prophecies. The Christian is not to believe every “spirit,” i.e., every prophecy and spiritual utterance, but test them to see if they are from God because many “false prophets” have gone out into the world. The next verse continues the thought: every prophecy that acknowledges that Jesus has come in the flesh is from God, while those prophecies that do not are not from God.

This verse parallels 5:20 and 21, which say not to treat prophecies with contempt, but to test them and then hold on to the ones that are “good,” that is, accurate and from the Lord.

The beauty of the metonymy is that it leaves the door open for primary meanings and secondary meanings to both be present, which is the case in this verse. Although the context is prophets and thus the primary meaning of “spirits” is prophecies, it is also true that the prophecies have a “spirit” generating them, and part of discerning the prophecies is discerning the spiritual power that is generating them and whether it is the holy spirit of God or a demon.

4:2. “every spirit.” This is primarily referring to prophecies, but is also looking “behind the curtain” at the spirit (gift of holy spirit or demon) that is producing the prophecy. See commentary on 4:1.

“acknowledges.” The Greek is homologeō (#3670 ὁμολογέω), and can mean “confess,” “profess,” “declare,” “acknowledge.” Here, “acknowledge” is the meaning of the word. True prophecy acknowledges that Jesus has come in the flesh.

“from God.” The Greek is “of God,” and is a genitive of origin, thus “from God” is proper, likewise in verse 3.

4:3. “every spirit.” This is primarily referring to prophecies, but is also looking “behind the curtain” at the spirit (gift of holy spirit or demon) that is producing the prophecy. See commentary on 4:1.

“not from God.” The Greek is “of God,” and is a genitive of origin, thus “from God” is proper.
4:4. “have overcome.” This verb, nikaō (#3528 νικάω), is in the perfect tense, portraying the action as completed, we have overcome them (those who are of the spirit of error, of the world, and of antichrist [4:3, 5-6]). The key to this victory is laid out in 5:4-5; an examination of the tenses used in these verses is very revealing: The one who has been born of God (past tense) overcomes (present tense) the world; and our saving faith is the victory that has overcome (past tense) the world. The one overcoming the world (present tense) is he who believes (present tense) in Jesus as the Son of God. Hence, our faith in Jesus, by which we were born of God, secured the victory that has overcome the world. In this sense the victory is past. It is portrayed as finished, the victory is won for us once we have this faith and are born of God. On the other hand, the overcoming is also presently unfolding, after our new birth and our believing in Christ as the Son of God. In essence, our saving faith has secured for us the victory that is being lived out until its fruition. We have been transferred to the winning team, and it is impossible for the losers to catch up—though they may score some points against us. Victory is ours but the game is nevertheless still being played until the clock runs out. In a like manner, our overcoming the world is both a past reality and a present progression.

4:5. “of the world... from the world.” Commentators seem to be in agreement that these two phrases are both genitives of origin (Lenski; Meier). They are “of the world” and not “of God” (4:2, 3) and the things they speak come out from the world that they originate in; hence the world listens to them. Williams’ translation captures the genitives this way: “They are children of the world; this is why they speak what the world inspires, and why the world listens to them” (emphasis added).

4:9. “God sent his only begotten Son.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

4:10. “sent his son.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

4:12. “lives.” For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

4:13. “of his spirit.” In the Greek this phrase uses the preposition ek (#1537 ἐκ), meaning “from” or “out of,” with the word “spirit” in the genitive case (pneumatos); literally it would read, “He gave from [out of] his spirit.” This is called the “partitive use of ek,” which signifies a part of some greater whole (Robertson, Grammar). In this case, God has the totality of spirit and gives us some of it.

4:14. “the Father has sent the Son.” The teaching that God sent Jesus Christ occurs over forty times in the New Testament, and can have different meanings in different contexts. For in-depth commentary on Jesus Christ having been sent by the Father, and its different meanings and nuances in context, see John 6:57.

“Savior of the world.” The term “Savior of the world” (soter tou kosmou) was used by the Romans to refer to the emperor. This was a national phenomenon meant to bring the empire together under a unifying religious banner by participation in the cult of the emperor (Wuest). Here, Christ is proclaimed as the true “Savior of the world” sent by God. Accordingly, early Christians refused to participate in the cult of the emperor and
were heavily persecuted. Christians need boldness to stand against what is wrong, even when the entire culture thinks it is right, even when it goes against the highest of earthy authorities, and even when it will cost us greatly. John wrote the truth, that Christ is the true Savior and the emperor is an erroneous parody; we also must stand against erroneous doctrines of the world and preach the truth of Christ.

4:15. “lives.” For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

4:16. “living.” For more on this translation, see commentary on 1 John 2:6.

4:17. “brought to its goal with us.” Verses 16-18 expounds upon what is mentioned in 2:28: “And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.” In verse 16 we see that God is love and hence it is by abiding in him that love is completed, brought to its goal, along with us. In this case, the end goal of love is to cast out fear of punishment, so we may have confidence in the Day of Judgment (v.18). Love has come to its intended purpose by our walking with God (who is love) now in this life. The perfect love that verse 18 is speaking of is the love brought to its “goal” in verse 17, they are both the same Greek word, τελειόω (#5048 τελειοῦ). By remaining in love we remain with God, and so we can have boldness in the Day of Judgment when we stand before Him, because we have been in communion with Him all along.

“confidence.” The word can also mean “boldness” but here the emphasis is on confidence, and it is contrasted with fear of punishment. When love is perfected in a person, that one has parresia (#3954; confidence, boldness, frankness of speech) in the Day of Judgment.

“Day of Judgment.” Each person who has ever lived will one day face God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and be judged. Most people either deny this or ignore it. Those who understand it “fear God,” in a truly godly sense, being fully aware of the seriousness of it.

“because just as he is, even so are we, although still in this world.” As Jesus is now, so are we (righteous before God, holy, justified), although we are in this world. In other words, being in this world does not affect our righteous standing before God. (cp. Lenski for the italics and sense. Cp. also Alford, The Greek Testament).

4:18. “fear.” This “fear” refers to “bad fear,” which we explain below. A fundamental teaching of the Bible is that we are to “fear God,” that is, have a healthy fear of the consequences of disobeying Him. New Testament verse that teach us to fear God (or Jesus Christ) include: Acts 10:35, Romans 11:20; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 5:21; Colossians 3:22; 1 Peter 1:17, Revelation 11:18; 14:7; and 19:5. Jesus taught us not to fear people, who can only kill the body, but to fear God, who can destroy us totally in Gehenna (Matt. 10:28).

But how are we to “fear God” and “love God” when there is no fear in love? The answer to that apparent dilemma is that biblically, although “fear” has a range of meanings, they fall into two basic categories. The Bible lets us know (and the field of psychology empirically verifies it) that there are two kinds of fear: “good fear” and “bad fear.”

A good fear is God-given or a learned fear that keeps us safe in life. “Good fear” is God-given, and some of it is even innate and is observed in babies who have not yet “learned to fear.” Innate human fears include falling, darkness, loud and sudden noises, strange things (which is why a large percentage of babies are afraid of Santa Claus at the mall), and interestingly, snakes. In contrast to “good fear,” “bad fear” is both
psychologically and physically harmful. Both “good fear” and “bad fear” occur many times in the Bible. Bad fear includes when the army of Israel was afraid of Goliath the Philistine (1 Sam. 17:11), when the Jewish people would not openly talk about Jesus because they were afraid of the rulers of the Jews (John 7:13), and people being afraid of death (Heb. 2:15).

“Good fear” serves as a warning system that keeps us out of trouble. It is important to understand, however, that “good fear” can become a bad thing if we do not move beyond it rather quickly. Good fear is designed to help us, not to keep us perpetually on edge. As we grow and understand the things we are “afraid of,” we manage our good fear and it blends with “respect” and “awe.” So, for example, what started in our young life as a fear of fire (and Mom and Dad sternly warning us about the danger of fire) becomes a respect for fire, and even an awe of huge fires. The proper fear of God is very helpful in the life of Christians. In the Bible, good fear includes us having the fear of God (Prov. 1:7; 9:10; Matt. 10:28), and living in the fear of God (Acts 9:31).

Sometimes people teach that the “fear of God” is not really “fear,” but “respect” or “awe.” This is not actually true, although in some contexts the Hebrew or Greek word can refer more to “respect” or “awe” than fear. In Hebrew, the two most common words for “fear” are the noun יָרֵא (Strong’s #3373 יָרֵא) and the verb form of the same word, יִרְאָה (Strong’s #3374 יִרְאָה). In Greek the common words for fear are the noun φόβος (#5401 φόβος) and the verb form of the same word, φοβέω (#5399 φοβέω). Both the Hebrew and Greek words for “fear” have a large semantic range that includes our English concepts of “terror, dread, fear, timidity, respect, reverence, and awe.” As we can see from that list, biblical “fear” is like our English word “fear” in that it includes both sides of fear spectrum: “good fear” and “bad fear.”

It is important that we do not lose sight of the fact that the essence of actual fear, being afraid, never left the word “fear,” even when יָרֵא or φόβος were being used with the primary sense of “respect.” Why do we respect certain things, like fire, electricity, and lions? One reason is that there are genuine and often terrible consequences if the thing is not respected. It is vital to see the connection between “disrespect” and “consequences” if we are going to properly understand why “fear” has a good side and a bad side, and what it is to “fear God.” People respected the king for different reasons, but one of them was because not to do so brought severe consequences. Similarly, we “respect” God in part because it is dangerous not to. People who ignore or disobey God and His commands will be destroyed in the Lake of Fire, and although we “respect” God, we never toy with Him and are aware of the consequences of not taking Him seriously.

If we expunge the meaning “fear” from the “fear of God,” and replace it with “respect” as if the meaning “respect” stood on its own, then we are misunderstanding what the Bible is saying. To be sure, there are verses where the aspect of “respect” or “awe” is a more accurate translation in a given context than “fear,” but the Bible student cannot forget that even when “respect” is the dominant idea in the context, the word Hebrew or Greek word still retains the foundation of fear of consequences that yokes “respect” and “fear” together.

Here is 1 John, there is no “fear” in love, meaning that there is no bad fear in love. This verse is not contradicting Jesus’ teaching that we should have a fear of God.

“love.” Specifically, the Greek has the definite article, “the love,” or as Lenski, “this love.” Which love? The love that has been perfected and is confident at the Judgment.
There is no fear in that love. However, it is also a general principle that fear and love do not co-exist, and so most commentators do not translate the definite article. Meyer writes, “The thought is quite general in its character: ‘where love is, there is no fear’” (Meyer’s Commentary).

“has to do with punishment.” Vincent writes: “‘Torment’ is a faulty translation. The [Greek] word means, ‘punishment, penalty.’ …Note the present tense ‘has,” the punishment is present. Fear, by anticipating punishment, has it even now. The phrase, ‘hath punishment,’ indicates that the punishment is inherent in the fear. Fear carries its own punishment” (Vincent’s Word Studies).

Fear has punishment now, in anticipation of the Day of Judgment, which is what the context is talking about (v. 17.). When we are perfected (brought to maturity) in love, we do not have any fear regarding the Day of Judgment.

“punishment.” This particular word for punishment (#2851 kolasis) is used only one other time in the New Testament (Matt. 25:46) for those people who are judged unrighteous at the Sheep and Goat Judgment and go “into everlasting punishment.” Those unrighteous people are thrown into the fire prepared for the Devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41). The definition of kolasis is “the infliction of suffering or pain in chastisement, punishment.” It is due to this that the KJV goes with “torment.”

4:21. “must love his brother also.” The Greek is a hina with a verb in the subjunctive mood command clause. See commentary on John 13:34, John 9:3.

Chapter 5

5:1. “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.” Calvinists use this verse to prove that “regeneration” precedes a person believing. They teach that the person who believes (now) has already been born again, and that it would be impossible to believe now unless one had been born again. But the verse does not say what the Calvinist’s teach. At the very instant a person believes in Jesus, he or she is born again. The people John is addressing in 1 John (still) believed at that time (thus the present tense of “believes”) but were born again when they believed for the first time.

5:4. “overcomes.” See 4:4 note on “have overcome.”

5:5. “overcoming.” See 4:4 note on “have overcome.”

5:7. “Indeed.” The Greek hoti (#3754 ὅτι) is not being used in a causal sense here, but in the sense of “indeed,” “in fact.” (cp. S. Smalley, Word Biblical Commentary: 1, 2, 3 John). The text note in the NET First Edition says, “It is probably best, therefore, to understand this second hoti as…not strictly causal but inferential in sense….” Cp. H. Cassirer, God’s New Covenant: A New Testament Translation, which reads, “And so it is that.” Sometimes this sense of the hoti is left out when the Greek is translated into English, as N. T. Wright had done in The Kingdom New Testament, but we felt it better to have it translated.

“three.” God required two or three witnesses in order for something to be considered the truth, so God provides them (cp. Deut. 17:6, 15; Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19; Heb. 10:28).
5:10. “testimony… testified.” This verse contains the figure of speech polyptoton, the repetition caused by using both the noun and verb forms for the same word. (Cp. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*).

5:11. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].


5:18. “everyone who has been born of God.” This phrase refers to Christians, who are born of God. The next phrase, “but the One who has been born of God,” refers to Jesus Christ. Thus, the sentence reads, “We know that everyone who has been born [gegenēmenos] of God [i.e., the Christian] does not continue sinning, but the One who was born [gennētheis] of God [i.e., Christ] keeps him.” Twice this verse uses the word for “born of God,” gennaō (#1080 γένναω). Both instances are past tense, but the first occurrence is the perfect tense (gegenēmenos), equivalent to our English past tense, while the second is in the aorist tense (gennētheis), a snapshot of a one time past event. This verse clearly makes a difference between two people who were born of God. Elsewhere John always uses the perfect (past tense) to refer to Christians born of God; it would be strange to switch to the aorist in this verse. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that there is no usage of this aorist form for the new birth, but all refer to natural birth (Gal. 4:29; Heb. 11:23), like Christ’s natural birth having been fathered of God (1 John 5:1). Hence, Jesus uses this word with regard to himself in John 18:37 (See, Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*). John uses the aorist and perfect to distinguish two different parties in 1 John 5:1, the general Christian born of God (perfect tense) and the Father who begets (aorist tense), showing that he thinks in distinction between the two tenses.

The first person spoken of in the perfect is the general believer, as seen by this same usage in 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; and 5:1, 4; the second person in this verse spoken of as “born of God” is Christ. Since we have established there are two different people spoken of as born of God, it makes sense that the second, aorist usage would not be another Christian, partly because Christians are always spoken of in the perfect tense by John. There is, however, a variant Greek reading which reads, “He who is born of God keeps himself,” placing the duty of keeping on the believer himself. Nevertheless, this reading is highly unlikely to be original (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*). Further, as Bart Ehrman has pointed out, “if the aorist were taken to refer to the believer, the point of the verse would be considerably muddied; no longer would it present a clear contrast between the believer who is liable to sin and Christ who keeps from sin. Now it contrasts the believer who is born of God and yet liable to sin and, presumably, the same believer who was born of God and who protects himself from sin” (Bart Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, p. 71). Ehrman also points out why early scribes would alter the text from “him” to “himself.” For some of the early Trinitarians saying that Jesus was born of God was a problem, and it was much easier to have the birth refer to Christians.

It is now Christ’s job to “keep,” tēreō (#5083 τηρέω), the saints. We are to spur one another on to good deeds (Heb. 10:24) and turn wanderers from sin (James 5:19-20), but Christ is spoken of as the one who actually keeps the saints. In the Old Testament God held the responsibility of keeping the Israelites (cp. Psalm 121:4-5), and Jesus prays for the Father to keep his disciples from the evil one (John 17:12, 15). After he was raised
from the dead all authority on heaven and earth was given to him and he now works with God to keep the believer (Rev. 3:10).

“**The Wicked One.**” See commentary on 2:13.

“**touch.**” The Greek is *haptomai* (ὥπτω). It has two basic meanings, 1) to cause illumination or burning to take place, light, kindle (Luke 8:16; 22:55); 2) to make close contact, to touch or to take hold of; to cling to; it can also mean to partake of (2 Cor. 6:17), or to touch intimately and sexually (1 Cor. 7:1). It can also mean “to touch” in the sense of causing harm (Job 5:19; Ps. 105:15 [Ps. 104:15 in LXX]). In this verse, “touch,” meaning “harm,” is the figure of speech *tapeinosis*, or “demeaning,” the lessening of something in order to increase it (Bullinger, *Figures*). The “evil one,” the Devil, harms Christians all the time. However, because their salvation is assured, he cannot harm them eternally, only in this life. Therefore, any harm he does is considered as nothing when compared to eternity. Thus the phrase, “the evil one does not touch him,” causes us to look at our lives from an eternal, not temporal, perspective.


5:20. “**life in the Age to come.**” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”.]

“**and we are in the True One by means of his Son Jesus Christ.**” The Greek reads that we are “in” the True One, “in” His Son Jesus Christ. We believe that the second “in” is an instrumental dative, “by” or “by means of.” It certainly is the testimony of Scripture that we get to know God through His Son Jesus. Most versions translate and punctuate the verse so that Jesus becomes God, but that is an interpretation, not what the text says. R. C. H. Lenski, a Trinitarian, writes that this verse does not make Jesus God.

The ἐν τῷ ἠλθινῷ [“in the true One] does not refer to a different person than does τὸν ἠλθινόν, namely “the real God.” The article with the dative reads like an article of previous reference. Our versions translate otherwise: “And we are in him that is true (real), even in his Son Jesus Christ.” This makes the second ἐν [“in”] phrase appositional to the first so that “the real One” in the phrase = “his Son Jesus Christ.” A comma is, therefore, placed between the ἐν phrases. If this were John’s meaning, he would have omitted ὁὗτος, would have written: “And we are in the real One, (namely) in the Son Jesus Christ.” He wrote ὁὗτος, the antecedent of which is τὸ ἠλθινό. We translate without the use of a comma: “And we are in the real One (God) in his Son Jesus Christ.”

If we wanted to say that both the ἐν [in] in the last phrase meant the same thing, we would still have a distinction between God and Christ, and John would be saying that our relationship with each of them was important. In that case, the ἐν would be the “static ἐν” and would mean “in union with,” so the verse would read that we are “in union with the True One [God]; in union with His Son Jesus Christ.”
2 John

1:1. “chosen.” From the Greek adjective, *eklektos* (#1588 ἐκλεκτός). [For more information on “chosen,” see commentary on 2 Timothy 2:10].

“lady.” From the Greek *kuria* (#2959 κυρία), this word is the feminine form of *kupios*, “Lord.” It is hard to translate into English. We do not have a word like “lordess;” the phrase “female lord” would be awkward; and “mistress” or “dame” give a totally wrong impression. The terminology “lords and ladies” was commonly used of the ruling class of society at the time of the writing of the King James Version, and the term “Lady” is still used in some circles in the sense of a woman who is in authority or control of a household or holds a position of authority in government. Therefore, although the meaning “lady” as one who had some authority over others was much clearer during the time of King James, when the culture of lords and ladies was much more prominent, still today it seems the best choice we can make for *kuria*. Picturing a church as a woman is not out of line with the Bible, which sometimes figuratively speaks of the Christian Church as a woman (cp. 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:26). Unfortunately, for most people today the term “lady” brings to mind a “well-mannered woman” regardless of the authority she has. Thus, the translation, “lady” is imperfect at best, and an example of why there is a need for commentary and footnotes to help explain the biblical text.

The majority of lexicographers believe the term is used metaphorical for the church (BDAG; Louw-Nida; TDNT; Gingrich; Metzger, Textual Commentary) and we agree with this for a number of reasons. The adjective “elect” is used of a church in 1 Peter 5:13; in Galatians 4:22-31 the church (new covenant) is referred to as our mother, while we, its members, are the children. However, Thayer and Vine maintain that it is a proper noun, *Cyria*; that is, the name of an actual woman to whom the epistle is addressed. However, this is refuted by BDAG, which claims it is late and rare as a proper name. Some other commentators hold that it is simply a general designation for an unspecified woman. Although it is possible, but not likely, that there was a woman to whom the epistle was addressed, if that is the case then she and the authority she held would represent the authority of the church in which she had authority, which would have been a “mother” church. It is most likely that the majority of the lexicographers are correct and the verse is referring to a mother church.

Further evidence for the chosen lady being a mother church is the last verse in the epistle, which reads, “The children of your chosen sister greet you.” It is much less likely that John would refer to a woman’s Christian sister as a “chosen sister,” than he would refer to a “sister church” as a “chosen sister,” and why, if her literal sister was “chosen” (saved) too, would her nieces and nephews send greetings but not the sister herself? In the Epistles, the word “chosen” (*eklektos*, #1588 ἐκλεκτός) only refers to an individual Christian one time, and when it does it specifically says his name (“Rufus;” Rom. 16:13), whereas “chosen” is a common designation for the Christian Church or a larger body of Christians (cp. Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Pet. 1:1; etc.). Also, although at the end of the epistles it was common for people to send greetings, when they did they were always specifically named. It was also common for a local church (a “sister congregation”) to send greetings, and of course in those situations the people were not named, but the greeting came from the church (cp. Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 16:19).
1:2. “abides.” The Greek word menō (#3306 µένω) has the basic meaning of “remain.” It can mean “remain” as in, “live, dwell” or “continue, stay.” Here it means both, for the truth lives in and also remains (stays) in the believer. In English, “abides,” captures both senses of remaining and living.

1:4. “some of your children.” This is the genitive of partition, which indicates a part of some greater whole by putting the larger group in the genitive case (Dana and Mantey, Grammar, §90). In this instance the larger whole would be all the children, some of which John found walking in the truth. This is a statement of encouragement and reproof at the same time. It is encouraging that some of the “children” were walking in truth but reproof that some of them had turned away from the truth. This verse is good evidence that the “lady” 2 John is addressed to is a “mother church” and not a person because there would certainly be no need for John to write a mother and point out to her that “some” of her children were walking in the truth. She would be aware of that, whereas that fact would not be as obvious to an entire church due to the differences in opinion that always exist in any given congregation.

1:5-6. At first these verses can seem a bit circular; the commandment is to love, and love is to walk according to the commandments. However this is easily understood when we realize the difference between the command (singular) and the commandments (plural), and that this is a reference to Christ’s summing up of the Law and Prophets spoken of in Matthew 22:37-40: “Jesus replied: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

The command (singular) is to walk in love, but how do we do that? By walking according to Jesus’ commandments (plural) that sum up the whole of the law. So we see that the plurality of commandments can be summed up in love, and love encompasses all the commandments.

1:8. “we have worked for.” John is saying that ministers are co-laborers, working towards a full reward for believers (cp. 1 Cor. 3:5-15; 2 Cor. 1:24; Phil. 2:16). There is a textual variation that reads, “What you worked for,” using “you” not “we,” (NIV). Although, this reading has considerable textual support, it is less favored due to internal considerations (Metzger, Textual Commentary). “We” is more likely to be original in that it is unlikely a抄ist would have changed “you” to “we.” It makes sense, however, that a copyist would change “we” to match the second person verbs in the rest of the verse (“watch yourselves… you do not lose…you may receive”).

“do not lose.” The Greek word translated “lose” is apollumi (#622 ἀπόλλυμι), often translated “destroy.” To understand this verse we must understand the difference between salvation and rewards in the Kingdom. It is not possible for Christians to lose their salvation, but it is possible for believers to lose the rewards they have worked for if they do not stay faithful to Christ. [For the permanence of Christian salvation, see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation”. For rewards in the future Kingdom of Christ, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or worthless”].

1:9. “going on ahead.” From the Greek proago (#4254 προάγω), “to take or lead from one position to another by taking charge, lead forward” (BDAG). When one takes charge and leads away from the teachings of Christ, he is taking the place of Christ (antichrist = instead of Christ), rather than submitting to the headship of the Lord by remaining in his
teachings (cp. 1 Cor. 4:6). Christ is called the Good Shepherd who leads us as a flock; we are to follow him and not lead ourselves and others astray from his teachings (John 10:2-16).

1:10. “this teaching.” The teaching that Jesus Christ came in the flesh (v.7).
“do not say a greeting to him.” This prohibition is not meant to be elitist or snobby, but to prevent the spread of false teachings. To give one “greetings,” from the Greek chairō (#5463 χαίρω), would be to say, “rejoice, be glad,” when instead you ought to be rebuking and correcting such a one (Tit. 1:9). One Greek lexicon speaks of using chairō as “a formalized greeting wishing one well… in effect, to express that one is on good terms with the other” (BDAG). It is this associating oneself with the other on good terms that causes participation in their evil works (v. 11). God does not want us to just bear with people who preach a different Jesus or different gospel, pretending that nothing is wrong with their teaching, greeting them as friends and welcoming them into our homes. This gives an implicit endorsement of their false teaching; He rebuked the Corinthians for doing this very thing.

2 Corinthians 11:4 (NRSV).
For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. Rather than just submit to false teaching, we are called to lovingly correct those who contradict sound doctrine (Tit. 1:9).
3 John

1:2. “I pray.” The Greek is *euchomai* (#2172 εὐχομαί) and expresses a prayer or a wish. Here it describes a wish or perhaps even more accurately, a desire. That desire is voiced in a prayer, so “pray” is a good translation, “wish” being too weak to properly communicate the emotion in this verse.

“all.” The Greek phrase is *peri panton* (περὶ πάντων), and most literally means, “concerning all” [thus, “concerning everything,” or “in respect to everything”]. It properly goes with the first infinitive verb, “go well with you,” and not the second, “be in health.” Thus, “Beloved, I pray that you do well in respect to everything,” would be very literal, but more difficult to read. “I pray that all may go well with you” catches the sense very nicely and is easy to read.

“goes well with you...well with your soul.” “Go well,” and “is well” are both from the Greek verb, *eudodo* (#2137 εὐδόδω), which is a compound word from the noun *hodos*, “road,” and the prefix *eu*, “good.” Often translated “to prosper,” this word literally means to “have a good road,” i.e., have an easy, successful path ahead of you. Although it can apply to financial prosperity (1 Cor. 16:2), it is not restricted to such; the term is much broader than that. It is used in Romans 1:10 in the context of things working out well, so the Apostle Paul could visit the Romans. Here in 3 John, “prosper” is too often thought to speak of money alone; the meaning is that John hopes things are going well for Gaius in every category of his life.

“good health.” The word *hugiaino* (#5198 ὑγιαῖνο) has the basic meaning “to be whole, sound, free from error”; accordingly, when applied to the human body, its means “to be in good physical health, be healthy” (BDAG).

“soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; and attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here *psuchē* is used broadly and includes the core of one’s life, both physically and mentally, and includes one’s attitudes, feelings, and emotions.

In this case, the “life force” does not prosper, but rather the person prospers in the seat of his personality and being. The way to have things go well in our innermost person and personality is to be in a correct [truthful] relationship with God and the Lord Jesus, and humble and honest about ourselves. Our “soul” will not do well if we are lying to ourselves or our beliefs are based on falsehoods, even if we believe them correct. Truth, both doctrinal and relational, must be the basis of a soul that is prospering. Many people seem to be doing fairly well on the outside, but their “soul,” the core of their life, is not well at all, and being whole in our “soul” is vital to a wonderful life. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

1:15. Some Greek texts combine verses 14 and 15, and so do not have a verse 15. We included it, following the Nestle-Aland Greek text and versions such as the ESV, NET, and NRSV.
Jude

1:1. “called ones.” In the Epistles this phrase refers to those who have accepted God’s call and are saved. See commentary on Romans 1:1 and Romans 8:28.

1:4. “perverting.” The Greek word is *metatithēmi* (μετατίθημι), and it means to move or transfer from one place to another; to change or alter; to change one’s mind about one’s allegiance. When *metatithēmi* is used as “to change or alter,” as it is here in Jude, it is often used as “to twist” or “to pervert.” Thus many English versions use “pervert” (ESV; NAB; NIV; NRSV; RSV). Through the ages, many people have perverted the grace of God and used it as an excuse for unrestrained behavior, especially sexual. God gives grace, undeserved divine favor, but it is never the “favor” to sin. The Bible tells us how God wants us to live, and defines sin as breaking the commandments of God or going against His will. God gives us grace to be saved, grace to forgive our sin, grace in times of need, and much more, but God does not overlook our sin “by grace.” We are free in Christ by grace, but Scripture says, “do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh” (Gal. 5:13), nor are we to use our freedom as a cover-up for evil (1 Pet. 2:16).

“immoral indulgence.” The Greek is *aselgeia* (ἀσέλγεια; pronounced ä-sel’-gay-a), and it refers to living without any moral restraint, and it especially referred to sexual immorality. It is excess, wantonness, outrageousness, licentiousness, lasciviousness, indecency, sensuality, lustful indulgence, flagrant immorality. The difficulty in bringing *aselgeia* into English is that if we make it all about sexual excess, we miss the fact that the immoral behavior can also be about money, power, fame, etc. On the other hand, if we make the English translation too neutral, we miss the fact that the Greek word usually has a clear sexual overtone, and that would be true here in Jude also. Sexual sin has been a scourge of the Church since the first century (cp. 1 Cor. 5:1-13), and it still is today. Sadly, while most people recognize their sexual sin as a moral weakness and are ashamed of it, some Christians play a mental game and pervert the grace of God such that they assert their sin is not sin, but allowable as part of God’s great grace. Any honest and straightforward reading of the New Testament will show that is not true, but is what Jude says it is: a perversion of the truth.

“Master.” The Greek is *despotēs* (δεσπότης) means master or lord, and it refers to someone who has legal control and authority over others, such as subjects or slaves (cp. 1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:9). It is used both as a title for God (Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24), and a title for Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 1:4). Here it refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Luke 2:29.

1:5. “want.” The word “want” is from *boulomai* (βούλομαι), which here has the undertone of “council” or “plan.” This shows Jude’s thoughtfulness for his readers, more than just wanting to write to them, he had deemed it necessary according to his council.

“the Lord.” The Greek texts of Jude 1:5 differ. Some Greek manuscripts read “Jesus,” and some read “the Lord.” There is even one manuscript that was obviously changed, and reads, “the God Christ.” The Aramaic texts read “God.” The weight of evidence is that “the Lord” was the original reading of the Greek texts. It is possible that an early scribe made a mistake and changed “the Lord” to “Jesus,” (early scribes often used abbreviations, and the abbreviation for “Lord” was KC and the abbreviation for Jesus was IC (both had lines over them). A scribe could have easily mistakenly substituted a “I” for a “K.”
It is also possible that the change was made on purpose. In the early centuries after Christ, the debate between Biblical Unitarians and Trinitarians was very heated, and “losers” of debates were often banished or killed. Therefore, there was a lot of pressure to change the text of the Bible to read in a Trinitarian fashion. Bart Ehrman (who is an agnostic but a good textual scholar) wrote a book, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, which has many examples of the original text being modified to conform to the developing orthodox position.

The modern English versions differ as to what reading is original, but the majority of them say “the Lord” (cp. HCSB, KJV, NAB, NASB, NIV, NRSV, and YLT), while the ESV and NET read, “Jesus.” The RSV says, “he,” apparently following a conjecture of F. J. A. Hort, that perhaps the original text read *ho* (ὁ; literally “the” but used for “he” or “the one”), and that the longer readings of “the Lord” or “the Jesus” (proper names usually had the definite article before them), came from that short reading, but most scholars feel that is not likely.

When the Greek sources are divided, we can sometimes get help from the scope, the context, and other readings, and that clearly seems to be the case here. First, there is no Old Testament text that says or even implies that Jesus led Israel out of Egypt. Thus the concept of Jesus leading Israel out of Egypt would be totally foreign to Jude’s readers. Furthermore, Jesus never said or implied that he had anything to do with the Exodus or Israel’s journey out of Egypt. Also, Jude nowhere else calls the Jesus Christ by the singular name of “Jesus,” as Jude 5 does in some Greek texts, but always refers to him as “Jesus Christ” (1:1, 4, 17, and 21). All this is good evidence that Jude did not originally read “Jesus” in verse 5.

Given the textual evidence of the Greek and Aramaic texts, the difficulty for Jude’s audience that “Jesus” was inserted into the Exodus record, the scope of Scripture concerning the Exodus, the uses of the name “Jesus Christ” in the book of Jude, and ease of making the text say “Jesus” either by mistake or from the pressure to produce a Trinitarian text to bolster the doctrine of the Trinity, we can conclude with the editing committees of the majority of modern Bibles that “the Lord” was the reading of the original text.

“second time.” This is the meaning in this verse of the Greek word *deuteron* (#1208 δεύτερος), meaning “second.” The “first time,” God delivered all the people out of Egypt by grace, even though they did not all deserve it. But then the second time, he made a distinction according to faith and destroyed those who did not believe in the desert after the Exodus. BDAG translates *deuteron* in this verse as “the second time,” and notes that Jude is making a “contrast between two special moments of display of divine power, one in salvation, and the second in destruction.” The versions that read “afterward” miss this point.

1:7. “unnatural flesh.” For “unnatural” compare: ESV; NAB; NET; NRSV. The Greek word is *heteros* (#2087 ἕτερος), meaning “another of a different kind,” which in this context makes “unnatural” a good translation.

1:8. “defame.” The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

1:9. “the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word *diabolos* means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a
primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

“defam[ing accusation].” The Greek noun is blasphēmia (#988 βλασφημία; pronounced blas-fay-me’-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmia, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

1:10. “defame.” The Greek verb blasphemēō (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. This is the third time in three verses that blasphēmeō and blasphēmia have been used, and the contrast is stark between these beings who do not mind defaming, and even Michael the archangel, who would not defame the Devil. [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

“whatever they do not understand.” Jude has great contrasts between godly and ungodly beings. Godly people (and angels) understand spiritual matters such as salvation (v. 3), faith (v. 3), and grace (v. 4), but ungodly people have no spiritual understanding and defame these wonderful things. For example, they ignore salvation, and speak of the Christian’s hope as “pie in the sky, by and by.”

“understand.” The Greek verb is epistamai (#1987 ἐπίσταμαι), and in this verse it is a present indicative, they are understanding or comprehending.

“naturally.” The Greek adverb is phusikōs (#5447 φυσικῶς; pronounced, foo-see-kōs’), and it means in a natural manner, by nature, under the guidance of nature: by the aid of the bodily senses, by instinct. This is the only place this word occurs in the NT. Many versions translate it “instinctively,” but that does not seem to be quite right. We usually think of things that are “instinctive” when we do not have to learn them but are born with an innate knowledge, for example, a duckling hatches from the egg already “knowing” how to swim, or babies know to suck “by instinct;” no one teaches them that. These people, however, are, or should be, taught by nature, even as animals are taught by nature or can be trained (although there is quite a bit of instinct built into animal behavior). Thus, while it is true that we more or less “instinctively” know about sex (or at least instinctively feel the attraction), we should be taught about it by our experiences. The same goes for stealing, lying, anger, drunkenness, etc. These ungodly beings participated in “unrestrained behavior” (v. 4), and ignored examples from which they should have learned (v. 7, 11). These evil and ungodly things that they participate in and enjoy are the very things for which they will be judged and that will destroy them.

1:13. “shame.” Shame here is used as a metonymy for “shameless deeds” (cp. Bullinger, Figures of Speech). BDAG translates the phrase: “casting up their shameful deeds like (waves casting up) foam.”

1:14. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“came.” The Greek is in the past tense, which is the “prophetic perfect” (see commentary on “seated,” in Ephesians 2:6). The Lord’s coming is so certain it is spoken of in the past tense.
1:16. “people.” The Greek is proṣōpon (#4383 πρόσωπον), which is more literally, “face.” The wicked flatter the “faces,” here used idiomatically for people. However, it would have been easy for God to just say “people,” and He did not. In biblical culture, the “face” represented the idea of intimacy, that the evil person would not be abashed at “lying to your face.” An expanded translation might be that the evil person would “flatter people to their face, just to gain an advantage.”

1:18. “lusts for ungodly things.” The Greek here is a genitive phrase that can be understood in different ways. We have translated it as an objective genitive (cp. Lenski), making “ungodly things” the object that is lusted after. But the same Greek phrase can be a subjective genitive or productive genitive, and mean: “lusts produced by ungodliness.” It is true that ungodliness can produce lusts, and this meaning is certainly implied in the Greek; however, the stronger, and more obvious for translational purposes, is the objective genitive reading: lusts for ungodly things. Nevertheless, both meanings are likely intended by God, the Author. Undisciplined people lust for ungodly things, but the more ungodliness they participate in, the more they are filled with lust. It is a vicious cycle, all neatly packed into one Greek phrase. Sinful actions lead to more sinful actions. (cp. 2 Tim. 2:16 and Rom. 6:19, and see commentary on 2 Tim. 3:13).

1:19. “merely of the soul.” [For more on psuchikos see commentary on 1 Corinthians 2:14, “natural”].

1:20. “building yourselves up in.” The Greek is epoikodomeo (#2026 ἐποικοδομέω), a present middle participle, “to build up upon a foundation.” The foundation is our faith. Now we build upon our faith in Jesus Christ, in this case by “praying in holy spirit.” “praying by holy spirit.” There is no definite article “the” in the Greek text. Praying “in,” or “by” (the instrumental dative) holy spirit is speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:14-16). This verse is clear and factual. We build up ourselves on our faith by speaking in tongues. This agrees with 1 Cor. 14:4, which says that the person who speaks in tongues “edifies himself.” [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

1:21. “life in the Age to come.” This is the everlasting life that begins with the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. [See commentary on this phrase in Appendix 2: “Life in the Age to Come”].

Revelation

Chapter 1

1:3 “the who reads and those who hear.” One person would read aloud, and others, who probably could not read, would listen. See commentary 1 Timothy 4:13.

“keep.” The Greek word is tereō (#5083 τηρέω), and it has several distinct meanings. One is to “obey,” and some English versions think that is the definition here. However, it also means “guard,” “safeguard” “watch,” or “pay attention to,” and that seems to be more the meaning in this verse. Note the following examples, which have tereō used in that sense (OT verses are from the Septuagint; all these examples are from the NET translation): Proverbs 2:11: “Understanding will guard you.” Proverbs 3:21: “safeguard sound wisdom and discretion.” Proverbs 4:6: “Do not forsake wisdom…and she will guard you.” Proverbs 4:23: “Guard your heart with all vigilance.” Ecclesiastes 11:4: He who watches the wind will not sow [the seed]. Matthew 27:36: “Then they [the guards at the crucifixion] sat down and kept guard over him there.” John 2:10: “You have kept the good wine until now!” Acts 12:5: “So Peter was kept in prison.”

1:4. “the seven spirits that are before his throne.” The best we know on the seven spirits before God is that they must be seven spiritual beings who are of great rank and authority, and help God administer the spiritual/physical world. Trinitarians have postulated that these seven are actually just one spirit, "The Holy Spirit," but that is not good exegesis of the text and is only suggested because of their Trinitarian doctrine. E. W. Bullinger, at one time the secretary of the Trinitarian Bible Society in England, wrote: “This fact that they are ‘before’ or in the presence of, God’s throne, shows that they occupy the position of servants (see 1 Kings 10:8), and of created beings (4:5, 10; 7:9, 15; 8:2; 11:4, 16; 12:10; 14:3, 5, 10; 20:12). This one fact ought to have precluded the idea that these seven could be one, and that one Divine! ...On the other hand, angels are constantly represented as occupying this position. And angels are again referred to in 4:5 under the symbol of seven lamps (to which other spiritual creatures are likened in Ezek. 1:13).”

Revelation 3:1 says that Jesus Christ “has” the seven spirits of God, which makes perfect sense if these seven are angels and he is Lord of all creation. Revelation 4:5 once again mentions that the seven spirits are “before” the throne of God, and 5:6 mentions them in the context of being connected to Jesus Christ. Revelation 8:2 then mentions “the” seven angels who stand before God, but up to that time there were no “seven angels” mentioned, only “seven spirits.” Thus the use of the definite article is a good reason to identify the seven spirits with “the” seven angels. It is possible that these seven are, or are somehow connected to, the “chosen angels” in 1 Timothy 5:21. God and Jesus work closely with angels, even though they would not have to. Similarly, Jesus told his apostles that when he came into his kingdom, they would sit on thrones judging the tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). God tells us that there is safety in a multitude of counselors, and apparently He takes His own advice.

1:5. “by.” The Greek word is en (“in”), and this is the instrumental dative, well translated as “by.”
1:7. **“Look!”** The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 ("Look!).

**“mourn.”** This is not a mourning of repentance, because by the time every eye sees Jesus it will be too late for repentance (not that the unbelievers would repent anyway, even at seeing Jesus), but rather mourning “because of” him, that is because of the loss they will suffer because of his justice. Nyland (The Source NT) has, “grief-stricken because of him.”

1:8. **“I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God.”** These words apply to God, not to Christ. The one, “who is, and who was and who is to come” is clearly identified in the context as God, not Jesus Christ. Revelation 1:4, 5 reads: “Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.” The separation between “the one who was, is and is to come” and Jesus Christ can be clearly seen. The one “who is, and who was and who is to come” is God.

This verse is made slightly more ambiguous in the KJV than the REV because the word “God” is left out of the Greek text from which the KJV was translated. Nevertheless, modern textual research shows conclusively that it should be included, and modern versions do include the word “God.”

The phrase “the Alpha and the Omega,” has caused many people to believe this verse refers to Christ. However, study of the occurrences of the phrase indicates that the title “Alpha and Omega” applies to both God and Christ. Scholars are not completely sure what the phrase “the Alpha and the Omega” means. Lenski (The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation) concludes, “It is fruitless to search Jewish and pagan literature for the source of something that resembles this name Alpha and Omega. Nowhere is a person, to say nothing of a divine Person, called ‘Alpha and Omega,’ or in Hebrew, ‘Aleph and Tau.’”

Although there is no evidence from the historical sources that anyone is named “the Alpha and Omega,” Bullinger (Commentary on Revelation) says that the phrase “is a Hebraism, in common use among the ancient Jewish Commentators to designate the whole of anything from the beginning to the end; e.g., ‘Adam transgressed the whole law from Aleph to Tau’ (Jalk. Reub., fol. 17.4).” That would make the expression the figure of speech, palmarismos, similar to ‘and there was evening, and there was morning,’” which stands for the whole day, in Genesis 1. The best scholarly minds have concluded that the phrase has something to do with starting and finishing something, or the entirety of something. Norton writes that these words, “denote the certain accomplishment of his purposes; that what he has begun he will carry on to its consummation” (A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians; 1877, pp. 479, 480).

Since both God and Jesus Christ are “the Alpha and the Omega” in their own respective ways, there is good reason to believe that the title can apply to both of them, and no good reason why this title makes the two into “one God.” The titles “Lord” (see Rom. 10:9 above), “Savior” (see Luke 1:47 above) and “king of kings (see 1 Tim. 6:14-16 above) apply to both God and Christ, as well as to other men. As with “Lord,” “Savior” and “King of kings,” this title fits them both. God is truly the beginning and the end of all things, while Christ is the beginning and the end because he is the firstborn.
from the dead, the Author and Finisher of faith, the Man by whom God will judge the world, and the creator of the new ages to come (see Heb. 1:10 above).

The opening 8 verses of Revelation are very choppy, as are the openings of many of the Epistles. The multiple doxologies make the opening choppy. As we read we notice: the first two verses explain a couple things about the book of Revelation. Verse 3 changes the subject, and is a blessing upon those who read and those who hear. Verse 4 and the first half of verse 5 are the “to whom” the book of Revelation is addressed. The last half of verse 5, and verse 6, are a doxology to Christ (this would have been easier to see if verse 6 had started with “To him who loves us,” in the middle of verse 5). Verse 7 is an exclamation to the people that Jesus Christ is coming. Verse 8 is a doxology to God, who is “the Power” behind the Return of Jesus Christ. That verse 7 is about Jesus’ coming while verse 8 is a doxology to God should not confuse us; as we have just seen, the opening verses change subjects a lot.

For more on this verse, see J. S. Hyndman, Lectures on the Principles of Unitarianism, 1824; available from Spirit & Truth Fellowship; and Donald Snedeker, Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals, 1998.

1:9. “Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony about Jesus.” John was banished to the small island off the coast of the Roman province of Asia (now Turkey) because of his Christianity, which Nero had made illegal. Patmos is a small, irregularly shaped island about 6 by 10 miles (10 by 16 km), and it served as a place of banishment during the Roman Empire. John would have been banished to Patmos during the reign of Domitian, and there received the revelation of the Book of Revelation. Some have suggested that John was not banished there, but went there to teach, but that is most unlikely: for one thing, the island did not sustain a population fitting for that.

1:10. “the Lord’s Day.” This is “the Day of the LORD” that is so often mentioned in the Old Testament. It is not “Sunday,” which always in the New Testament is referred to as “the first day of the week” (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). It would be strange indeed if this were a reference to Sunday, but the only place in the Bible where Sunday is called “the Lord’s Day.” Actually, there is no evidence that Christians called Sunday “the Lord’s Day” for centuries after the NT was written, and even then it is because they assumed that John saw the vision on Sunday. Some people argue that if this was referring to the Day of the LORD, then the grammar would match the grammar of the Hebrew OT, but that is not a valid argument. The Hebrew language has no adjective equivalent to “Lord’s,” but has to use the double noun, “day of the LORD.” The Greek does not have to follow that construction. There are places in the NT where the construction “day of the Lord” is similar to the Hebrew (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:10), but the construction in Greek does not have to follow the Hebrew construction to communicate the same meaning.

There is a reason that the Greek construction of “the Lord’s day” is the way it is in Revelation 1:10. In the Greek text, “the Lord’s day” of Revelation 1:10 is directly contrasted with “man’s day” in 1 Corinthians 4:3, which reads literally, “and to me it is for a very little thing that by you I may be judged, or by man’s day…” (YLT). Sadly, many translations have the reading, “a human court,” in 1 Corinthians 4:3, which misrepresents the Greek text and misses the connection God is trying to make between “man’s day” when man does the judging and man vents his wrath, and “the Lord’s day,” when the wrath of God will be poured out upon mankind.
Lastly, there is no reason in the text or context for the Bible telling us John saw his vision on “Sunday.” Why would the Bible tell us that? In contrast, we think John saw his vision what we know as the book of Revelation about 90 AD, during “man’s day,” but by the spirit he was taken into the future to “the Lord’s day,” and thus he recorded for us to read and understand what will happen during that great Day of the LORD when God judges the earth.

1:11. “and…and…,” etc. This repetition of “ands” is the figure of speech Polysyndeton (“many ands”), and the purpose is to give emphasis to each member of the list (cp. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*).

1:12. “the voice.” This is the figure of speech metonymy, the “voice” is put for the person speaking. Without the figure of speech, we would say, “I turned to see the one who was speaking to me.” This is also the figure of speech catachresis, a forced and incongruous use of language. A “voice” is invisible, so we cannot “see” it.

1:14. “as white wool.” This is a good example of how a simile can communicate a lot of information in a little phrase. Many things are brought into mind by Jesus’ hair being described as “white as white wool.” One is that is the way God is described in Daniel 7:9. White hair was a sign of age and wisdom (Prov. 16:31), and elders were to be respected (Lev. 19:32). We do not see a reference to age here, but rather the wisdom that usually comes with age. Also, white was a symbol for holiness and righteousness. Important to the book of Revelation is that Jesus is called “the Lamb” 26 different times, while in all of the four Gospels, he is only called “the Lamb” twice (John 1:29, 36). Here in Revelation 1:14 the imagery of the Lamb is brought forward and Jesus is said to have hair “as white wool.”

1:15. “his feet were like burnished brass, when it has been made to glow in a furnace.” The word we translate as “burnished brass” (*chalkolibanon*; #5474 χαλκολίβανον) does not occur in any known Greek writings except the Book of Revelation. Scholars have suggested different possible meanings, but “burnished brass” (or bronze or copper) is very likely, especially due to the symbolism that brass had in the Tabernacle and Temple. The phrase “when it has been made to glow in a furnace” is also likely given the symbolism of the Book of Revelation itself. Although it can also perhaps refer to brass “that has been refined in a furnace,” the fact that Revelation deals with God’s wrath and judgment makes Jesus’ “burning feet” more likely.

When Jesus comes in judgment, he tramples the enemies underfoot, and those enemies become ashes underfoot of Jesus and the righteous ones: “I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing (Isa. 63:3 NIV84). “Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,’ says the LORD Almighty” (Mal. 4:3 NIV84).

Brass (or bronze) played a very important part of both the Tent of Meeting and the Temple. Both were considered holy, and it was dangerous to ignore God’s commands concerning those sacred places. Not only were the altar and washing basins of bronze, but also the bases, or “feet” of the posts that supported the outer wall of the Tent of Meeting (Exod. 38:10, 11).
The glowing brass feet of Jesus Christ remind us of his holiness and that he is coming in judgment, and also intimately connect us with the fact that he is the “meeting place,” where we meet God.

“many waters.” That is the deep and powerful sound of a rushing river, like the Colorado, a huge waterfall, like Niagra, or crashing ocean breakers. It is a sound so deep and powerful that you don’t just hear it, you “feel” it. It would be nice to be more specific here than just “many waters,” but that is the way the Greek text reads. Since John was writing on the island of Patmos, he likely quite often heard the surf of the Aegean Sea when it was roaring.

1:16. “out of his mouth came a sharp, two-edged broadsword.” This sword is the Word of God (cp. Eph. 6:17), in this case prophecies that are spoken by Jesus Christ. (See commentary on Rev. 19:15; 1 Cor. 14:12; 2 Thess. 2:8).


1:17. I am the First and the Last.” The phrase, “the First and the Last,” is a title that is used five times in the Bible, twice in Isaiah of God (44:6; 48:12), and three times in Revelation of the Son (1:17; 2:8 and 22:13). Trinitarians sometimes make the assumption that since the same title applies to both the Father and the Son, they must both be God. However, there is no biblical justification on which to base that assumption. When the whole of Scripture is studied, we can see that the same titles are used for God, Christ and men. Examples include “Lord” (see commentary on Romans 10:9) and “Savior” (see commentary on Luke 1:47) and “King of kings” (see commentary on 1 Timothy 6:14-16). If other titles apply to God, Christ and men without making all of them into “one God,” then there is no reason to assume that this particular title would mean God and Jesus were one God unless Scripture specifically told us so, which it does not.

In the Old Testament, God truly was “the First and the Last.” The meaning of the title is not specifically given, and so scholars debate it, but it seems that a key to its meaning is given in Isaiah 41:4, in which God says He has called forth the generations of men, and was with the first of them and is with the last of them. Isaiah 41:4 says, “Who has done this and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, Yahweh—with the first of them and with the last—I am he.” Thus, the Bible connects the phrase “the First and the Last” with calling forth the generations.

While God was the one who called forth the generations in the Old Testament, He has now conferred that authority on His Son. Thus, it is easy to see why the Lord Jesus is called “the First and the Last” in the book of Revelation. It will be Jesus Christ who will call forth the generations of people from the grave to enter in to everlasting life. God gave Jesus authority to raise the dead (John 5:25-27). His voice will raise all dead Christians (1 Thess. 4:16, 17), and he will change our bodies into new glorious bodies (Phil. 3:20, 21). However, even when Jesus said he had the authority to raise the dead, he never claimed he had that authority inherently because he was God. He always said that his Father had given authority to him. While teaching about his authority, Jesus Christ was very clear about who was the ultimate authority: “The Son can do nothing by himself…the Father…has entrusted all judgment to the Son…For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in himself. And He has given him authority to judge” (John 5:19, 22, 26, 27). If Jesus had the authority to raise the dead because he was in some way God, he never said so. He said he had his authority because his Father gave it to him. With the authority to raise the generations came the title associated with the
existence of the generations, and so that is a major reason that after his resurrection Jesus Christ is called “the First and the Last.”

Another way that we can tell that the title “First and Last” does not make Jesus God is simply the way Jesus used it. Note what the verse in Revelation says: “I am the first and the last, and the Living One, and I was dead, and Look! I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of the grave” (Rev. 1:17, 18). Patrick Navas observes:

“Jesus is the one who ‘was dead’ but now lives.... In two out of three instances where Jesus describes himself as ‘the First and the Last’ in the book of Revelation, the statement is made in association with his death and subsequent resurrection. ...If ‘the First and the Last’ in this case means, or unlimtely implies, ‘God (Almighty), the Eternal One,’ in what way would it make sense for Jesus to say, in effect, ‘I am the Eternal God, I died but came to life’? How strange and how unlikely—if not impossible—would it have been for God to have died or said that he died? Even many Trinitarians teach that ‘God,” or the ‘divine nature/aspect of Christ,’ did not die, in any way. ...So Trinitarians would have to argue, ultimately, that Jesus is identifying himself as God by calling himself ‘the First and the Last’ and, immedaiately after, switching to, or speaking out of, his ‘human nature,’ due to the fact that he died. This would clearly be a case of ‘playing fast and loose’ with Scripture. (Divine Truth or Human Tradition, pp. 585, 586).

The fact that when Jesus used the title, the First and the Last he connected it with his death and resurrection shows us that, far from a claim to being God, it showed how, as the Son who obeyed his Father all the way to the cross and death, Christ now had the authority of God, even to raising the dead, especially since he finished 1:18 by saying that he had the keys to death and the grave (which, by the way, would only make sense for him to say if having those keys was not inherently part of his nature. If he were God, why say it in this context? Of course it would be true..

[For more discussion on this verse, see Charles Morgridge, True Believer’s Defense Against Charges Preferred by Trinitarians, Boston, Benjamin Greene, 1837, reprinted by Spirit & Truth Fellowship, p. 122; The Racovian Catechism, in Polish 1605; in Latin 1609; in English 1818, available through Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, pp. 157-161; Patrick Navas, Divine Truth or Human Tradition, Authorhouse, 2011, pp. 585-588].

1:18. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδοὺ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

1:19. “the things.” The Greek is more properly “what,” (“Write what you saw”), but in Greek the “what” is plural, indicating that John saw a number of things. In contrast, in English “what” is often singular, so if the English said, “Write what you saw,” people might think he only saw one thing. Saying, “Write the things you saw” brings out the plural meaning of the Greek text.

“signify.” The book of Revelation is in the future. The events in it have not yet happened. Many commentators who believe the book of Revelation is about the past, or partially about the present, read Revelation 1:19 and interpret it as dividing the book of Revelation into three parts: the things which were seen (past), the things that are now (present) and the things that will happen (future). However, that is not the proper way to
understand the verse. The early introduction of Revelation, 1:2, notes that the book is about what John “saw.” John got the vision by revelation, and after he had seen it, was told to write it down. In contrast, Paul got some of the vision also, but was forbidden to write it down (2 Cor. 12:3-7). A careful reading and understanding of 1:19 shows that John was to write what he saw and “what they signify,” or “what they mean.”

The Greek word translated “signify” is εἰμί (#1526 εἰμί, pronounced ā-me’, like the girl’s name, Amy, but with the accent on the last syllable). It is the “to be” verb in Greek, translated “is,” “are,” etc. However, in many cases in Greek (and in English as well), the “to be” verb is used for what something “means” or “signifies.” Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon says the “to be” verb can express, “what does it mean?” Thayer’s gives Luke 8:9 as an example, which literally translated reads, “what this is, the parable,” but which we usually translate as “what this parable meant.” In Matthew 9:13, Jesus told the religious leaders, “Go and learn what this ‘means.’” The literal Greek is, “Go and learn what this ‘is.’” Similarly, in Matthew 12:7, Jesus told the religious leaders, “If you had known what these words mean.” A more literal translation would be, “If you had known what these words are.” Other examples of when the Greek “to be” verb is used for “means,” or “signifies,” include, Luke 15:26; 20:17; John 16:17; Acts 2:12; and 10:17. Adding weight to the argument that the “to be” verb in Revelation 1:19 means “signifies,” or “means,” is the fact that in the next verse, Revelation 1:20, the “to be” verb is used twice, and both times means “signifies.” The seven stars “are,” that is, signify or mean, the messengers of the seven churches, and the seven golden lampstands “are,” that is, signify or mean, the seven churches.

The Emphasized Bible by Rotherham translates the verse, “Write, therefore—what things thou hast seen and what they are….” Alford (The Greek Testament) translates, “and what things they signify.” Alford acknowledges that the Greek text can mean either “and what they signify” or “the things which are [now],” and references scholars on both sides of the argument, but he concludes that the weight of evidence is with “signify.”

English, like Greek, uses “is” and “are” to mean “signify” or “mean.” For example, if someone hears a loud siren going off at an odd hour, he might say, “What is that?” Of course he knows it “is” a siren, but he is asking, “What does that siren mean? Does it mean there is a tornado, a nuclear attack, or is it just a system test?”

Many commentators assert that the book of Revelation is past, and the events described are symbolic and apocalyptic. Others say that although Revelation is not about the past, it is about what “is” or “is now.” Neither of these interpretations is correct. The book of Revelation is about the future. Revelation 1:19 is not about the things that have taken place, and “what is now and what will take place later.” Rather, it is about “What you saw and what they mean, even those things that are about to happen.”

Many of the commentators who say that Revelation is about the past make their case by saying that the book of Revelation is symbolic. However, although there are some symbolic elements in the book of Revelation, the meaning of those symbols is often easily discerned. Furthermore, we must remember that the symbols tell us about things that are real. For example, the Four Horsemen (Rev. 6:1-8) are not literal flesh horses, but they are spiritual forces that are unleashed at that specific time. Furthermore, horses were a well-established symbol of strength and speed. When we see the effects of the seal-plagues, it is clear they are future.
When we read the book of Revelation and look at the events it portrays, it makes much more sense that they are future than past or present. We need to examine all the evidence of Scripture. We look first at the Old Testament. It foretold a time of worldwide distress and destruction, not just the destruction of Jerusalem, and Daniel mentioned this happening over a period of seven years. For example, Isaiah speaks of the Day of the Lord, and says it will be a “cruel day,” when He “will punish the world for its evil” and people will become “scarcer that pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir” (Isa. 13:9-12). Daniel says there will be a time of distress such as has never been known on earth, and after that will be the resurrections (Dan. 12:1, 2). Joel says the Day of the Lord is “a day of darkness and gloom,” and that there will be an army so large, it “never was of old, or ever will be in the ages to come, and at the sight of them, nations are in anguish.” (Joel 2:1, 2, 6). Zephaniah says the Day of the Lord will be wrath, distress, anguish, trouble, ruin, and gloom (Zeph. 1:15), and there will be judgment upon not only Israel, but Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, and Assyria (Zeph. 2:4-15). Zechariah 14:3 says that in the Day of the Lord the Lord will fight against the nations that attack Jerusalem. That is not a description of Jerusalem being attacked by Rome in 70 AD. That is a description of the wrath of the Lord on the world for all its sin.

When we look at the Four Gospels, we find the Apostles asking Jesus when “the end of the Age” would be (Matt. 24:3). They did not expect, nor ask about, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. That was not the end of the Age, and it did not immediately precede the Messianic Kingdom on earth they were so anxiously awaiting. Jesus’ answer indicted that there would be a time of distress (Matt. 24:29), and that nation would fight against nation, and there would be famines and earthquakes in various places (Matt. 24:4-7). Furthermore, after that tribulation, the Son of Man would come from the sky and there would be a gathering of people, including resurrecting the dead (Matt. 24:30, 31). This is certainly not the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. It is the end of this Age and the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom.

Then, when we read the book of Revelation itself, we can see the wrath of God being poured out over a seven-year period, and the seal-judgments, trumpet judgments, thunder-judgments, and bowl-judgments occurring in succession and including the entire world. Although there are symbols interwoven into these judgments, it is also true that most of them can be simply read and understood for what they are: a number of judgments that kept increasing in severity. Revelation 19 portrays Jesus coming from heaven and the Battle of Armageddon, then Revelation 20 shows the Resurrection of the Righteous and the 1000 year Messianic Kingdom on earth. These records flow in such a way that we can see what is coming in the future. To make them “symbolic” is to leave us with no description of the future, and the question, if they are symbolic, what do they symbolize?

“even.” The Greek word kai can be translated “and” or “even,” and in this case, “even” is the meaning before the last phrase, which emphasizes that fact that these future things are about to come to pass. E. W. Bullinger, in Commentary on Revelation, does a very good job explaining this verse.

1:20. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]
“messengers.” The messengers of the synagogues. See commentary on Revelation 2:1.

Chapter 2

2:1. “messenger.” The Greek is aggelos (#32 ἄγγελος; pronounced an-ge-los). The word means “messenger,” and can refer to either human messengers (Luke 7:24) or divine messengers, which we usually call “angels” (Matt. 1:20). Usually in English Bibles, when aggelos refers to divine messengers, the word is not translated, but is transliterated as “angel.” In Revelation 2:1, the “messenger” is human. There are a number of reasons to believe that this “letter to the seven assemblies” is a letter to the Jewish assemblies after the Rapture of the Christian Church (see commentary on Revelation 2:1, “church,” below. When Jesus Christ wants a letter communicated to the Jewish congregations after the Rapture, he writes to the “messenger” of the congregation. Bullinger writes about this “messenger.” After saying that there is no “angel” or “messenger” connected with the Christian Church, he says:

“But we do meet with the word Angel in connection with the Synagogue (though not in the Old Testament). There, there was an officer, who was called Sheliach Tzibbur...Tzibbur meaning the Assembly; and Sheliach, the Angel or Legate of the Assembly, and the Leader of Divine worship, from...shalach, to send. The chief officer [of the Synagogue] was the Archisynagogos, or “Ruler of the Synagogue”; and after him came the Sheliach Tzibbur; or “Angel of the Assembly,” who was the mouthpiece of the congregation. His duty was to offer up public prayer to God for the whole congregation. Hence his title; because, as the messenger of the assembly, he spoke to God for them.” (E. W. Bullinger, Commentary on Revelation (Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 1984), pp. 66, 67).

The reason that Jesus would write his letter to the “messenger” of the Synagogue was that the messenger of the synagogue would then communicate the letter to the people. The use of “messenger of the congregation” is more supporting evidence that the Rapture occurred earlier, and Jesus was writing to Jews who were left on earth after the Rapture. The Church Epistles of Paul were written to the believers, because the Christian Church did not have the type of structure that the synagogue did, and any Christian in the congregation who could read could read Paul’s letter to them. In contrast, when Jesus wanted his letter read in the Jewish synagogue, he addressed it to “the messenger,” the Sheliach Tzibbur, the one who was charged to read such letters to the people assembled together.

“congregation.” This is a Jewish congregation after the Christian Church has been Raptured into heaven. Christians who believe in the Rapture have long been divided over the issue of to whom this “Letter to the Seven Congregations” is written. Some, like E. W. Bullinger, say the Rapture happens before any event in the book of Revelation, and that this Letter is addressed to the Jews who live on earth after the Rapture, guiding them in the Faith just as the Seven Church Epistles of Paul guide Christians in the Faith. Other Christians, including those who believe in a mid-tribulation, pre-wrath, or post-tribulation Rapture, say this letter is written to Christians before the Rapture. We side with
Bullinger, and assert that the evidence in the Letter to the Seven Congregations shows that it is not to Christians, and even contradicts some of the things that Paul wrote to the Christian Church in his epistles. We assert that the nature of this “Letter” shows that it has the same nature as the writings to the people in the Old Testament and Gospels, before the Christian Church started in Acts 2.

One thing that has confused Christians about this “Letter to the Seven Congregations” is that almost every English version has, “to the…Church in Ephesus,” and later, to the “Church” at Smyrna, the “Church” at Thyatira, the “Church” at Sardis, and so forth. The translation “Church” is very misleading. The Greek word that most English versions translate as “Church” is εκκλησία (ἐκκλησία; pronounced ek-clay-see'-ah), and it refers to an assembly or gathering of any kind. The specific kind of gathering has to be determined by reading the context (see commentary on Matthew 16:18).

By far the most common use of εκκλησία in the New Testament is the “congregation” or “assembly” of the Christian Church (cp. Acts 8:1; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2; etc.), but that is clearly because the majority of the times εκκλησία is used, it is in Acts or the Epistles of Paul, which are written to the Christian Church. But εκκλησία is also used of other, non-Christian assemblies. For example, εκκλησία is used for a Jewish congregation in Acts 7:38. Stephen was speaking about the history of Israel and spoke of Moses, who led the εκκλησία, the “congregation,” in the wilderness. Of course, the εκκλησία that Moses led was an assembly of Jews. Also, in Acts 19:32 we see a secular use of εκκλησία. The “congregation ” in Acts 19 started as a mob of Gentiles in Ephesus who assembled together to defend their goddess Artemis, but as they got noisy, more and more people joined them, and eventually the majority of “the congregation” did not even know why they were assembled. In conclusion, εκκλησία does not always refer to a Christian “Church,” and using the word “Church” in the “Letter to the Seven Congregations” has misled many Christians.

Since we have seen that we must determine the nature of the “congregation” from the context in which εκκλησία is used, we have to carefully read the “Letter to the Seven Congregations” to determine what kind of “congregation” it is written to. We will see that there are many pieces of evidence that the εκκλησία mentioned in Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, and 14 are Jewish congregations that we would find in a synagogue; they are not Christian congregations.

• The Christian Church is in the “Administration of Grace” (Eph. 3:2), and we can clearly see the special grace given to Christians when we read the Seven Church Epistles. For example, the Christian Church has so much glory from God that the Law of Moses had “no glory” in contrast to it (2 Cor. 3:10). In contrast to the grace that the Christian Church lives in, when we read the Letter to the Seven Congregations, we can see that it was written in a time of wrath, not a time of grace. The guidance in the Letter is for a time of Tribulation, the time of “Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7), a day of wrath and burning anger (Isa. 13:13), so terrible that God says, “Woe to you [Jews] who long for the Day of the LORD…that day will be darkness, not light” (Amos 5:18).

The Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist, and Jesus, foretold that a time of great wrath would come upon those people who were not faithful to God,
and the Letter to the Seven Congregations echoes that theme over and over (see commentary on Revelation 6:17). For example, Revelation 2:16 says Jesus will make war against the Jews in the congregation who did not repent of their sin. This is in complete contrast to the information in the Seven Church Epistles of Paul, which say that Christ, who justified us, will not condemn us, and that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:31-38). To understand this contrast between the “Church Epistles” and the “Letter to the Congregations,” we need to remember that Christians are born again children of God and are guaranteed salvation, while the people after the Rapture are not, and if they turn against Christ, they will be destroyed (this is also what we see in the Old Testament; cp. Ezek. 33:11-13).

- It was prophesied in many places in both the Old Testament and the Gospels that the “Tribulation” would be a specific time of great distress that would be worldwide and come upon one generation (for the time of God’s wrath on earth, see commentary on Revelation 6:17). This specific time of God’s wrath is spoken of in Revelation 3:10, which speaks of the “hour of trial” that will come upon the whole world. In contrast, the Christian Church is never told that Christians will go through a specific time of Tribulation, and the most logical reason for that is the Rapture. At the Rapture, all Christians will be taken from the earth, and that will happen before the Tribulation occurs. It seems certain that if one generation of Christians were going to go through the Tribulation, there would be some mention of it somewhere in the Seven Church Epistles, but there is no mention of any such specific time of trial. So while Christians are never told about going through a specific time of trial, these Jewish believers are told they will go through it, but will be “kept” during that period of time.

- Jewish believers of the Old Testament and the Gospels are told they will live forever on earth, and neither the Old Testament nor the Gospels mentions them being in heaven at any time. They are raised from the dead and go back to the land of Israel (Ezek. 37:11-14). The Letter to the Seven Congregations, like the Old Testament and the Gospels, has no hint of a heavenly hope, but says that those who overcome will then get to be in “Paradise,” which is always on earth (2:7; see commentary on Luke 23:43), ruling the nations of earth (2:27), and being pillars in the Temple in the New Jerusalem that comes to earth (3:12).

In contrast to the Jews who have a hope of being in Paradise on earth, part of the Christian’s hope is spending time in heaven. Christians are citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20), will be seated in heaven (Eph. 2:6), and are waiting for the Lord from heaven who will Rapture them into heaven (1 Thess. 4:16-18). We Christians will come back to earth with Jesus when he comes, but from the Rapture until that time we will be in heaven. Thus part of the hope of the Christian Church is spending time in heaven, but that hope presented in the Letter to the Seven Congregations is the same hope given in the Old Testament to the Jews, and this is good evidence that the Letter to the Seven Congregations is addressed to Jews.
When Paul wrote the Seven Church Epistles (Romans through Thessalonians), he wrote them directly to the “holy ones” (translated “saints” in many English versions), who are the Christians. Any Christian who knew how to read would then read the epistle to the congregation. However, the Letter to the Seven Congregations of Revelation is written to the “angel” of the congregation. In a Jewish congregation, the term “angel” was used of a specific man who was charged with certain responsibilities, including reading letters to the congregation (see commentary on Revelation 2:1, “angel”). The fact that the Seven Church Epistles were written directly to Christians, while the Letter to the Seven Congregations was specifically addressed to the “angel,” is very good evidence that the “Epistles” and the “Letter” were written to two different groups of people.

The Church Epistles teach that faith in Christ results in New Birth, which is permanent and guarantees salvation [see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation”]. In contrast, the Letter to the Seven Congregations reverts to the teaching of the Old Testament and the Gospels, that a person had to be faithful until death or until “the End” to be saved (cp. 2:10, 11, 25; 3:5). There is no mention in the Letter to the Seven Congregations that salvation comes by faith in Christ alone, and no teaching that once a person is saved he is guaranteed salvation. Quite the opposite. Revelation 2:16 says that if the people in the congregation do not repent, Jesus will make war against them with the sword from his mouth, which is not a sword of correction or discipline, but a sword of destruction (Rev. 19:15, 21. See commentary on Revelation 19:15; 1 Corinthians 14:12; and 2 Thessalonians 2:8). In short, Christians have guaranteed salvation through faith in Christ, while the believers in the Tribulation period have to be faithful throughout their life, just as the Old Testament believers did.

The tone of the Letter to the Seven Congregations is totally different than the tone of the Seven Church Epistles. While the Seven Church Epistles open and close with “Grace to you, and peace,” the Letter to the Seven Congregations does not contain the word “grace” or “peace” even one single time. Instead, each of the seven segments of the Letter to the Seven Congregations has the stern warning: “Anyone who has an ear had better listen to what the Spirit says to the congregations!” This sharply worded warning never occurs in the Seven Church Epistles of Paul, but does appear in the Gospels, before the Christian Church started.

In the Seven Church Epistles of Paul, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, but One Body in Christ, with every Christian being a “brother” to every other Christian (the term “brothers” is general and includes women). People who are not saved but have infiltrated the Christian congregation, and Christians who have turned against Christ, are called “false brothers” (2 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 2:4). At the Rapture, the One Body is taken to heaven and God again deals with two groups, Jews and Gentiles. Thus, the pretenders who have infiltrated the congregation in the Letter to the Seven Congregations are never called “false brothers,” but instead are “those who say they are Jews, but are not” (2:9; 3:9).
• Calling part of the group in the Letter to the Seven Congregations a “synagogue” shows us that the group is a group of Jews. The Christian Church is a new creation made up of both Jews and Gentiles, and as a group they are called “the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12). The Christians who oppose Paul, such as those who were promoting circumcision or preaching Christ out of selfish ambition, are never called a “synagogue.” The word “synagogue” is never used in the Seven Church Epistles because the synagogue was a gathering of, or gathering place for, Jews. Similarly, in the Gospels and Acts, no gathering of Gentiles was ever referred to as a “synagogue.” Thus, when Revelation twice refers to those people who were part of the congregation but who opposed the Lord as “a Synagogue of Satan” (2:9; 3:9), it is clearly referring to Jews, not Christians.

• In the Seven Church Epistles, eating food offered to idols is only a problem if it is a stumbling block to those whose conscience is weak (1 Cor. 8:1-13). However, after the Rapture, the grace about eating food offered to idols is removed and believers are again under law about it, so twice the Letter to the Seven Congregations mentions that it is wrong to eat food sacrificed to idols and Jesus is upset with the believers for doing that (2:14, 20). If we do not understand that what Paul wrote to the Christians applied specifically to Christians, and what John wrote was to the believers after the Rapture and applied specifically to them, we would have to concede that Paul and John contradict each other. Only by knowing that Paul wrote to Christians in the Age of Grace, and John wrote for Jews after the Rapture, are we able to see how the Word of God fits together.

When we study the Seven Church Epistles and the Letter to the Seven Congregations side by side, it is clear that they cannot both be guidance to the same group of people. They have to be written to different groups, and they are. The Seven Church Epistles are to the Christian Church. The Letter to the Seven Congregations is to the Jewish congregations in synagogues after the Rapture. Of course, many of the things in both sets of letters apply to every believer. For example, there are things that please the Lord and things that do not; there are rewards for obedience and faithfulness; there is a goal that every person should aspire to, which is everlasting life with the Lord. However, we must not let the similarities blind us to the fact that the differences between the Epistles of Paul and the Letter that John wrote are so stark that it is clear they are written to different groups of people.

2:7. “Anyone who has an ear had better listen to what the Spirit says to the congregations!” The verb “hear” is in the imperative mood, and is too weakly translated by “let him hear.” This is not just an invitation from Jesus for us to hear what he says. Jesus is Lord of all, and there will be rewards for hearing and obeying, and consequences for ignoring what he says. For this phrase and the imperative mood, see commentary on Matthew 11:15.

“the Spirit.” The Greek word for “Spirit” is pneuma (#4151 πνεῦμα), and it has many meanings, including “spirit,” “wind” and “breath.” It is used to refer to many different things, including God, angels, demons, and to the gift of holy spirit that God gives to people. After his resurrection, Jesus Christ also became known as “the Spirit,” as
we see here in Revelation. So, “the Spirit” is one of the names of Jesus Christ, just as he is also called, “the lion of Judah,” “the root of David,” “lamb of God,” etc.

This use of “Spirit” clearly refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. In Revelation 1:9-17, Jesus Christ appeared to John and began talking to him and telling him what to write. It is clear that it is Jesus who appeared to John, especially since he describes himself in 1:18 as “I was dead, and Look!, I am alive for evermore.” It is also clear that Jesus is “the Spirit” because in 2:17 (and other places) it is “the Spirit” who “says” things to John, but in the very next verse, 2:18, we read, “These things says the Son of God.”

What Jesus tells John to write takes up Revelation chapters two and three. Jesus commanded John to write a letter to the congregations of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, and what we refer to as Revelation 2:1 is simply the continuation of the conversation between Jesus and John that started in Chapter 1.

Jesus refers to himself as “the Spirit.” We can understand this because when Jesus was resurrected, his body was still flesh and bone (Luke 24:39), but it was spiritually empowered; powered by spirit, not by “soul” as our mortal bodies are. 1 Corinthians 15:44-46 says Jesus was raised “a spiritual body,” and because of that he began to be called, “the Spirit” (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:44). 2 Corinthians 3:17 clearly confirms this, saying, “Now the Lord is the Spirit.”

When Jesus first appeared to his disciples, they thought he was an incorporeal being, a “spirit” (pneuma), as if Jesus was some kind of ghost (Luke 24:37). But he told them he was not a “spirit” but was flesh and bone, and he proved that by having them touch his body to feel his flesh. However, as we have seen, because Jesus’ new body was spiritually empowered, Jesus is called “the Spirit” in many places in the NT. These include Acts 2:4; 10:19; Romans 8:16, 26, 27; 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; and 22:17. (also, see commentary on Acts 2:4 and Romans 8:26, and the book, The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be Like Christ).


“the First and the Last.” For information on this phrase, which occurs three times in Revelation (1:17; 2:8; 22:13), see commentary on Revelation 1:17.

2:9. “defaming speech.” The Greek noun is blasphēmia (#988 βλασφημία; pronounced blas-fay-me'-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmia, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

“the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

2:10. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the
Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

“the crown of life.” The Greek is, “the crown of the life,” but it clearly involves a genitive of apposition, thus, “the crown, which is the life.” This can especially be seen by the next sentence which refers to not being hurt by the second death. The crown is “the” life, that is, the well-known and wonderful everlasting life in the Kingdom. People who are faithful to death win the crown, the only crown worth having, everlasting life. Royalty can wear, or an athlete can win, any other crown, and no matter how massively made of gold or how ornately encrusted with gems it is, it is worthless if the person has not also won the true crown, which is everlasting life.

2:11. “Anyone who has an ear.” See commentary on Revelation 2:7 and Matthew 11:15.

“the Spirit.” This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.


2:13. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. See commentary on 2:9.

2:16. “the broadsword from my mouth.” This sword is the prophecies that are spoken by Jesus Christ. (See commentary on Rev. 1:16; 19:15; 1 Cor. 14:12; 2 Thess. 2:8).


“the Spirit.” This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.


2:19. “and…and…and.” This repetition of “ands” is the figure of speech Polysyndeton (“many ands”), and the purpose is to give emphasis to each member of the list (Cp. Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible).

2:22. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“am throwing.” The Greek is ballo (βάλλω), to cast or to throw, and the verb is in the present tense, active voice, indicating that this punishment is, to some extent, going on at the present. Almost all translations put the verb in the future tense “will cast,” and it certainly is true that her punishment will be more acute in the future. However, sexual sin always has harmful effects in the present.

“a bed of suffering.” The Greek simply reads, “a bed,” and the suffering is implied from the context. This is great irony. Jezebel has ruined the lives of many through sexual sin, so God will cast her onto a bed, where she will suffer.

2:23. “her children.” The word “children” is the plural of teknon (τέκνον), “child.” Jezebel’s “children” are not the children of her adultery, but her followers, her disciples. In the biblical culture, a person who was a father figure, mentor, and guide, was called a “father.” Thus, Joseph said he had become a “father” to Pharaoh (Gen. 45:8), the prophet Elisha referred to the elder prophet Elijah as his “father” (2 Kings 2:12), and the king of Israel referred to the prophet Elisha as his “father,” his spiritual mentor and guide (2 Kings 6:21). Similarly, the word “mother” was used literally of mothers, but it was also used of those women who were respected and had nurtured or guided the “child” in some way. Thus Jesus pointed to his disciples, some of whom were obviously women,
and said, “Look! My mother and my brothers” (Matt. 12:49; Mark 3:34). Paul referred to Rufus’ mother as his mother also (Rom. 16:13). In Revelation 17:5, Babylon is called “the mother of prostitutes” because she influenced people to become prostitutes.

In turn, just as a mentor was called a “father” or “mother,” a disciple was called a “son” (huios, #5207 υἱός), or a “child” (teknon, #5043 τέκνον). Although huios means “son,” it is sometimes translated as the gender neutral “child,” and although the Greek word tekon is gender neutral and means “child,” if the context is clearly about males or females, it may legitimately be translated as “son” or “daughter.” A clear example of the word “son” being used for disciples occurs in the Old Testament when the disciples of the prophets were called “the sons of the prophets” (1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1, etc.). When the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebul, he said, “If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? (Matt. 12:27). The “sons” of the Pharisees were the disciples of the Pharisees. The Apostle Paul referred to Timothy as his “child” (1 Tim. 1:2), and also Titus (Titus 1:4), and Onesimus (Philemon 1:10). At the last supper, Jesus referred to the apostles as his “little children” (John 13:33; tekon, #5040 τεκνίον, the diminutive of tekon.)

In this case, the “children” of Jezebel are the ones she has mentored in her sexual immorality. [For more information, see commentary on Matthew 12:27].

“kidneys.” The Greek is nephros (#3510 νεφρός) and literally means “kidneys.” We get our modern word nephrology, the study of the kidneys, from the Greek word. The Word of God points to the fact that our kidneys, bowels, and belly (or womb) are part of our mental/emotional life, not “just physical organs.” Our “gut,” including our intestines, bowels, kidneys and stomach contain as many nerve cells as our brain, and studies are now showing that our “gut” contributes significantly to our emotional life and health. We have “gut feelings,” get upset stomachs upon hearing bad news or have an upset stomach or irregular bowels when facing emotionally difficult times. Bible commentators used to think that “kidneys,” “bowels,” and “belly,” were in the Bible because the ancients did not know what they did and assumed they were the center of human emotion. Now we know that the ancients, and the Word of God, were correct all along, and the arrogance of “modern” medicine, upon discovery of the brain, had just assumed the ancients were ignorant.

Other words to study besides “kidneys” are “bowels” and “belly.” Although in our modern world, we use “mind” to place and emphasis on our thoughts and “heart” for our emotions, bibliically, the word “heart” was more closely associated with the mental life while “bowels,” “kidney,” and “belly” (which is the same word as “womb”) were more associated with the emotional life. The Old Testament reveals the same truth that the New Testament does. The Hebrew word for “kidney” is kilyah (Strong’s #3629). Below is a list of some pertinent verses showing the relation of the kidney to our emotional life.

- Psalm 7:9 (KJV): …God trieth the hearts and reins [kidneys].
- Psalm 16:7 (KJV): …my reins [kidneys] also instruct me in the night seasons.
- Psalm 26:2 (KJV): Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins [kidneys] and my heart.
- Psalm 73:21 (KJV): Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins [kidneys].
• Jeremiah 11:20 (KJV): But, O LORD...that triest the reins [kidneys] and the heart....
• Jeremiah 17:10 (KJV): I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins [kidneys]....
• Jeremiah 20:12 (KJV): But, O LORD of hosts, that triest the righteous, and seest the reins [kidneys] and the heart....

2:24. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. See commentary on 2:9.

2:25. Quoted from Psalm 2:8.

2:26. Quoted from Psalm 2:9. This is an incomplete quotation from Psalm 2:9. Missing in the Greek is the subject of the sentence, which is, who it is that will be smashed to pieces like pottery. It is the figure of speech ellipsis, in which something in the sentence is omitted so that the part that is included gets a greater emphasis. (Some scholars refer to this as an anacoluthon, but in an anacoluthon the subject abruptly changes, but here the quotation simply leaves out the subject of the sentence).

The ellipsis catches our attention and reminds us that Jesus will rule with a rod of iron, and as a righteous judge, will punish those who deserve punishment. This picture of Jesus is totally different from the “namby-pamby, love-and-accept-everyone-no-matter-how-they-behave” picture of Jesus that many Christians have in their minds today when they think of Jesus. Jesus came to earth the first time as the sacrifice for the sins of mankind, and to show us what it means to be humble and obedient. He was not a king at that time in the sense of having earthly authority. When he rules over the earth as king, he will not be tolerant of sin.


“the Spirit.” This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

Chapter 3


“the Spirit.” This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.


“messenger.” See commentary on Revelation 2:1.

3:8. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

3:9. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. See commentary on 2:9.

“bow down” See commentary on “pay him homage” Matthew 2:2.

3:10. “from the hour.” The Greek preposition ek can mean “out from” in the sense of “through,” or “out from” in the sense of “away from.” Many people who believe in a pre-Tribulation Rapture still think that this “Letter to the Seven Churches” is to Christians, and thus they say that being kept “out from” the Tribulation is because of the Rapture.
However, the letter is the “Letter to the Seven Congregations,” and they are Jewish congregations (see commentary on Revelation 2:1). The Rapture is past, the Christians are in heaven, and now these Jewish congregations on earth are having to stand fast in their faith. Even during the Great Tribulation, however, God protects many of His faithful ones (Rev. 12:13-17).

3:11. “take your crown.” This verse is one of the many that shows that we have to remain faithful to the end to receive a full reward (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or worthless”). In the Tribulation Administration salvation was not guaranteed, so it is possible that, since “crown” refers to everlasting life in Revelation 2:10, that here it refers to a believer turning from Christ and losing his salvation.


“the Spirit.” This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

3:14. “ruler” The Greek archē (ἐγκρή) can and should be translated “ruler” in this verse, as the NIV does. [See One God & One Lord Appendix A].

“messenger.” See commentary on Revelation 2:1.

3:19. “are my friends.” The Greek word we translate as “are…friends,” is philēō (φιλέω). It is hard to translate the Greek verb philēō in this context and keep the English as a verb. If we say, “love,” as most versions do, we lose the meaning of philēō here, and confuse it with agapē love. Philēō love has a deep attachment, like the attachment of true friends, while agapē love does not necessary have any feeling of attachment at all, which is why we can “love” (agapē) our enemies. Jesus takes a special interest in those who have taken a special interest in him (“You are my friends if you do what I command” John 15:14), and he reproves, disciplines, and prunes those with whom he has a special friendship relationship. In the REV we could have tried to stick with a verb and used “friendly” or “fond,” but these seem to weak. Also, the Greek verb philēō is in the present tense. Given that, it seemed that using the phrase, “are…friends” was the best way to bring the meaning of the Greek into the English. For a more complete understanding of philēō, see the note on John 21:15.

3:20. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).


“the Spirit.” This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

Chapter 4

4:1. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

4:2. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“someone was sitting on the throne.” The context (chapters 4 and 5) makes it clear that this is God, who is taking on human form so we can better relate to Him. See commentary on Acts 7:55.
Chapter 5

5:1. “written on the inside and on the back.” The fact that the document mentioned in this verse is written “on the inside” and “on the back” lets us know that in this case the word biblion (#975 βιβλίον) refers to a scroll and not a “book,” although the first books were being published by the time John was writing. A scroll is written “on the inside,” which is the first side written on before the scroll is rolled up, and then “on the back” when more room was needed and the back of the scroll was written on also.

5:2. “break” The Greek is luo (#3089 λύω). Normally, “loose,” but here it refers to breaking the seals, the only way to open and unroll the scroll. That was, in fact, the purpose of the seal. One could tell the scroll had been opened if the seals were broken.

5:4. “cried and cried.” Cp. NIV, HCSB. The literal is “cried much,” with polus (#4183 πολύς) meaning “much,” and the word for cry, klaio (#2799 κλαίω), in the imperfect tense. The imperfect tense of the verb shows that John began crying and kept on crying. This taken together with the word for “much” is painting a picture of John continuing to cry and cry, while no one “was able” (also imperfect, v. 3) to open the scroll. For more on the word klaio, see entry on Matthew 2:18.

Much crying is indeed an appropriate response, because John was faced with the fact that with no one to open the scroll and start God’s judgment, the world would continue in sin and under the control of the Devil, and that misery on earth would continue indefinitely. People, and the world itself, groan as if in the pains of childbirth (Rom. 8:22, 23). If no one can bring about the righteous judgment of the earth and complete the redemption of mankind, then like Paul says, “We are of all people the most to be pitied.” One thing this shows is that the world is totally unable to save itself or bring itself into a righteous state. All of man’s boasting about how we are going to improve the world is just empty words. If God and Christ do not act on our behalf, we are doomed, and crying is certainly appropriate. Thankfully, the angel stopped John’s crying by pointing out “the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.”

5:5. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“Shoot from David.” See commentary on Romans 15:12.

5:6. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“the middle of the throne and of the four living creatures.” Jesus Christ is the “middle,” the central figure. He is in the middle of the throne, living creatures, and elders. All attention is on him.

“standing.” Though the lamb had the markings of one that had been killed, the fact that Jesus is standing points to the fact that he is in all his authority, similarly to when Stephen saw him standing at the right hand of God in Acts 7:56.

“looking as if it had been slain.” The particle “as if” is often used in Revelation to point out what John saw. This phrase is not throwing doubt on the death of Jesus, but rather pointing out that Jesus looked as if he had been slain. He did the same when he appeared to Thomas and showed his hands and side to Thomas (John 20:27). This one picture of Jesus tells in short form the essence of the Gospel: victory through sacrifice.
The most profound reason for the wounds of death being now visible is so that everyone can see the way to victory is through sacrifice.

5:9. “singing a new song.” The believers are singing to Jesus Christ, a way of honoring and worshipping him. [For more on singing to Jesus, see commentary on Ephesians 5:19].

Chapter 6

6:2. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 iðoú), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

6:4. “earth so that.” The Greek has a kai (and) between the words “earth” and “so that,” which places more emphasis on the last phrase. The sentence would then read, “…to take peace from the earth, even so that they would slay one another.” The kai (and, even) makes the English more difficult to read without really changing the meaning, and so many versions omit it.

6:6. “a voice.” We are not told who is speaking.

“A measure of wheat for a denarius.” The “measure” is the Greek word choinix, which was about is about 2 pints, and was the measure of grain given to slaves for food for a day, which was barely enough to sustain them. A denarius was a day’s wage (cp. Matt. 20:2, 9). Ancient records show us that a denarius would buy 16 choinix in the time of Cicero, and 20 in the time of Trajan. So this would have been a great famine even by ancient standards, but for us in the USA today, it would be a huge famine indeed if a day’s wage only bought two pints of wheat or 6 pints of barley.

6:8. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 iðoú), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“Death and the Grave.” Both Death and the Grave are personified in this verse, and likely refer to real demons by those names, as well as the concepts their names represent. The Adversary holds the power of death, so it is no surprise that there are demons called “Death” and “Grave.”


6:10. “they cried with a great voice.” This is the figure of speech, “personification,” whereby inanimate things are said to speak. These souls (people) are dead.

“Master.” The Greek is despotēs (#1203 δεσπότης) means master or lord, and it refers to someone who has legal control and authority over others, such as subjects or slaves (cp. 1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:9). It is used both as a title for God (Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24), and a title for Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 1:4). Here it is used of Jesus Christ, since he is the one breaking the seals and they speak to him in response to his actions. See commentary on Luke 2:29.

“the holy and true One.” Both “holy” and “true” are substantives, adjectives used as nouns. [For more on substantives, see the commentary on Matthew 5:37].

6:12. “sackcloth.” The Greek is sakkos (#4526 σάκκος). “Sackcloth” is the rough cloth from which sacks for carrying things or storing things was made of. It is quite similar in texture to burlap. It was made of “hair,” but culturally it was made from goat hair, which was long and black. [For more on goats and goat hair, see commentary on Matt. 25:32].
6:17. “the great day of their wrath has come.” Since the Fall of Adam and Eve, people have had troubles, trials, and tribulation in life. However, because of the sins against God that mankind has committed, God foretold that there would be a relatively short and specific time during which the wrath of God would be poured out upon the whole world. This time of wrath, which many Christians refer to as “the Tribulation,” is referred to by many names in the Bible, often as “the Day of the Lord,” which is sometimes just called, “the day,” or “that day.” Although the references to this specific time of wrath are far too many to list here, a sampling includes: Isaiah 13:9; 63:1-6; Ezekiel 30:3; 38:19-23; Daniel 12:1; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 31; Amos 5:18-20; Obadiah 1:15; Zephaniah 1:14-18; Zechariah 14:1-6; Malachi 4:1; Matthew 3:7; 13:37-43; and 24:4-14. The book of Revelation is the clearest picture of the time of the wrath of God in the Bible. The whole period of tribulation will take place over seven years, and will be a time of judgments that increase in severity. There are the seal judgments in Revelation 6, the trumpet judgments in chapters 8 and 9, the thunder judgments in chapter 10, the bowl judgments in chapter 16, and finally the Battle of Armageddon in chapter 19.

Chapter 7

7:9. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδοù), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).
7:14. “made them white in the blood of the lamb.” This is a paradox. Washing in blood makes a garment red, so the paradox catches our attention and forces us to think about how the blood of the Lamb could make garments white. The truth is even more profound than that, because the only why to be white and clean is by washing in the blood of the Lamb.

Chapter 8

8:9. “soul life.” The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here psuchē refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life.” We translated it “soul life.”

We felt that if we translated it as just “soul,” that would be confusing, because almost every Christian wrongly believes that animals and fish do not have “soul,” even though the Bible says they do. We also think that translating it “life” is not correct because it makes the verse say too much. The Greek word zōē (#2222 ζωή; pronounced zō-ē'; from which we get words like zoo and zoology), means “life,” the state of being alive versus being dead. It is not 1/3 of everything that had “life” died, but 1/3 of those things like whales and fish, that have “soul” died. There is no verse in the Old or New Testament that indicates that plants have “soul;” they have another kind of life that animates them. Although it is possible that 1/3 of the plant life in the ocean died too, that
is not stated in this verse. This is one of the many verses that shows that "psuchē, soul," is not immortal, and is used for the physical life of the body, similar to Romans 11:3 and 1 Peter 4:19. [For a more complete explanation of "psuchē, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

8:13. “high overhead.” The Greek mesouranēma (#3321 μεσουράνημα) literally means “middle heaven,” and it refers to the highest point in the sky, in other words, straight overhead. It is the point the sun occupies at noon. The eagle was not far off at the horizon, but directly overhead, where his voice could be clearly heard by those on earth.

Chapter 9

9:2. “smoke from the pit.” The Greek, “smoke of the pit,” is a genitive of origin, meaning smoke from the pit.
9:12. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδοὺ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).
9:16. “the number of the armies of the horsemen was twice 10,000 times 10,000.” If literal, this would be an army of 200 million. However, it may be a figurative number or a hyperbole. It would not in any case be “exact.” Also, despite the number of commentators who believe this is a human army, it seem clear from the description in the next several verses that this is some kind of demonic army.

It has been estimated that at the time of Christ the population of the earth was between 200 and 300 million. If Revelation 9:16 is understood to be a human army, one thing it does show is that when John penned Revelation, he penned it as a future prophecy, not as the preterists believe, that the events of Revelation had already happened. By this time in Revelation at least 25% of the world’s population was already dead (cp. Rev. 6:8), so there is no way an army of 200 million could come from the area of Russia and Asia proper.

Chapter 10

10:7. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

Chapter 11

11:1. “sanctuary.” This is the Temple that will exist in the future, in between the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD and Armageddon. It is not the Temple described in Ezekiel, which will be the Millennial Temple. Although there is not a Temple in Jerusalem now, the Bible assures us that there will be a Temple during the time of the Book of Revelation. According to 2 Thessalonians 2:4, the Antichrist will enter into that Temple, and Jesus said that the Abomination would be in the Holy Place (Matt. 24:15).
In this case, the word “sanctuary” is correct. The Greek word is *naos* (#3485 ναός; pronounced nä-ŏs’), which refers to the “Temple proper,” consisting of the Holy Place and Holy of Holies. The word is not *hieron* (#2411 ἱερόν; pronounced he-err-on’), which refers to the entire Temple complex, including the Temple courts (cp. Mark 11:15).

A large number of scholars insist that this “sanctuary” is the Church (or believers), but that is not the case and there is no reason not to take the text literally. There will be a literal temple in Jerusalem at this time. We can see why people would want to make this temple into a figure of speech. Preterists, who believe the events of Revelation have already occurred, could not be correct in their interpretation if this referred to a literal Temple, because the Temple in Jerusalem had already been destroyed by the time John wrote.

We do not need to invent allegories for the sanctuary, the altar, and the Temple courts. They are all literal and will all be present in the Temple during this time.

“*Altar.*” The Temple has two altars: the altar of incense inside the Holy Place and the altar of sacrifice just outside it. Since we cannot see into the sanctuary to see the altar of incense, and John was not a priest and could not go in there, this must refer to the altar of sacrifice. Thus it seems clear that Jewish sacrifice will restart before or during the Tribulation.

11:2. “**42 months.**” Daniel 9 speaks of 490 years from the command to build Jerusalem until the Messiah (Dan. 9:25-27). This will consist of two periods of sevens, one for 62 and one for 7. The sevens are years. After the 69 sevens (483 years) the Messiah is killed.

After 483 years there was to be another 7 year period (verse 27). The "ruler who will come," the antichrist, will make a 7 year covenant with Israel. However, in the middle of the 7 years, he will break that off. The last 7 would have followed the first 69 sevens immediately except God intervened with the Administration of the Sacred Secret.

After 3 ½ years of the seven years of Tribulation, the Antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel and rules the world. During this last 3 ½ years, God protects some of the people of Israel from the antichrist. This 3 ½ year period is referred to in three different ways in Scripture.

1) Time, Times, and Half a time (i.e., a year, 2 years, and half a year): Daniel 7:25; 12:7; Revelation 12:14.
2) 42 months: Revelation 11:2; 13:5.
3) 1260 days. Revelation 12:6. (1260 days is 42 months of 30 days each).

Daniel 12:11 and 12 refer to an extension on the 1260 days needed to gather the nations for Judgment (probably 30 days), and then judge them (probably 45 days): (Matt. 25:31ff), Also, the 1260 days that the two witnesses prophesied (Rev. 11:3) started in the first 3 1/2 years and ends in the second, and does not equate to the 1260 days of Revelation 12:6. After the 1260 days, 42 months, or 3 1/2 years of the reign of the Antichrist, comes the battle of Armageddon.

11:8. “**Sodom.**” This is the figure of speech antonomasia, (“name change;” see Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*) where the real name is not used, but another name is used in order to import the characteristics of that other name. Here, Jerusalem has been called “Sodom” to ascribe to her the sexual immorality and ungodliness of the city of Sodom in Genesis, which God destroyed by fire from heaven (Gen. 19). Jerusalem is called “Sodom” in Isaiah 1:10, and compared to Sodom in Ezekiel 16:46ff.
11:12. “the cloud.” We would expect the text to say “a” cloud. The word “the” ties this incident back to the cloud that appeared at historic events such as the cloud that covered the men at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:5), and the cloud in which Jesus ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9).

11:13. “gave glory to the God of heaven.” The meaning of this verse is hidden in the use of “glory,” which often refers to the honor, power, or prestige that one gets who is the best at something. For example, a victor in the gladiator arena can get “glory” from the loser while being despised by him. In this case, the people on earth granted that God had the power to bring the earthquake, but in the honor-shame society of the first century, the fact that they gave God “glory” did not mean they believed and repented.

11:14. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

11:15. Quoted from Exodus 15:18 (cp. Ps. 146:10; Dan. 2:44).

“has become the kingdom.” This is the idiom of the prophetic perfect, the Greek using the aorist tense. The kingdom was not yet the possession of Christ and God, but it soon would be. [For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Ephesians 2:6].

Chapter 12

12:1. The “woman” in this chapter is different in different verses. The woman in verse 1 is the constellation Virgo, which on the night of Christ’s birth was indeed “clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet,” i.e., the sun was in the center of the constellation, with the moon just below her feet (Earnest Martin, The Star that Astonished the World). The woman in verse 4 about to give birth is Mary. The woman in verses 6 and 13, from whom the Messiah came, is Israel, whom the Dragon ruthlessly persecutes during the Tribulation.

12:3. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“Dragon.” The Greek word drakôn (#1404 δράκων) means “dragon.” One of the New Testament names for the Devil is “the Dragon.” Since the Devil is not literally a dragon, this is the figure of speech hypocatastasis comparing the Devil with a dragon [For more on hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2]. The name “Dragon” emphasizes his fierce, ferocious qualities. Like a dragon, the Slanderer (Devil) is powerful, ferocious, pitiless, merciless, dangerous, and deadly. For more on Dragon and the other names of the Slanderer (Devil), see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

“diadems.” The Greek is diadema (#1238 διαδήμα). The diadem is different from a “crown.” Diadem is an English loanword, “properly the sign of royalty among the Persians, a blue band trimmed with white, on the tiara, hence a symbol of royalty generally; royal headband (BDAG).

12:5. Quoted from Psalm 2:9.


12:7. “to make war with the rest of her seed.” This war is separate and distinct from the war that occurred when the Devil originally fought with God and dragged a third of the angels down with him (12:4). This war occurs in the time of the book of Revelation.
when the Devil is cast out of heaven and no longer is able to come before God (cp. Job 1:6; 2:1; Rev. 12:10).

12:9. “the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

“the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

12:10. “Accuser.” The Greek word is katēgoreō (#2723 κατηγορέω), and it means to accuse, to accuse before a judge. The Devil knows that God is righteous and just, so he uses people’s sin against them, and relentlessly accuses people. Often when tragedy strikes a person who has sinned, it is said that the person has “walked out from under the umbrella of God’s protection.” The teaching that God can do what He wants, when He wants, has completely obscured the truth that God wants to bless and help people, but He must be just, and if a person sins willfully over and over, eventually in the “heavenly court,” which is attended by angels and demons (cp, Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6), Satan will get to harm the person. Satan asked to harm Peter, but Jesus’ prayer stopped him (Luke 22:31). Because the Devil is the god of this world, there are apparently some evil things he can just do without God’s permission (Satan is a lawbreaker, liar, and generally dishonest), and the war between God and the Devil is a real war, not a fake war. For more information on the name of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”. For more on the control of the world that Satan has, see the commentary on 1 John 5:19.

12:11. “souls.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here, “soul” primarily means their physical life (which is why many English versions have “lives”), but it includes the core of their being and mental and emotional life as well. There was nothing in their life these martyrs loved more that God and the Lord, so they did not give up their testimony even though it cost them their life. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].


Chapter 13

13:1. “a beast coming up out of the sea.” This beast, like the beasts of Daniel 7:2-8, is the figure of speech hypocatastasis, comparison by implication, and is an empire, but it is an empire ruled by men, one of which is the “horn” who is also the “little horn” (Dan. 7:8), who is the one we sometimes refer to as “the Antichrist.” Thus the beast is clearly
an empire in some verses such as 13:1, but refer to a person who is over it in 13:8. It is simply understood culturally that an empire has someone who is in charge.

The “sea” is a hypocatastasis for the people of the world (Rev. 17:15). That this beast comes out of the “sea” is indication that the Antichrist is a Gentile, not a Jew. This beast is much different from the beast in 13:11, who comes from the “earth.” The “earth” (ge; #1093 γῆ: pronounced “gay”) can refer to the whole earth, but is often associated with Israel. Thus, the beast that comes up from the “earth” and who is called “the false prophet” (Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10) is almost certainly a Jew. [For more on hypocatastasis see commentary on Revelation 20:2].

“ten horns.” These are ten kings (Rev. 17:10), and are also the ten “horns” of Daniel 7:7. They are called “horns” because they are powerful. The horns, like the horns of a bull, represented power, and horns were an ancient symbol of power. When someone was exalted and feeling “on top of the world” (either rightly or out of arrogance), his horn was up. Thus Psalm 75:6 says not to raise your horn against heaven, and Psalm 89:7 says that by God’s favor (grace) our horn is exalted. When someone’s power was broken, their head was down and their horn went into the ground. Thus, Job, who lived about the same time as Abraham, said that he had “thrust his horn in the dust” (Job 16:15). Sadly, as people are less and less connected with animals and how they hold their heads, the image of the horn being up or down is lost, and so many modern versions omit the word “horn” altogether and find other ways to translate the verses that have the idioms with horns. However, that makes verses such as Revelation 13:1, which calls the kings, “horns,” much harder to understand.

“diadem” See commentary on 12:3.

“defaming.” The Greek noun is blasphēmia (#988 βλασφημία; pronounced blas-fay-me'-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmia, see commentary on Matt. 9:3]. The very names of the evil described in this verse defame God.

13:5. “defaming words.” The Greek noun is blasphēmia (#988 βλασφημία; pronounced blas-fay-me'-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmia, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

13:6. “utter defaming words.” The Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. This verse contains the verb, while 13:1, 5 have the noun [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

13:7. “every tribe and people and tongue and nation.” There is disagreement among commentators as to whether the antichrist will rule the whole world, or part of it. Although we lean toward the belief that he will rule the entire world, there is room for the possibility that he will not. The Bible often uses language referring to the whole world when it only means the whole world known at the time the Bible was written. Example of when references to the whole world only referred to the world that was known or controlled at that time include 1 Kings 4:34; Daniel 4:1; and Matthew 2:1. It is possible that there are places in the world that will not be directly controlled by the antichrist.
13:8. “slain from the foundation of the world.” The versions of the Bible are divided as to how the Greek text should be translated. The KJV, for example, translates the Greek the same way as the REV. In contrast, the NASB does not connect the word “slain” with the prepositional phrase, “from the foundation of the world,” but connects it with the phrase about being written in the book of life, thus having, “everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.”

Both of the above interpretations involve God’s foreknowledge and fore-planning. “Slain from the foundation of the world” is the natural reading of the Greek text, the phrases being in that order in the Greek. There should be no problem understanding this. First, we must remember that Jesus Christ is not only the redeemer of the human race, he is the redeemer of all of God’s creation. Ever since the fall of Satan the whole creation has been groaning (Rom. 8:22) and waiting for a redeemer. Thus, before God even created Adam, God had a plan for the restoration of His creation that involved the sacrifice of Christ.

God also planned for the fact that mankind would sin. Even if Adam lived without sinning, God would have known that at some point Adam’s progeny would sin, and thus He planned for their redemption. Thus, Jesus was both known, and we, the Church, were even chosen in him, before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20; Eph. 1:4). The Church, and Jesus did not literally exist before the foundation of the world, but were in the mind of God. God then revealed what He had in his mind via the prophecies He gave in the Old Testament.

The Church could not be said to be chosen in Christ if the plan of salvation was not plotted out beforehand, so Ephesians 1:4 makes no sense if the sacrificial death of Christ was not plotted out beforehand. Thus it makes perfect sense for the text to say that Jesus was slain before the foundation of the world—it was part of God’s plan for the salvation of His creation.

That being said, if the natural reading of the Greek text is “slain from the foundation of the world,” what would be a reason for moving the words of the Greek text around to create the reading in the NASB? The major reason is that the concept that the lamb was “slain” from the foundation of the world is “difficult,” and so some think that it is more natural that the Author meant the verse as the NASB has it. However, as we have seen, the death of Christ was part of God’s plan from the foundation of the world. Thus, there is really no problem at all if the verse says he was slain from the foundation of the world.

Another reason some theologians like the translation as the NASB has it is that then it is more clearly espousing the Calvinist doctrine that people’s names are written in the book of life before the foundation of the world, i.e., God predestines them either to salvation or damnation long before they are born. After all, if people’s names are written in the book of life before the foundation of the world, then God knows, and even determines, the fate of every person. This is not what Scripture teaches. God gives each person freewill to make his or her own choices. God wants all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), and we are the ones who decide whether we are saved or not.

13:14. “deceives….by the signs.” Signs in the physical world are never in and of themselves proof of God or godliness. Both God and the Devil have power, and so throughout history, both good and evil “prophets” have demonstrated power. The power
must be in conjunction and agreement with the Word of God. Similarly, when it comes to the spoken Word, sincerity is no guarantee for truth. Many sincere people are wrong about what they believe.

Chapter 14

14:1. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).
14:8. “fallen, fallen.” The word “fallen” is repeated twice for emphasis. It is the figure of speech epizeuxis (see Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible). In the Greek text, “fallen” is in the past (aorist tense) even though the event has not happened yet. This is the idiom of the prophetic perfect “Babylon” was not yet fallen, but it’s fall was certain. [For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Ephesians 2:6].
14:8. “Babylon.” This is almost certainly not the literal city of Babylon. There have been many Babylons since Nimrod first built Babylon soon after Noah’s Flood (Gen. 10:8-10). The Devil is constantly promoting centers of power and influence through which he can work to corrupt others. Evil people cannot successfully work the soil (Gen. 4:12), which is why Cain, after killing Abel, went off and built a city (Gen. 4:17), and cities have been centers of evil ever since.

Nimrod’s Babylon was a center of evil, and was followed by many other Babylons, which promote cultural, commercial, spiritual, and personal rebellion against God and against righteousness. Literal Babylon lost influence as powers like Egypt grabbed the limelight, but it rose again in time to become a world power and destroy Jerusalem in the days of Jeremiah, who wrote: “Babylon was a gold cup in the LORD’s hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad” (Jer. 51:7). But Daniel’s prophecy of the succession of kingdoms (Dan. 2:36-45), made it clear that literal Babylon would fall again, then would come Persia, Greece, and then Rome. Rome was the clear frontrunner for the designation “Babylon” during its day, but its candle grew dim too.

The centuries have seen “Babylon” shift from place to place. In fact, “Babylon” does not even have to be a single city, it is intimately tied to the Devil’s purposes and can be a city, cities, or perhaps even an evil empire. The Devil is constantly working, always trying to spread his evil across the globe. We do not know how long God will wait before the Great Tribulation and we can be sure that the fortunes of the cities of earth will continue to shift, but no matter which city or cities are “Babylon” when the End comes, the Devil is always the power behind the throne. Thus, one of the beauties of using the name “Babylon” here is that it reveals the evil power behind the city, but is not tied to a specific city.

“of the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.” The Greek text’s use of three genitives in a row, as well as vocabulary that is used in two different senses, has caused quite a division among commentators. The Greek word translated “passion” is thumos (#2372 θυμός; pronounced thoo-mos), and means “anger, wrath, passion,
excitement.” Because it is mostly used in Revelation to refer to anger, many commentators assume this is a mixed metaphor, somehow referring both to the Whore’s wine and sexual immorality, and God’s anger and wrath. But that mixed metaphor is unlikely and unnecessary. It is well established in Greek literature that thumos can to refer to passion or excitement, and there is no reason it cannot mean that here as well in the other verses in the Bible that refer to the passion of sexual immorality, especially as it is excited by wine. E. W. Bullinger says in his commentary on Revelation: “If we take the word thumos as meaning ‘inflammatory’ or ‘exciting,’ as it does when used of wine, all difficulty is taken away.” David Aune (the Word Biblical Commentary) says, “The term thumos is used here meaning ‘intense desire’ and in verse 10 meaning ‘fury, intense anger.’” Aune recognizes this shift of the meaning of the word thumos in this section of Revelation, and refers to it as one the many instances of a play on words in the book of Revelation.

Lenski points out that the phrase here in Revelation 14:8, and the same phrase in 18:3, and the very similar phrase in 17:2, all are governed by the pronoun “her.” Thus the introduction of the idea of God’s wrath simply from the vocabulary is not satisfactory, especially since there are other explanations of the phrase. The two genitives, “passion” and “sexual immorality” can be constructed either as “passionate sexual immorality” or as “sexually immoral passion.” We favor “passionate sexual immorality” because throughout the Bible, “sexual immorality” was used both literally for the sin of sexual immorality and also used figuratively for idolatry and other immoral acts. When we keep in mind that some idolatry was intertwined with actual sexual immorality, it seems more consistent with the whole Bible that God is speaking against her “sexual immorality,” than “sexually immoral passion.” However, we should realize that that idea can be is basically the same.

It has been known for ages that wine inflames passions that lead people to set aside moral and physical restraints and behave immorally. Habakkuk shows us that the ancients understood the connection between wine and sexual passion: “Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies” (Hab. 2:15 NIV84). Since it was well known that wine could lead to passionate sexual immorality, we can see why God used “wine” figuratively in Revelation.

The “wine” that has been flowing from Babylon is a figure that goes back into the Old Testament. Jeremiah 51:7 says, “Babylon was a gold cup in the LORD's hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad.” The nations and people who drink of Babylon’s wine act like insane people: they rebel against their Creator as if there was no consequence for it.

Actually, rebellion and idolatry did not start with Babylon in Jeremiah’s time, but were rooted in Babylon all the way back in Genesis, and spread all over the world. This fact is expressed in the use of the perfect tense of the verb “drink” in the Greek text, which is hard to exactly translate into English, because it implies a past action that is still going on. Lenski has, “has been making all the nations to drink,” that is, Babylon has been making people drunk with immorality for a very long time. From the Great Whore of Babylon flowed the wine that inflamed people and got them to participate fully, or passionately, in unrestrained behavior and rebellion against God.
What we see in this verse, and 17:2 and 18:3, is that the people of the world have been and are still today intoxicated by sexual immorality and rebellion against God. Indeed, following our sin nature and rebelling against God and “doing our own thing” can be intoxicating, whereas living an obedient lifestyle can sometimes feel very restricting. Galatians tells us that the “flesh sets its desire against the spirit” (Gal. 5:17). But in the end the people who join Babylon will be like Babylon: “Fallen, fallen,” and “will drink of the wine of the anger of God” (Rev. 14:10). God’s people need to honor God by following His commands and staying separate from the world’s way of doing things.

14:11. “to ages of ages.” The Greek is αἰῶνας αἰώνων αἰὼν; literally, “to ages of ages.” This is a hyperbole, an overstatement. The wording is similar to Revelation 20:10, see the commentary on that verse.

“day and night.” The meaning of this phrase can be seen by noticing how it is used in other verses. Paul preached “night and day” to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:9), and later prayed for them “night and day” (1 Thess. 3:10). First, we see it does not necessarily mean “constantly,” although it could in the context of future torment. Second, it does not mean it goes on forever. Both Paul’s preaching for the Thessalonians, and his prayers to see them, came to an end at some point. Similarly, the person who sows seed in the ground sleeps and gets up “night and day” while the seed is growing (Mark 4:27). In this example, as with the one involving Paul, the phrase “day and night” does not mean he sleeps and rises all day every day, but rather that there is a general pattern of sleeping and rising. Furthermore, there is an end to his activity. Another example is when Satan is said to be in heaven accusing the brothers “day and night” (Rev. 12:10), but we know that there were times he was on earth, not in heaven, so the phrase does not necessarily mean all day every day, and we know Satan’s accusations will come to an end. The point the verse is making is that those thrown into Gehenna have no guarantee of rest, and likely will have no rest at all, either day or night, until they are consumed and annihilated.

14:13. “the Spirit.” This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

“let them rest.” (Cp. HCSB, NAB). We believe this should be taken as a command clause. See entry on John 9:3, “let the works of God be revealed in him.”

14:14. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

14:19. “the winepress, the great winepress of the anger or God.” The “winepress of God” is the Battle of Armageddon. This is clear from Revelation 19:15, which uses the same terminology, and from Isaiah, which refers to the battle the Messiah fights to conquer the earth and says, “I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing” (Isa. 63:3 NIV84).

14:20. “stadia.” A Roman stadia is about 607 feet. The total distance is about 180 miles (290 km).
Chapter 16

16:3. **soul.** The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the mammal, fish, or other sea creature that is animated, made alive, by psuchē, “soul,” which is why many English versions say, “every living creature,” or “every living thing” in the sea died. This is one of the verses that shows us that psuchē is the life that animates both humans and animals, and it is not immortal. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

16:9. **defamed.** The Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημεώ) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].


16:13. **frogs.** There are many fanciful guesses as to what the frogs refer to. Two ideas seem to be solidly founded: In 16:12 the angel struck the Euphrates and it dried up. When the Nile was struck by a plague of blood (Exod. 7:19ff), the next plague upon Egypt was frogs (Exod. 8:1ff). This seems clearly to be pointing back to this: the Euphrates dries up in verse 12 and then frogs go forth in verse 13. The second thing is that frogs were known for their loud croaking, and it would take some loud “croaking” to get the leaders of the earth to come to Israel to fight Jesus.

16:14 **spirits, namely demons.** Genitive of apposition.

16:15. **Look!** The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

16:21. **talent.** The Greek is talantiaios (#5006 ταλαντιαῖος) The Roman talent weight varied from place to place and also over time. Estimates range from over sixty to well over 100 pounds. Most scholars place this talent at somewhere in the neighborhood of 100 pounds.

Chapter 17

17:1. **the great prostitute that sits on many waters.** The Great Prostitute is called by the name “Babylon” in 17:5. The Great Prostitute is not a person or a kingdom, but a religious system of life and thought that starts in the heart of the Devil and makes its home in people who follow his ways and who then mold the world in their image. The Prostitute is false religion (many commentators refer to this as the “Apostate Church,” but that makes it seem like it is deceived Christians, when in fact it is deceived religious people). She is the pattern of the world in the robes of religion (cp. Rom. 12:2), stated in a concrete way, as if it was a woman. This is very Semitic. In Proverbs, both Wisdom and Folly are portrayed as women (Prov. 8:1; 9:13).

In this verse she “sits on many waters,” that is, on the masses of the people of earth (“waters” represent the masses of people, see Rev. 17:15. That “waters” or “the sea” means “people” is a well-known biblical figure; cp. Isa. 17:12, 13; Daniel 7:2; Rev.
13:1). In contrast, in Revelation 17:3, the woman sits upon 7 “mountains,” that is, seven empires ruled by kings.

The fact that she “sits” on the people of earth is profound, for some people she controls and oppresses, while others follow her willingly, lured by what she offers (see 17:4), e.g., her power (purple and scarlet), her wealth (gold, precious stones, pearls), sex (adulteries), and her self-indulgence and rebellion against God (her abominable things). All this can be seen in the “church” today and in history. Many are those “religious” people who are not godly.

That the Great Prostitute is successful “sitting” (the verb is a present participle) on the people of earth is a testament to the fallen nature of mankind. In general, the Devil would rather lure people to sin willingly than try to force people to sin. History shows us that there is an abundance of people who fall right into the Devil’s ways of thinking and acting if they are lured by power, money, sex, and self-indulgence. The Devil sets up the system, and people willingly become his sycophants, using and oppressing others. It should not be lost on us that it was not to the “sinners” of his time such as the prostitutes and tax collectors, but to the religious leaders that he said, “You are of your father the Devil, and you want to do the desires of your father” (John 8:44).

17:2. “with the wine of her sexual immorality.” See commentary on Revelation 14:8.

17:3. “names that are defaming.” See commentary on Revelation 13:1.

17:4. “pearls.” Pearls were very expensive in the ancient world, and very highly valued. [For more on pearls, see commentary on Revelation 18:12].

17:5. “Sacred Secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the term “Sacred Secret” see Ephesians 3:9.]

The word musterion is a huge key to understanding “Babylon.” In the Greco-Roman world, a musterion was a secret in the religious sphere (a “secular” secret was a kruptos, “secret”). A musterion was not a “mystery,” but was a secret that was hidden from the general public until it was revealed. Here the “secret,” this secret which has dominated the religious realm, is called “Babylon.” Furthermore, she is called “the mother of the prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth.”

That she is called “Babylon,” does not mean she is the literal city of Babylon (or even a literal city at all), which we can see from the full description of her in the chapter, but she is called “Babylon” because she relates to “Babylon” in an important way. In this case, “Babylon” was the first city built by Nimrod after Noah’s Flood (Gen. 10:10). It became a center of religious apostasy and rebellion against God, even though it looked “very religious.” Ever since Nimrod, “religion” has been a powerful force on earth, and sadly, there is usually a lot of evil at the center. This includes practices that are overtly ungodly, like human sacrifice, but the fact is that oppression, guilt, and control have been at the center of almost all religions.

That this woman is called, “the mother of the prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth,” points to the fact that she is the starting point and nurturer of the sexual immorality and godlessness in the world. She is the personalization of the Devil’s system of evil infiltrating religion and masquerading as truth, just as the woman “Wisdom” in Proverbs is the personalization of God’s way of doing things. The false religion is not an enemy to, but to a large degree works symbiotically with, the political systems of earth. Thus the “mountains” (kingdoms and kings) let her sit on them, and in a practical sense
they support one another. This is certainly true historically. The Bible has many examples of false prophets supporting evil rulers, just as Ahab and Jezebel had their false prophets (1 Kings 17, 18; cp. Ezek. 22:25-28).

Furthermore, although false religion has “sat” on the “waters” (people) of the earth (17:1), and on the kingdoms of the earth (17:3) for millennia, she will come to an abrupt end when Christ conquers the earth and sets up his kingdom.

17:6. “martyrs.” The Greek word is martus (#3144 μάρτυς; pronounced mar’-toose), which technically means “witness.” However, especially after 64 AD when Nero made Christianity illegal and the execution of Christians started, the most profound “witness” was to die for the faith. Thus martus came to be used of those who witnessed for Christ and those who died for the faith, and our English word “martyr” comes directly from the Greek martus. It is challenging to translate the word in this context because if we say “those who testified of Jesus” (NET), it may not be clear that they died for him, but if we say “martyr,” we might lose the connection with the fact that dying for the Faith was considered a very powerful witness.” That is why the English versions are split on the translation: “martyrs” (ASV, ESV, KJV, NJB, RSV), versus “witness, testify” (HCSB, NASB, NET, NIV, NLT, Rotherham).

17:7. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret. See commentary on 17:5.

17:9. “mountains.” This is the figure of speech hypocatastasis, a comparison by implication, and it refers to empires ruled by rulers. In the Bible, a “mountain” is one of the figures of speech used to represent a kingdom and by extension, the king who rules it. David called his kingdom a mountain (Ps. 30:7). Babylon was called a mountain (Jer. 51:25). The Messiah’s kingdom will be a mountain that will fill the earth (Dan. 2:35), and cp. Zechariah 4:7 as well. Thus here in Revelation we again see vocabulary being used in the way it was used in the Old Testament. [For more information on hypocatastasis, see commentary on Revelation 20:2].

The mountains are also immediately said to be “kings,” so in this case the empires are not “general,” but also include the kings who control them. The mountains cannot refer to Rome, although many commentators think they do (Cp. John Valwoord, The Revelation of Jesus Christ; Bullinger, Commentary on Revelation).

It is important that we notice that the woman sits upon the mountains. She is not a mountain, but sits on them. Bullinger thinks all the kingdoms are future, while other scholars think that the empires have existed through time. In any case, the empires are bewitched and controlled by the woman—not forcibly, but by the lure of what she offers. The Bible refers to this as them being “made drunk with the wine of her sexual immorality.”

17:15. “are peoples, and multitudes.” This verse is a huge key to understanding both the Old and New Testament. Daniel 7:2 speaks of the “four winds of heaven. In Hebrew, the word ruach (#7308 רוח) is used of both “wind” and “spirit.” In Daniel’s case, although he likely saw a vision of a great ocean being stirred by the “winds,” he knew his own language and the meanings it had, and would have understood that this was a vision meant to communicate that spirits (referring to both demons and angels) were stirring up the “great sea,” (the people of the world),and “beasts” (i.e., nations) were coming up out of the sea. That verse in Daniel is a great example of how the figure of speech hypocatastasis can be confusing and how important it is to understand the key words
involved. In Daniel, the “winds” were spirits, the “sea” was masses of people, and the “beast” was an empire. So too, here in Revelation, the “sea” is clearly said to be the masses of people on earth.

17:16. “hate the prostitute.” In an amazing turn of events, the false religious system that has supported, and been supported by, the rulers of the earth will suddenly be attacked by them. The beast (the Antichrist) will no longer be content to share his glory with another false religion and will move to control the world’s religions and garner all worship for himself. Thus begins the universal, one-world religion controlled by the Antichrist that will dominate the final period of time before Armageddon.

17:18. “the great city.” Here, “Babylon” is called “the great city” although it is not a literal city, which we saw from 17:1, where she sits on many waters, 17:3, where she sits on empires, and 17:5, where we saw that she was, as a sacred secret, called “Babylon,” not because she was literally the city of Babylon, but because Nimrod’s Babylon was the source of all evil empires, having its origin in the Devil and ruled by people given over to the service of the Devil. However, in a sense she is “the great city” because she is the power that has dominated and directed all the cities of earth. In a sense, she is

Chapter 18

18:2. “haunt.” The Greek word phulake (φυλακή) can mean either a prison or the prison guard, or the act of guarding or watching. In this case, the demons (unclean spirits or “birds”) are not in prison in Babylon, but live there and keep watch there. Thus “haunt” is a good translation to communicate that.

18:3. “the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.” See commentary on Revelation 14:8.

18:12. “pearls.” Pearls are mentioned in a number of New Testament verses because in the biblical world pearls were incredibly expensive. The Roman historian, Pliny the Elder (23 AD – August 24, 79 AD), said this about pearls: “The topmost rank of all things of price is held by pearls.” Round, white pearls are amazingly rare. When pointing out that women should not dress extravagantly, 1 Timothy 2:9 says women should not dress with gold and pearls. Jesus told a parable about a man who found one very expensive pearl and sold everything he had to buy it (Matt. 13:46).

Part of the mystique about pearls in the first century was that people were not sure where they came from. Expensive pearls that came into the Roman world from the Persian Gulf and from India had traveled far and had an air of mystery about them. Although some pearls did come from shallow water, most pearls in the ancient world were brought up from quite deep in the ocean. In the Persian Gulf region, a fruitful source of pearls in biblical times, they were often at a depth of about 40 meters (about 45 yards or half a football field).

To get down to the oyster beds, pearl divers held a weight on a rope to make a quick descent to the bottom. Once the diver was on the bottom, he let go of the weight, which was pulled back up to the ship by the rope, while the diver swam back up after he put the oysters he had gathered into a sack he carried with him. Until the invention of scuba gear, this diving-with-a-weight method of pearling was the common way of pearling, with only slight improvements over the years, such as hand and foot protection
from the sharp oysters and a face masks so the diver could see better and to protect the eyes. This dangerous way of getting pearls was the major reason natural pearls were so expensive until our modern times.

In the early 1900’s pearls lost much of their value and the pearl industry collapsed because the Japanese invented a way to grow cultured pearls. Also, shortly after that plastics and resins began to be used to produce very realistic looking pearls. Then finally, the invention of the scuba diving system made getting the real pearls much easier, safer, and more reliable. The result of all this was that pearls, which for millennia had been a mark of high culture, social standing, and financial wealth, were suddenly being worn by anyone and everyone, so they were less a status symbol and thus less attractive. As their attraction wore off, they were worn by fewer and fewer people, even being ignored by those who could afford the “real” ones.

18:13. “slaves, even the souls of human beings.” The word for “slaves” is actually “bodies,” and slaves were referred to as “bodies” in the Roman Empire. God created people to be relational and to interconnect with one another, so in order to be with other people and treat them horribly it is almost a necessity to “dehumanize” them. This is very common in war. Germans are not people, they were “Krauts,” Italians were “Wops,” Japanese were “Nips,” and people from the Middle East are called “Towel heads” by many in today’s armed forces.

This dehumanizing was done in Bible times as well. In the Bible, the Jews called themselves “the People” (and you will see “People” with a capital “P” in the REV translation), which meant that non-Jews were not “people.” Similarly, in ancient Egypt, the Egyptians called themselves “people,” and the foreigners were specifically the “no-People.” The ancient Greeks thought of themselves better than everyone else, and thus everyone else was a “Barbarian,” an onomatopoeic word based on “ba-ba-ba-ba,” which is what the Greeks thought everyone else’s language sounded like—just a bunch of “ba’s” strung together. Thus it is no surprise that in the Roman Empire slaves were called “bodies.” They were certainly often used that way.

“soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here “souls of human beings” is a phrase that primarily refers to “people,” but by including the word “soul” it includes the mental and emotional life. People were bought and sold, but their thoughts and feelings were disregarded. Similar uses of psuchē are Romans 2:9 and 2 Peter 2:14. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

18:14. “soul.” The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή). Here it refers to the seat of the mental and emotional life. People did not just want the fruit, they wanted it from the core of their being. [For more on “soul,” see commentary on Revelation 18:13].


18:22. “the sound of the mill.” When Jerusalem was about to be destroyed by the Babylonians, Jeremiah prophesied that the sound of the millstone would not be heard in her (Jer. 25:10). It was a happy sound that was a staple of family life. The women would grind meal together and enjoy each other’s company, and there would be fresh bread to eat. When the sound of the millstone is not heard, family life is pretty much non-existent.
18:23. “the voice of the bridegroom.” As in Verse 22 above, Jeremiah 25:10 also mentions the voice of the bridegroom.

Chapter 19

19:10. “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” The testimony “of” Jesus (genitive of relation: testimony about Jesus; most likely also includes the sense of the genitive of origin, i.e., the words or testimony that Jesus gives) is the spirit (the general attitude, the essence, “the inner content” (Lenski)). In contrast to false prophecy, true prophecy will elevate Jesus.

19:11. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).


19:14. “armies.” Although the reason for the plural “armies” could be a plural of emphasis to show the large size of the army, it is more likely that it is plural because of the compound nature of Christ’s army, which includes spirit beings and Christians, who were Raptured into heaven and now are returning to earth with Christ. There are verses that indicate that we will participate in the destruction of Satan, such as Romans 16:20, which speaks of Satan being crushed “under your [the Christian’s] feet.” Also, 1 Corinthians 6:3 speaks of us judging angels, which almost certainly includes participating in the defeat of the fallen angels we know as demons. Also, 1 Thessalonians 4:17 speaks of us always being with the Lord after the Rapture, so it is unlikely that Christ could come to earth and fight without us participating.

19:15. “out of his mouth comes a sharp broadsword.” That there is a sharp sword coming out of the mouth of Jesus is also stated in Revelation 1:16 and 2:16. What this “sharp sword” is, is made clear in 2 Thessalonians 2:8, which says that the Lord will destroy the lawless one with the “spirit from his mouth,” where “spirit” is used for prophecies spoken by Jesus Christ (see commentary note on 2 Thessalonians 2:8, and 1 Corinthians 14:12). Christians should be used to thinking in terms of the Word of God being a two-edged sword from Hebrews 4:12 and Ephesians 6:17. Jesus Christ is not depicted destroying people with a physical sword, but rather with the “sword of the Spirit,” which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:17). Powerful words from God come out of Jesus’ mouth and destroy his enemies.


19:20. “sulfur.” The word “brimstone” is an old word for “sulfur.”

19:21. “broadsword.” We know from the context that this sword is the prophetic utterances that are spoken by Jesus Christ. (See commentary on Rev. 19:15). For commentary on the fact that this is a “broadsword,” see commentary on Luke 2:35).

Chapter 20

20:2. “dragon.” Names such as “dragon” and “serpent” are descriptive terms for the Devil, which is made clear in the verse. They are the figure of speech hypocatastasis.
(pronounced: hī-poe-cā-tās'-tā-sīs), a “comparison by implication.” In the Bible, there are many uses of the three common figures of speech of comparison, which are simile, metaphor, and hypocatastasis. These are commonly used in English speech as well, but only simile and metaphor are generally known by name. A simile is a “comparison by resemblance,” that is, the two things being compared resemble each other in some way. A simile in English usually uses “like” or “as.” If a person is a sloppy and noisy eater, someone might say, “You eat like a pig.” Psalm 1:3 uses a simile when it says a righteous person is like a tree planted by the water.

More intense than a simile is the figure metaphor, a “comparison by representation.” In a metaphor, one noun represents another. In the pig example above, a metaphor would be, “You are a pig.” Jesus used a metaphor when he said to his disciples, “I am the vine; you are the branches…” (John 15:5 NIV).

Even more intense than metaphor is the figure hypocatastasis, which is a “comparison by implication.” In the pig example, instead of comparing the messy eater with a pig by saying he is “like” a pig, or even using metaphor and saying the person “is” a pig, in hypocatastasis the comparison is just implied. One person says to the other, “Pig!” and the meaning, although it is just implied and not specifically stated, is effectively communicated.

Hypocatastasis is used very effectively in our everyday language. If a person helps us when we need it, we might say, “You angel!” If someone lies to us, we might say, “Snake!” When someone is being overly hesitant, he gets mocked by the hypocatastasis, “Chicken!”

The examples, “Pig,” “You angel,” “Snake,” and “Chicken” show us that in hypocatastasis, the person is being compared to something else, and by that comparison, the qualities of the pig, angel, snake, or chicken, are being assigned to the person. As long as the comparison is well known in the culture, the implied meaning is not confused.

Figures of comparison are helpful in communication because they quickly bring both meaning and emotional impact to a situation that would otherwise take a lengthy description. Imagine how long it would take to describe the way a person was eating and how it was affecting you emotionally, when all you have to say is, “Pig,” and the meaning is clear.

The figure of speech hypocatastasis can be confusing, however, for three major reasons. First, since the comparison is implied, it may not be clear who the subject of the comparison is. For example, in Ezekiel 19:5 a king of Judah is being called a “lion,” but which king is it referring to? The scholars are not sure. Most of them say either Jehoiachin or Zedekiah, but we do not know for certain.

The second reason hypocatastasis can be confusing is that sometimes it is not clear what meaning is being implied. It may be quite easy to figure out why the Devil is called a “serpent” (Rev. 20:2), but we may not understand what Jesus meant when he called Herod a “fox.” A study of the word “fox” in the biblical culture reveals that Jesus was calling Herod a destructive nuisance (cp. commentary on Luke 13:32).

The third reason hypocatastasis can be confusing is that the figure can be missed entirely, and people think that the hypocatastasis is literal. When Jesus used the figure hypocatastasis, sometimes even people who knew him well were confused. For example, Jesus told his apostles to beware of the “leaven” of the Pharisees, but they did not recognize the hypocatastasis and thought he was speaking of actual bread. He was using
“leaven” to represent “doctrine,” something he made clear to them after he realized they had misunderstood what he said. (Matt. 16:6-12 KJV).

Another good example of people mistaking the hypocatastasis for something literal is the way many Christians think that Genesis 3:1 is speaking of an actual snake when it refers to the Devil as a “serpent” by the figure hypocatastasis. The figure should be clear because literal snakes cannot talk, the Devil is referred to as the serpent in other verses of Scripture, and when 2 Corinthians 11:3 (KJV) says “the serpent” beguiled Eve, the context is Satan and his ministers (v. 14). Furthermore, Revelation 20:2 calls him, “that ancient serpent,” which refers to the “serpent” being very old, which is true, since “the serpent” of Genesis 3:1 is the very first reference to the Devil in the whole Bible. Nevertheless many people miss the hypocatastasis and think that the “serpent” in Genesis was some kind of actual snake, and artists do not help the situation when they paint pictures of a snake in the Garden of Eden. There are people who think that the snake was possessed by the Devil, but why would Eve believe a snake? She would be immediately suspicious of something so out of the ordinary. The Devil would have appeared to Eve in an unthreatening way as a wise and helpful being, but his crafty nature and intent are clearly set forth by the hypocatastasis: “serpent” (E. W. Bullinger has an extensive appendix (#19) on the serpent being the Devil in his Companion Bible).

The Bible has many examples of hypocatastasis. In Song of Solomon the Beloved is called a “dove” (Song of Sol. 2:14); destructive people are called “wolves” (Acts 20:29); the strong enemies of God are called “bulls” (Ps. 22:12); vicious and unclean people are called “dogs” (Ps. 22:16; Matt. 7:6) and also “pigs” (Matt. 7:6); the people of God are “sheep,” while unbelievers are called “goats” (Matt. 25:33). People are sometimes called “trees” or “plants” (Jer. 11:19; Matt. 15:13). Each of these terms imports a meaning into the text that is important for us to understand.

Sometimes very different people are compared to the same thing, as long as the comparison is valid. A lion usually typified irresistible power and destructive strength, and so many things were compared to a lion. These include God (Job 10:16; Isa. 38:13; Jer. 49:19); Jesus (Rev. 5:5); Israel (Num. 23:24; 24:9); the tribe of Gad (Deut. 33:20); wicked people (Ps. 17:12; 22:13); false prophets (Ezek. 22:25); Jehoahaz, king of Judah (Ezek. 19:3); the officials in Jerusalem (Zeph. 3:3); Babylon (Jer. 4:7); Egypt (Ezek. 32:2); the enemies of Israel (Jer. 2:15); and the Devil (1 Pet. 5:8).

Hypocatastasis is a powerful figure in that it can bring a wide range of possible meanings to the text from just one illustration, and thus invites us into prayer, thought, and study. A good example of this occurs in Ezekiel.

**Ezekiel 34:8**

As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock,.....

In the above verse, God uses hypocatastasis to compare His people to sheep, calling them “My flock.” Then He again uses hypocatastasis to explain what has happened to them: they became food for the “wild animals.” If God had tried to explain in paragraph form who the “wild animals” were who had eaten His people (i.e., taken advantage of, hurt, and killed them), it would have taken Him at least a paragraph, and the punchy impact of the figure would have been lost. No doubt the list would include
cruel leaders, ungodly priests, ruthless businessmen, foreign enemies, and even demonic forces. God covers all these possibilities, forces us to think broadly about the verse, and brings emotion into the text, simply by using the figure hypocatastasis and saying “wild animals.”

Here in Revelation 20:2, the Devil is referred to by hypocatastasis as a dragon, comparing the Devil to a dragon and importing to him the characteristics of evil, fierceness, viciousness, etc. [For more names of the Slanderer (Devil), see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

“Serpent.” The Slanderer (the Devil) is not a literal serpent, so his being called that is the figure of speech hypocatastasis (a comparison by implication; see entry on “dragon” above). Calling the Slanderer a “serpent” compares him with a serpent, and imports the characteristics of a serpent onto the Slanderer. Thus we can see that, among other things, the Slanderer is hard to see and recognize (he is very good at hiding), crafty, and deadly. Places the Slanderer is referred to as a serpent include Genesis 3:1,13,14; 2 Corinthians 11:3; and Revelation 20:2. [For more names of the Slanderer, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

“the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

“the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

20:4. “souls.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is primarily for the person himself, which is why the HCSB says, “I saw the people who had been beheaded because of their testimony.” However, by using the word “soul,” God includes their mental and emotional life, and helps us see these people as the committed people that they truly were. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

“beheaded.” This is the figure of speech synecdoche of the part, where a part of something is put for the whole of that thing [For synecdoche, see Bullinger, Figures of Speech]. In this case, only those believers who have been “beheaded” are said to get up, but in fact all believers from the Old Testament and Tribulation will get up. This is the “first resurrection, the resurrection of the righteous,” when every righteous person will hear the voice of Christ (John 5:25-29) and get up from the dead (except those in the Christian Church, because they have already been raptured). This verse specifically says “beheaded” because it is in the context of the Great Tribulation, when believers will die horrible deaths, and because there is an emphasis that these people are the type of people who “did not love their souls—even to death” (Rev. 12:11). There is no reason to believe that beheading will not be reinstated as a way to execute the death penalty. It is already
occurring among some Moslem groups. [For more information on the Old Testament believers getting up at this time, see commentary on John 14:3].

“came to life.” The dead are dead, and not alive in any way. [See Appendix 4: “The Dead are Dead.”]

“1000 years.” Jesus Christ will come to earth and rule a kingdom scholars refer to as the “Millennial Kingdom” (from the Latin, mille, 1000, and annus, a year). As this verse says, it will last 1000 years. [For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 3: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

20:7. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Ἀδιάβολος (See 20:2). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer.” See 20:2. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer.”]

“will be loosed.” The Adversary will be bound for 1000 years, allowing the restoration of Eden-like conditions on earth. Justice, no war, plenty of food, great weather, and more. In this Millennial Kingdom, the promises God made to Abraham and to Israel will be fulfilled. But after the 1000 years the Adversary and his demons will be loosed and apparently will deceive mankind in a similar way to the way he deceived Adam and Eve: by suggesting that what people have is not good enough. In this way he will amass an army of disgruntled people and attack Jerusalem (20:8, 9). On the Day of Judgment it will be clear that people’s happiness, or contentment, is less about what they actually have than what they think about what they have. People who “have everything,” can still be disgruntled and ungodly. The Old Testament alluded to the period when the demons would be imprisoned and then let loose (cp. Daniel 7:12; Isa. 24:21, 22; note that verse 22 is worded in such a way that after many days the demons will be “visited,” and the Hebrew word can mean either for good or bad, depending on the context. They can be released, punished, or both).  

20:10. “the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is διάβολος (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer.” See 20:2. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer.”]

“they will be tormented day and night to the ages of the ages.” This is usually translated as, “They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” This verse has been used to teach the eternal torment of the damned, i.e., that people who die “unsaved” burn forever in “Hell.” What the Bible really teaches is that people who die unsaved are not tormented forever, but are eventually annihilated in the flames of Gehenna. [For more information on annihilation in the lake of Fire, see Appendix 5: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

20:11. “great white throne.” What theologians refer to as “the Great White Throne Judgment” is the final judgment, and occurs at the “second resurrection.” The vast majority of the dead who are raised in this judgment will be condemned to annihilation in Gehenna (see commentary on Rev. 20:10). Jesus Christ will be the judge sitting on the throne (see commentary on Rom. 14:10).
21:3. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

21:5. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδοû), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

21:6. “I am the Alpha and the Omega.” For information on this phrase, see commentary on Revelation 1:8. “Beginning and the End.” The phrase appears twice: here and Revelation 22:13. The exact meaning of the phrase “the Beginning and the End” is not given. Scholars give differing explanations of the phrase, but the meaning must be closely associated with the concepts of “Alpha and Omega” and “First and Last” because these titles are associated together (cp. Rev. 22:13). We have seen from the study of the title “Alpha and Omega” that it refers to the start and finish of something, and we have seen from the title “First and Last” (Rev. 1:17) that Christ will raise up the generations of people unto everlasting life. It is clear why Christ would be called the “Beginning and the End” in association with these concepts. He is the firstborn from the dead, and he will be the one to call the last people out of their graves, he is both the Author and Finisher of faith, he is the Man by whom God will judge the world and he is the one who will then create and bring to completion the next ages (see the notes on Heb. 1:10). There is no compelling reason to assume Jesus is God simply because of the title, “the Beginning and the End.” It is common for people of similar status to use the same title. [For more discussion on this phrase see The Racovian Catechism, in Polish 1605; in Latin 1609; in English 1818, available through Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, pp. 161-163.

21:9. “the bride, the wife.” There is a lot of misinformation in Christianity about the “Bride of Christ.” There is no group of people such as Israel or the Church who are “literally” the bride. The term “bride” is one of the figures of speech God uses in His Word to bring specific meaning and emotion into the text. When we understand the subject, we can see that every saved person together is referred to as the “bride” or “wife” of Christ. [For more information on this subject, see Appendix 13: “The Bride of Christ”.]

21:16. “stadia.” A Roman stadia is about 600 feet. The distance is about 1,400 miles, or 2,200 kilometers. The city is probably a huge pyramid, with the throne of God and Jesus at the top. Thus it would be similar to the Holy Jerusalem in the Millennial Kingdom, with the Temple at the top of the mountain of the Lord (see Schoenheit, The Christian’s Hope, chapter 4).

21:18. “The city was pure gold, like pure glass.” This does not mean the gold is transparent, but rather that glass in the time of the apostle John could be made very pure and visibly so, and so he is saying that the gold will be pure also, not amalgamated or diluted.

21:21. “pearls.” Pearls were very expensive in the ancient world, and very highly valued. [For more on pearls, see commentary on Revelation 18:12].
22:3. “and his servants will serve him.” Although the verse mentions both God and Jesus Christ, the pronoun “him” is singular, and refers to God, something that becomes clear from the rest of the verse in 22:4. Although both God and Jesus are on the throne, God has the primacy.

22:4. “and they will see his face.” Throughout history the face of God was hidden. Moses was allowed to see God’s back, but not His face (Exod. 33:20-23). But God never wanted His people to be separate from him, and in the Everlasting Kingdom the saved will all see God.

“and his name will be on their foreheads.” The people in the Everlasting Kingdom will have the name of God and of Jesus on their foreheads (Revelation 14:1), but since this is singular, “his name,” it would refer to God.

22:7. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).


22:12. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

22:13. “Alpha and Omega.” For information on this phrase, see commentary on Revelation 1:8.

“First and Last.” For information on this phrase, see commentary on Revelation 1:17.

“Beginning and the End.” For information on this phrase, see commentary on Revelation 21:6.

22:15. “likes.” The Greek verb we translate as “likes” is phileō (#5368 φιλέω). If we say, “love,” as most versions do, we lose the meaning of phileō here, and confuse it with agapē love. Phileō love has a deep attachment, like the attachment of true friends, while agapē love does not necessary have any feeling of attachment at all, which is why we can “love” (agapē) our enemies. The people in this verse do not “love” falsehood in the sense that they feel it is the right thing to do even though they do not enjoy it (that would be to confuse phileō with agapē), rather, the people being referred to in this verse have a deep connection to, and friendship with, falsehood. For a more complete understanding of phileō, see the note on John 21:15.


22:17. “the Spirit.” This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

22:19. “God will take away his part from the tree of life.” Tampering with God’s words, which is His communication to mankind, is a very serious sin and has serious consequences. Revelation 22:19 is part of the information the Bible gives us about the period of the book of Revelation, which directly applies to people after the Rapture, i.e. after the Christians have been caught up into heaven to be with Christ (1 Thess. 4:17). During the time of the Old Testament, Gospels, and Revelation, a person’s salvation was not guaranteed and thus a person could sin and not be saved. This is very clearly presented in the Old Testament, Gospels, and Revelation. It is especially clear in sections such as Ezekiel 33:12-16, and it is why when the man asked Jesus, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life,” Jesus answered, “If you want to enter life, obey the commandments” (Matt. 19:16, 17). It is also why the letters to the assemblies in Revelation 2:1-3:21 speak of people having to be faithful to overcome.
If a person living during the time of Tribulation takes away from the words of God, he will not receive everlasting life. In contrast, if a Christian, someone who is born again, takes away from the words of God, he is still guaranteed everlasting life [see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation”]. Revelation 22:19 does not directly address Christians because Revelation is written to people left on earth after the Rapture, but we can assume that any Christian who takes away from the words of God would suffer serious consequences just as he would with many other serious sins [For information on rewards see commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:5].
Appendix 1. The Permanence of Christian Salvation

Through the centuries of the Christian era, there has been a huge debate about whether a Christian can lose his salvation. We assert Scripture teaches that when a person is born again of God’s holy spirit, his salvation is guaranteed, and he is not in danger of the “Second Death” (Rev. 20:12-15). Salvation is of ultimate importance to every human being, since those who are saved will live forever and those who are not will be annihilated in the Lake of Fire [For annihilation, see commentary on Rev. 20:10]. Therefore, God has spent considerable time on the issue of the permanence of salvation and has approached it from many different angles, so we must do the same, and take some time to expound the issue.

General Background: Administrations in the Bible

One of the greatest truths of Scripture is that, for the accomplishment of His purposes and the benefit of His people, at different times in history God changed the “rules” He wants people to live by. In other words, God has administered His people differently at different times in history. Theologians call the set of rules associated with a specific time period an “administration” or “dispensation.” The systematic theology that recognizes these different administrations or dispensations is referred to as “Dispensationalism.” We should note, however, that even theologians who do not consider themselves dispensationalists realize that God has changed His rules for mankind from time to time. Thus, under the entry “Covenant Theology,” in the Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (W. Elwell, editor), we find the comment, “...the covenant of grace includes various dispensations” (p. 280).

When Christians do not recognize or understand the administrations in the Bible, it abounds with apparent contradictions. For example, Genesis commands circumcision, but Galatians says if a man is circumcised he is fallen from grace. Which is the truth, Genesis or Galatians? If we recognize the administrations in Scripture, we can see that both are truth, they just apply to God’s people at different periods of time. Another example is that under the Mosaic Law, God allowed a man to have multiple wives, but in 1 Corinthians He forbids that practice. Almost 100 years ago, Bible scholar Martin Anstey wrote: “…the golden rule is, ‘Distinguish the dispensations and the difficulties will disappear.’” (How to Master the Bible, p. 23.)

We must understand that God changed His rules for people if we are to understand salvation in the Bible, and the permanence of our salvation as Christians. A search of the Scripture shows that salvation is not guaranteed during the Old Testament, Four Gospels, and the Tribulation period (which comes after Christians are taken to heaven at the Rapture). However, God changed the rules about salvation on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). On that day God started a new administration, and it is so dominated by God’s grace that He refers to it as “the administration of God’s grace” (see commentary on Ephesians 3:2). Part of the “grace” of the Administration of Grace is that salvation is guaranteed.

We will now begin to look at reasons why we conclude salvation is permanent for Christians. We are looking for things that are unique to the Administration of Grace. If we are correct that salvation is guaranteed for Christians, but was not guaranteed before
the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), then that fact should be reflected in the words in the Word. We will see specific wording and specific statements made in the Church Epistles that do not appear in any form in the Old Testament or Gospels.

A) **New Seed and New Birth**

When a person acts on Romans 10:9 and confesses that Jesus is Lord and believes that God raised him from the dead, God our Father puts a spiritual seed into that person, and he is “born again.” Scripture says, “For you have been born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23).

To fully grasp the impact of 1 Peter 1:23, we must examine both “seed” and “birth.” When it comes to seed, there is no mention of God’s spiritual seed outside the Epistles to the Christian Church. Spiritual “seed” cannot be found in the Old Testament, the Four Gospels, or the Book of Revelation. Only Christians in the Administration of Grace have spiritual seed. This should immediately alert us that God is doing something for Christians that He never did before. Also, God calls the seed “imperishable,” because it does not die or go away. It stays in us forever, so the effect it produces in us, our salvation, is “imperishable” too.

God’s use of “birth” to communicate what happens in Christian salvation is crystal clear, because birth is permanent. Furthermore, the “New Birth,” like the incorruptible seed, is never found outside the Epistles to the Church. Although many English versions have the phrase “born again” in John 3:3 and 3:7, that is a mistranslation. The Greek that is often translated “born again” in John 3 is totally different from the Greek in 1 Peter 1:23, and means “born from above.” The “birth from above” of John 3:3 refers to resurrection from the dead, not the New Birth that Christians experience (see the commentary on John 3:3, “born from above”. Also, for a full explanation of what Jesus was referring to in John 3, which was the resurrection out of the grave, see John Schoenheit, *The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul*, pp. 257-266).

God uses three different words that refer to the Christian’s New Birth, and *anagennaō* and *apokueō* appear only in epistles to the Church, and nowhere else in the Bible, while *paliggenesia* appears in Matthew, but not in reference to people.

1. *Anagennaō* (#313; ἀναγεννάω; from the Greek prefix ana, “again” or “up,” and *gennaō*, “to give birth”). It means to be given birth to again, or to be born again, and it occurs in 1 Peter 1:3 and 23, “in his great mercy he has given us new birth…” (1 Pet. 1:3).

2. *Paliggenesia* (#3824; παλιγγενεσία; from *palin*, “again” and *genesis*, “genesis” or “origin”). It means to have an origin again, a new genesis, and it occurs in Titus 3:5: “He saved us through the washing of rebirth….”

3. *Apokueō* (#616; ἀποκυέω; from the Greek prefix apo, “away from,” and *kueō*, “to be pregnant”). It means “to give birth to,” and it occurs in James 1:18, “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth….”

Every one of the above Greek words was used by the Greeks for birth, and they all appear in the Epistles to the Church, and nowhere else. As every parent knows, the predominant truth about a birth is the presence of a baby, who is “permanent.” Surely God would not use three different words for “birth” if there were not an actual birth, or if we could not apply the concepts of birth, such as permanence, to what happens when a Christian is “born again.” “Birth” is permanent, both in the flesh and in the spirit.
B) Adoption
Birth is permanent, and so to emphasize the permanence of our guarantee of salvation, God calls it birth. But in the Roman culture adoption was permanent, and so God also calls our new birth “adoption,” once again, in part to emphasize its permanence (See commentary on Eph. 1:5).

C) A New Divine Nature
Every child is born with the nature of the parent. Because we have been born of God, 2 Peter 1:4 says we are partakers of the divine nature. No one in the Old Testament, Gospels, or Book of Revelation is ever said to receive, or “partake of,” a divine nature, not even the prophets, who had God’s gift of holy spirit upon them. We have the nature of God because we are His children by birth and have His incorruptible seed in us, while people outside the Church Administration did not have His nature because they were not “born” of God. Because Christians have both a new divine nature and an old sin nature, these antithetical natures struggle against each other within us. Although every person since Adam and Eve has struggled with sin, we must realize that only in Scripture addressed to the Church does the Bible say that the “nature” of sin (sometimes called the “flesh”) and the “nature” of God (the “spirit”) “are in conflict with each other,” (Gal. 5:17).

Because we have a divine nature, the Bible refers to all Christians as “saints,” although a better translation would be “holy ones” (see commentary on Philippians 1:1, “holy ones). There are “holy ones” in both the Old Testament and New Testament, however, a quick study of the Greek and Hebrew words translated “saints” will show that the “holy ones,” in the Old Testament and Gospels were holy by virtue of their obeying God. In contrast, the Church Epistles make it clear that anyone who is a Christian is holy because of the divine nature within him.

D) New Creations
The New Birth is actually an act of creation—God created His nature in us, so we are new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Our first birth was not a creation, but our new birth is, because when we believed, God “created” new life within us. People in the Old Testament and Gospels believed God, but they were never “created” anew when they believed. In contrast, when a person in the Administration of Grace believes, God literally “creates” in him something new and permanent. Other verses, such as Colossians 3:10, also indicate we are new creations.

E) Sealed with holy spirit
Birth is permanent, and in birth the nature of the parent is passed down to the offspring, and so in the new birth the nature of God is passed to believers. But what is the nature of God? God is “holy” and God is “spirit,” so what is “born” [by creation] inside each Christian is the “holy spirit.” We know that birth is permanent, but another way God emphasized the permanence of our salvation was by saying in Ephesians 1:13 that the holy spirit inside us is “sealed” in us. This sealing is new in the Administration of Grace. No one in the Old Testament, Gospels, or Revelation is said to be “sealed.” Quite the opposite! God took His holy spirit from King Saul when he sinned (1 Sam. 16:14). Also, Psalm 51:11 records that after committing adultery with Bathsheba and having Uriah killed, King David asked God not to take holy spirit from him. Even if we sin, we never have to ask God not to take the gift of holy spirit from us, because it is permanently sealed in us by birth.
F) God’s Guarantee to Us

The Church Epistles says that Christians have a guarantee of salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 2 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 1:14). In contrast to these three verses in the Church Epistles, there are no verses in the Old Testament, the Four Gospels, or the Book of Revelation, that say salvation is guaranteed.

There are versions of the Bible that do not translate Greek word ἀρραβών as “guarantee,” but instead use “earnest,” “pledge,” “deposit,” or something similar. The Greek word ἀρραβών means a deposit in advance that guarantees the full payment to come. For Christians, that means we are guaranteed being Raptured into heaven and given new, immortal, bodies. The NIV gets the sense of the word well: “Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come” (2 Cor. 5:5). [For more on ἀρραβών and “guarantee,” see commentary on Eph. 1:14]. If God “guarantees” our everlasting life, then it is guaranteed. The Bible never says, or even hints, that the guarantee is in any way conditional, like, “I guarantee it if you will do such and such.” Christians are God’s children by birth, and His guarantee of everlasting life is absolute and unconditional.

G) Part of the Body of Christ

Christians become new creations individually because God creates His nature in us. However, we also collectively become part of a newly created Body, a spiritual body called, “the Body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27; cp. Romans 12:4,5; 1 Cor. 10:16; 12:12-20; Eph. 1:23; 3:16; 4:4; Col. 1:18; 3:15). Like our physical body, this spiritual body is comprised of many members, and Jesus Christ is its head (Eph. 5:23).

Like the New Birth and the permanence of salvation, the Body of Christ is unique to the Grace Administration and never mentioned outside the Epistles to the Christian Church. The Body of Christ is made up of all those who believe, no matter what their gender or nationality. Galatians 3:28 makes it clear that there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female in Christ. This is a shift from the Old Testament, Gospels, and Revelation in which the people of God are distinctly counted as being either a Jew or a Gentile. After the Church is taken from the earth at the Rapture, God again separates the Jewish believer from the Gentile believer (cp. Rev. 7:1-17).

H) We are Already in Heaven

Ephesians 2:6 says we are seated in heaven. When we got born again, we were given spiritual life and God guaranteed that He would raise us from physical death. Our being raised from the dead (or changed from mortal to immortal at the Rapture) is so certain, so secure, that God refers to it with the idiom that linguists refer to as the “prophetic perfect.”

The prophetic perfect is an idiom mainly used in Semitic languages, but occasionally used in other languages as well, to emphasize the certainty of a future event by speaking of it as if it has already happened (see commentary on Eph. 2:6). Thus, even though Christians are still on earth, we are said to be “in heaven” because our being in heaven is certain. God used the prophetic perfect idiom many times in the Bible to assure people of future events. For example, in Isaiah 53:5 God said of the Messiah, “he was pierced for our transgressions,” even though Jesus’ being pierced was a future event, and would not actually occur for about 750 more years. God said in Isaiah that Jesus “was” pierced to assure the people that the Messiah would suffer for their sins. Similarly, God assures us that Jesus will come back by saying in Jude, “Behold, the Lord came with
many thousands of His holy ones” (Jude 1:14 NASB and literal Greek text). Of course the Lord has not come yet, but God puts the coming of the Lord in the past tense so we know his coming in the future is assured.

Although Ephesians 2:6 promises that we will be in heaven by using the idiom and saying we are already there, there are verses that let us know we are still on earth (as if we needed proof of that). Thus, the promise that Christians will be raised to everlasting life is worded literally (without the idiom) in Romans 6:5: “we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.” It would be disingenuous of God to use the prophetic perfect idiom and say we are already in heaven if in fact we might not be there in the future. God never told the believers in the Old Testament or Gospels that they were already in heaven because their salvation was not assured, as ours is. Truly we live in an Age of Grace.

I) New Language
To prove to us the inward reality of the presence of holy spirit and show us we have indeed been born again, God gave us a new language, a language unique to the Administration of Grace. The Bible refers to it as “speaking in tongues.” Speaking in tongues first happened on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4), and it will cease to exist after the Rapture of the Church (1 Cor. 13:8). In the meantime, speaking in tongues is prayer and praise, it edifies the one speaking, and what God says about it is very clear: “I would like every one of you to speak in tongues….” (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:5).

J) New Citizenship
As new creations, we now belong, not to the earthly realm where our physical body resides, but to God’s heavenly kingdom. Scripture makes this clear: “But our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). Here again we see the uniqueness of the Christian Church. Many people in the Old Testament and Gospels believed, but none were referred to as citizens of heaven. In contrast, because our salvation is guaranteed, we can legitimately be called citizens of heaven.

K) New Relationship with God
The bond that exists between parents and their birth children is universal. No matter how a child behaves, somehow the parent loves him. If we are correct that we Christians have permanent salvation based on our New Birth, then we should see a shift in how God expresses His love relationship with Christians, as opposed to what he said about Israel in the Old Testament. We do see that shift, and one place it is recorded is Romans 8:35-39. Those verses express two facts: first, that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39), and second, that this is a change from the Old Testament (Rom. 8:36, 37).

Quite a few Old Testament verses refer to God’s having had enough of “His people,” even to the point of rejecting them and saying, “I will no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive them” (Hos. 1:6), and “…you are not my people, and I am not your God” (Hos. 1:9). Isaiah 50:1 and Jeremiah 3:8 speak of God divorcing Israel and sending her away: “I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries” (Jer. 3:8). In contrast, the Church is not in danger of being separated from God even when we sin. We are God’s children by birth, and even when we behave despicably, He tells us He will always love us. [For more on God being called our “Father,” see commentary on Romans 8:15].

L) New Glory
The Grace Administration, with its guarantee of salvation, is much more glorious than the Law. The Law was glorious in that it gave light and justice where there had been confusion and darkness, but consider the following verse from the Church Epistles regarding the glory of the Administration of Grace: “For what was glorious [the Law] has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory” (2 Cor. 3:10). What God has given the Church is so new and so glorious that in comparison to it, the Law of Moses had “no glory.”

M) New Way of Salvation

We now have a new, simple, and straightforward way to be saved: “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). This verse agrees with the others in the Church Epistles, such as Romans 3:22, Galatians 2:15, 16, and especially Ephesians 2:8, which specifically states that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and “not by works.” Faith has always been the way to salvation, but before the Administration of Grace there was no new birth or guarantee of salvation, so a person’s works were important to demonstrate his faith, which had to continue throughout his life (cp. Ezek. 33:11-20). That is why Moses said that righteousness came by being careful to obey the Law (Deut. 6:25).

Jesus and the Apostle Paul both taught the way of salvation, and both were asked the basic question, “What must I do to be saved?” Jesus answered: “If you want to enter life, obey the commandments” (Matt. 19:17). During the Law of Moses, when Jesus answered the question, there was no guarantee of salvation available, so a person had to maintain his faith and righteousness throughout his life. Thus, Jesus told the man to obey the commandments, which was what God demanded under the Law. In contrast, Paul answered: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved…” (Acts 16:31). Paul could say this because he lived in the Administration of Grace, and the moment a person believes, he is born again and has a guarantee of everlasting life.

N) New Ending

The Administration of Grace began on the Day of Pentecost when Christ poured out the new gift of holy spirit (Acts 2:4, 33) and it will end with the Rapture, when dead Christians are raised, living Christians are changed, and both groups are taken to heaven in new bodies that are like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:51-54). The Rapture is only spoken of in the Church Epistles. Some people believe that Matthew 24:37-41 is also about the Rapture, but it is not. Reading it in context shows clearly that it is about Christ’s coming to earth as a conqueror and the Judgment, it and compares the Judgment of the wicked of Noah’s day with the Judgment of the wicked when Christ comes back to earth (see commentary on Matthew 24:40; for a full explanation, see John Schoenheit, The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul pp. 25-28).

Because the Rapture occurs only in the Church Epistles, many scholars deny that it will ever occur, feeling certain that if it did, it would be spoken of in more than just a couple places in the Epistles. That, however, is exactly our point: only Christians are in the Rapture, so it is only spoken of in the Church Epistles. It is unique to God’s children by birth, so it is not in the Old Testament or Four Gospels.

The righteous saints of the other administrations will be resurrected in the Resurrection of the Righteous, also called the “first resurrection” and the “resurrection of
life” (Dan. 12:2; Luke 14:14; John 5:29; Acts 24:15; Rev. 20:5). They come out of their graves and live on earth (Ezek. 37:11-14). [For more on the resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15].

**Totaling the evidence**

The evidence that Christians are guaranteed everlasting life is overwhelming. Note the things that are unique to the Christian Church: God creates in us imperishable spiritual seed by which we are “born again” of God’s spirit. That holy spirit is “sealed” within us, and thus we have a new divine nature. Because every birth is permanent, we also have a guarantee of salvation; and since our birth was an act of creation, we are “new creations.” As new creations who have God’s holy spirit, we have new, spiritual life. With our new spiritual life comes a new language: speaking in tongues. As God’s children by birth, we are now citizens of His “country;” heaven. Furthermore, we are already said to be in heaven, an idiomatic promise that we will be there. Since God is now our birth Father, we are told that nothing can separate us from His love. At the Rapture we will be taken with new bodies into heaven. Finally, what we Christians have is so glorious that the administrations before the “Grace Administration” had “no glory” in comparison.

For a Christian to lose his guarantee of salvation, God’s “imperishable seed” would have to perish; birth would not be permanent; we could break God’s seal on us; it would be clear that our “divine nature” was actually not part of our nature; the “guarantee” we had from God guaranteed absolutely nothing; we would have to become uncreated; we would have to be amputated from the Body of Christ; our new spiritual life would have to be killed; our new language would have to be taken from us; our heavenly citizenship would have to be revoked; God’s promise that we were already with Him in heaven would be shown to be worthless; the “surpassing glory” we are said to have would be shown to be no different from the glory of the Law; and the promise that nothing would separate us from God’s love would be false.

**Why is the permanence of salvation debated in the Church?**

In the light of all the evidence in the Epistles to the Church, why would anyone think Christians can lose their salvation? There are a number of reasons. One is that it is a long-standing tradition that people can lose their salvation, and many people are uncomfortable going against the tradition of the Church or their ancestors. However, no matter how long a tradition is entrenched, it is the Word of God that we must follow.

Another reason some people believe salvation is not guaranteed for Christians is that they read the Old Testament, the Four Gospels, and the book of Revelation and see that salvation is not guaranteed during those administrations, and therefore think that salvation is not guaranteed for Christians. However, God did something wonderful for Christians and even called the time in which we live the “Administration of Grace,” and we need to recognize that fact.

Another reason is that most people do not read the Epistles to the Church carefully enough to notice things that are written to it that are never written anywhere else in the Bible, such as the “guarantee” of everlasting life that we have, which does not appear outside the Church Epistles. We must read the Bible carefully and prayerfully to get His truth.

Another reason is that some people are scandalized by the thought that a person can become a Christian by faith in Christ and then return to sin and still be saved. They
do not think that is logical. But the guarantee of salvation is logical if we understand “birth.” Many parents have children that become very ungodly, but they are still their children. The same is true for God’s children by birth; even if some behave very ungodly, they are still children.

Still another reason is that there are some verses (very few!) in the Epistles that seem to say a Christian can lose his salvation. However, with some study every one of those “unclear” verses can be explained in light of the teaching that salvation is guaranteed for the Christian.

Still another reason is that some people think it would be unfair of God to guarantee salvation to the Christian Church, but not to people in other administrations. However, God made our salvation permanent for His purposes and to reveal His wisdom (Eph. 3:10). We do not think of God’s other rule changes as “unfair,” and we should not think that about His change of the permanence of salvation. For example, we do not think it unfair that a leader in the Old Testament could have more than one wife but a Christian leader cannot, or that the Jews had very strict food regulations but we Christians do not. We understand that when God changes the rules, He does so with great wisdom and love.

Can you relinquish your salvation?

Some people acknowledge that a Christian cannot lose his guarantee of salvation by sinning or behaving in an ungodly manner, but believe that if a person wants to become unsaved or wants to repent of his salvation, he can do that. However, that is not correct. When a person becomes born again he actually becomes a new creation and gets a new nature. He does not have the power to “uncreate” himself or change his nature. The New Birth changes the person in a way that cannot be reversed. An analogy would be a person who decided he did not want to see and so blinded himself, but in a couple years repented and decided that he wanted to see again. But he cannot just reverse his decision—he has been permanently changed. When a person gets born again he is permanently changed, and there is no verse in the New Testament that says that he can reverse his decision or that God would ever grant someone’s request to not be saved.

Scripture is clear: If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead, by the grace of God you have the guarantee of salvation and will live forever.
Appendix 2. Life in the Age to Come

The Greek phrase that we translate “life in the Age to come” is ἔτη αἰώνια (ζωή αἰώνιος). The word ζωή is the noun, “life,” while αἰώνιος is the adjective, “Age.” (Occasionally the phrase occurs as αἰώνιος ζωή, with the noun last; John 17:3; Acts 13:46, but that is the exception, and there is no difference in meaning).

English Bibles usually translate the phrase ζωή αἰώνιος as “eternal life” or “everlasting life,” but we feel that most of the time that is not a good translation, and can even be confusing. The phrase ζωή αἰώνιος (“Age life”) refers to everlasting life which begins in the Messianic Age, also known as the “Millennial Kingdom” (cp. Rev. 20:1-6).

Translating ζωή αἰώνιος as “everlasting life” in verses such as John 3:16 causes a couple of problems. One problem is that the phrase “everlasting life” places the emphasis on “How long will I live” (answer: “Forever”), instead of “When will I live forever” (answer: “In the Messianic Age”). Many verses attest to the fact that the Messianic Age will never end (cp. Ps. 89:29, 37; Isa. 9:7; 65:18; Jer. 17:25; Ezek. 37:25-28; Dan. 2:44; 7:18; Micah 4:7), and so from both those verses, and the duration of time that is implied in the word αἰώνιος, it is understood that those people who have ζωή αἰώνιος will never die once they are raised from the dead. However, as we will see from the study below, ζωή αἰώνιος usually places the emphasis on the “Age” when people will live more than how long they will live.

A second problem that occurs if ζωή αἰώνιος is translated “everlasting life” or “eternal life” is that most English readers take that translation at face value and think they have everlasting life right now. Thus, translating ζωή αἰώνιος as “everlasting life” has contributed to the general misunderstanding held by most Christians that when a righteous person dies, only his body dies, while his soul (or spirit) does not die, but lives on in heaven; and when an unsaved person dies, his soul lives on in “hell.” Actually, no one has “everlasting life” right now. Believers have the promise of everlasting life, which will be fulfilled at the Rapture or their resurrection from the dead.

The well-respected biblical scholar F. F. Bruce states what we feel is the correct understanding of ζωή αἰώνιος, and that it does not mean “eternal life.” He writes:

While ‘eternal life’ (ζωή αἰώνιος) etymologically might mean simply life of indefinite of perpetual duration, it appears from its NT usage to mean more precisely ‘the life of the Age to Come,’ i.e., resurrection life.” (see Geoffrey Bromiley, general editor, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “Age,” Vol. 1, p. 67, article by F. F. Bruce.)

C. H. Dodd agrees, and writes, “…ζωή αἰώνιος is used in John with reference to the Jewish idea of the life of the Age to Come.” (see C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 146.)

To understand the phrase ζωή αἰώνιος, we must know some background information on the subject of death, resurrection, and the Age to Come. Scripture teaches that when a person dies, he is dead in every sense of the word, and he stays dead until he is raised by Jesus Christ, either at the Rapture of the Church, or at one of the resurrections (see commentary on 1 Cor. 15:26; and *Is There Death After Life* by Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit).
Until the Church Epistles stated that the Christian Church would be taken up to heaven from the earth in an event theologians refer to as “the Rapture,” (1 Thess. 4:16-18), the Bible had only revealed that there would be two resurrections. The first resurrection is called, “The first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5, 6); “the resurrection of life” (John 5:29); and “the resurrection of the Righteous” (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15). The first resurrection will occur at the beginning of the 1000 year Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah. The second resurrection is called “the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29), and the resurrection of the “unrighteous” (Acts 24:15), because most of the people who are raised at that time will be judged to be unrighteous. This second resurrection will occur after the 1000 year Millennial Kingdom is over (Rev. 20:4-13). There are some verses in the Bible that refer to both of these resurrections in the same verse or context, and these include: Daniel 12:2; John 5:29; Acts 24:15; and Revelation 20:4-13. [For more on the Rapture and the resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15].

The “Messianic Age” has two parts, and those people who are in the first resurrection will participate in both parts. The first part lasts 1000 years (Rev. 20:4), and so it is known as the “Millennial Kingdom” (from the Latin word mille, “thousand”). In the Millennial Kingdom the earth will be similar to the earth we know now, but it will be mostly restored to a pristine state (Matt. 19:28). After the Millennial Kingdom, there will be a war with Satan, then the second resurrection and the White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:7-15). Then the second part of the Messianic Age begins, which lasts forever, so it can be referred to as the “Eternal Kingdom” (Rev. 21:1ff). At the start of the Eternal Kingdom a huge gold city comes down from heaven to earth, complete with walls made of precious stones and streets made of gold (Rev. 21:10-21).

Although the book of Revelation shows us that the Messianic Age is broken into two parts, the Millennial Kingdom and the Eternal Kingdom, that is new light shed upon the subject by the book of Revelation. As far as anyone in the Old Testament or Gospels knew, the “Messianic Age” was one continuous everlasting wonderful future age when the Messiah would rule the earth from Jerusalem, there would be no sickness or hunger, and righteousness and peace would last forever. The fact that the two distinct stages of the Messianic Age were unknown before the book of Revelation was written explains why the Jewish rabbis and most of the New Testament speak only of two ages, the present evil age and the wonderful Messianic Age to Come [For more on the Rapture, the two resurrections, the Millennial Kingdom, and the Eternal Kingdom, see, Schoenheit, The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul.]

People who are saved begin their everlasting life after they are raised from the dead. Mark 10:30 and Luke 18:30 show this to be true.

Mark 10:29, 30 (NIV)
“I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel 30 will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.

Mark 10:30 is one of the verses that clearly show Jesus talking about the two ages: this present age and the age to come. He said that anyone who gave things up for his sake would “receive a hundred times as much in this present age” and also, in the Age
to Come, “eternal life” (*zōē aïōnios*). There are two very important things we must understand when we read this verse. The first is that Jesus taught in terms of two “ages,” the present age, and the Age to Come. The second is that Jesus taught that a person’s “eternal life” begins in the Age to Come, not immediately.

That the Jews in the time of Jesus recognized that there were two “ages” is clearly portrayed in Scripture. For example, Christ said people who blaspheme the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven “either in this age or in the Age to Come” (Matt. 12:32). Many versions translate *aïōn* as “world” in this verse but that is misleading. First, the “world” does not come to an end; it is restored to a pristine condition by Christ. It is this evil “age” that ends. Second, by translating *aïōn* as “world” here and in many other places, the English reader never really understands the important biblical teaching of the two ages. For example, in the King James Version, there are about 30 places where *aïōn* is translated “world” where “age” would have been more accurate and more helpful in communicating to people the teaching of the New Testament. Ephesians 1:21 also speaks of both the present and future age, telling us that Christ is far above all rule and authority, not only “in the present age but also in the one to come.”

While the verses noted above speak of both the present age and the future age in that one verse, there are many verses that only mention one of the two ages. For example, Matthew 13:22 speaks of the cares of “this age,” and Romans 12:2 says not to be conformed to “this age.” Other verses that mention this age include Mark 4:19; 1 Corinthians 2:6; 3:18; Galatians 1:4; 1 Timothy 6:17; 2 Timothy 4:10; and Titus 2:12. The “children of this age” are people whose character reflects the character of this age (Luke 16:8), and the “god of this age” is the Devil (2 Cor. 4:4).

The Bible makes it clear that this age will come to an end. For example, the disciples came to Jesus while he sat on the Mount of Olives. They asked him about his coming and “the end of the age.” (Matt. 24:3). Other verses that speak of the end of the age are: Matthew 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20; 1 Corinthians 10:11; and Hebrews 9:26.

After this age ends, the Age to Come, the wonderful Messianic Age, will begin, and it will be a time of great blessing and joy, but only the righteous will attain it. Jesus talked about that when he spoke about “those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead…” (Luke 20:35). Other verses that speak of the Age to Come include Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; Ephesians 2:7; and Hebrews 6:5. David Hill writes about how *zōē aïōnios* emphasizes the concept of the Age to Come.

“Now it is well known that in discussions of the New Testament use of *zōē aïōnios* it is generally assumed that the adjective *[aïōnios]* refers to the “Age to Come” and that the phrase means “the life of the Age to Come,” explicable in terms of the Jewish doctrine of the Two Ages. ...It would appear therefore to be legitimate and right to interpret *zōē aïōnios* to mean “life of the Age to Come.” To do so, however, does not mean that the idea of duration is absent. The future Age is brought in and established by God’s action, and in so far as it is his age it is enduring and eternal: those who experience it share in “life” which is infinitely prolonged. In other words, *zōē aïōnios* in the New Testament contains a temporal reference but stresses the qualitative reference.” (David Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings*, pp. 186-188.)

In light of the fact that *zōē aïōnios* refers to the life of the Age to Come, and those who attain that Age then live forever, there are some verses, such as John 3:16, where the phrase might legitimately be translated expansively as, “everlasting life in the Age to
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come.” Furthermore, as Hill pointed out, although *aiōnios* generally emphasizes the Age to Come, it does have a temporal, durative meaning, and there are some verses where that temporal meaning is emphasized. In those places translating it “everlasting” is more appropriate than translating it “Age to Come.” Mark 10:30 and Luke 18:30 are good examples of verses when *zōē aiōnios* is better translated “everlasting life” than “life in the Age to come.”

The difficulty in properly understanding the phrase *zōē aiōnios* is exacerbated by the fact Christian commentators and lexicographers tend to see the definition of words in light of what they believe is true, and have often oversimplified the definitions they put in their study helps. This can make it difficult to accurately study the subject, particularly if one’s research library is very limited. For example, The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament, by Spiros Zodhiates, gives the following definitions for *aiōnios*: “eternal, perpetual, belonging to the *aiōn*, to time in its duration, constant, abiding.” Similarly, Thayer’s Lexicon defines it as “without beginning, without end.” While those definitions can be correct in the sense that *aiōnios* can refer to something that is everlasting, that is not the only definition of the word, and is not even the best definition to apply to many verses. It would help people understand the Bible if the scholars who write the lexicons and other resource books would give the full meaning of words used in the Bible, and not just part of the meaning.

The adjective *aiōnios* is derived from the word *aiōn*, “age,” and gets much of its meaning from it, so if we are going to understand *aiōnios* it is important that we understand the meaning of *aiōn*. The Liddell and Scott Greek-English Lexicon shows that *aiōn*, “age,” from which the adjective *aiōnios* is derived, does not always mean an “everlasting age.” It gives the following four definitions for *aiōn*: 1. One’s lifetime, life. 2. An age, generation. 3. A long space of time, an age, of old, for ages, for ever. 4. A definite space of time, an era, epoch, age, period; ‘This present world’ (New Testament).” (H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, “*aiōn*.”)

Once we understand that *aiōn* can refer to different durations of time, we can see why in the Septuagint it is the word that is most often chosen to translate the Hebrew word “*olam*.” In fact, understanding *olam* can help us understand *aiōn*. Like *aiōn*, *olam* does not always mean “forever.” The Hebrew word *olam* (#5769 עולם), generally refers to a long period of time or an indefinite period of time. It occurs over 400 times in the Hebrew Old Testament and exactly what it means, or how long a period of time it refers to, must be determined from the context and from the scope of Scripture.

*Olam* can mean a long time with no specific end in sight. C. H. Dodd correctly and succinctly states: “The word עולם [*olam*; #5769], with *aiōn* [#165 *aiōn*] as its equivalent, denotes properly a period of time of which the beginning or the end are both out of sight, an indefinitely long, rather than strictly an infinite period.” (C. H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, p. 144)

For example, in 2 Chronicles 33:7 God says He would put His name in the Temple in Jerusalem “forever” (*olam*) but we know that in the Eternal City that comes from heaven there will not even be a temple (Rev. 21:22). At the time it was written that the Temple would last “forever,” the statement was accurate because there was no specific end in sight for the temple even though at some point the Temple would be no more. Translating *olam* and *aiōn* is very difficult, because English really does not have any word that is equivalent to them. The English word “forever,” is not a good
translation, because “forever” has no end, whereas *olam* and *aiōn* can come to an end—the end is just out of sight, a long time away. There does not seem to be a very good English word for *olam*, so “forever” gets used most of the time, even though it is misleading. Some translations might be: “age-abiding,” “age-long,” “for ages,” “for eons,” etc. Some other times *olam* refers to a long period of time include Psalm 143:3 and Lamentations 3:6, referring to people who have been dead a long time.

*Olam* can also refer to a long period of time that is now over. For example, Isaiah 63:9 refers to God carrying Israel “in the day of old” (*olam*). It would be wrong to translate *olam* as “forever” in that verse, because then the verse would not be accurate. (Other verses that have that meaning for *olam* include Deut. 32:7; Isa. 44:7; 63:11; Amos 9:11; Micah 5:1; 7:14; Mal. 3:4).

*Olam* can be used to define a specific period of time that does not have a definite end. For example, a human life. According to the Law, a person who volunteered to be a bondslave would be a slave “forever” (*olam*), meaning the life of the person, however long that ended up being (Deut. 15:17; cp. Exod. 21:6; 1 Sam. 1:22; 27:12; Job 40:28).

*Olam* can be used to define things that will seem to last indefinitely, and some, like God, will indeed last “forever.” God is forever (Gen. 21:33; Isa. 40:28). [For a more complete definition with more examples, see Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon].

Seeing the different periods of time that *olam* can refer to, and realizing that it was translated by the word *aiōn*, shows us that the word *aiōn* (from which we get our English word, “aeon” or “eon”), can refer to different durations of time—something that can be easily seen in both the Bible and Greek literature. If we count the uses of *aiōn* in both the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) and the Greek New Testament, it occurs more than 750 times. In Exodus 21:6 it refers to the duration of someone’s life. In Exodus 40:15 it refers to the priesthood of Aaron, which, while lasting a long time, is not “forever.” In Leviticus 25:46 it refers to the time a slave serves, which would be for their lifetime at the longest, certainly not “forever.” In Joshua 4:7 it refers to a heap of stones that were to be a memorial but are gone today and therefore not “forever.” In 1 Samuel 1:22 it refers to the term of Samuel’s service at the Tabernacle.

We also need to be aware that the word *aiōn* refers to more than just a period of time itself, i.e., a passage of years. One reason that *aiōn* is sometimes translated “world” in many versions of the New Testament is because the meaning of *aiōn* often included both the period of time itself and the characteristics of that period (cp. the KJV in Matt. 12:32; Mark 4:19; Luke 16:8; John 9:32; Acts 15:18; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 2:6; 2 Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 6:12). The Greek-English Lexicon by Arndt and Gingrich lists “world” as one of the meanings of *aiōn*, while Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon says *aiōn* is used figuratively, with “age” meaning “world” by the figure of speech “metonymy of the container for the contained…i.e., the aggregate of things contained in time.”

A helpful way of thinking of “age” as referring to the characteristics of the age would be to think of a restaurant trying to create a specific “atmosphere.” A Mexican restaurant might be in downtown Indianapolis, IN, but the owners want you to feel as if you are in Mexico when you go inside. They create an “atmosphere” by having characteristics of the country designed into the restaurant, including architecture, colors, and decorations. Thus “atmosphere,” which normally refers to the mass of air surrounding the earth, also refers to the characteristics and influences in the immediate
environment. In a similar way, *aiōn*, age, not only refer to the period of time, but also to the characteristics of the age. Sometimes the characteristics of the age are specifically spelled out, such as when the Bible speaks of the “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). Richard Trench writes about *aiōn*, age, referring to the characteristics of the age, that the word *aiōn* includes:

All that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world, which it may be impossible to seize and accurately define, but which constitute a most real and effective power, being the moral, or immoral, atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale, again inevitably to exhale—all this is included in *aiōn*…  (Richard Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, p. 217, 218.)

Scholars acknowledge that by the time between the Old and New Testaments, there was rabbinic teaching that there were at least two ages: the present evil age and a glorious Age to Come that was associated with the advent of the Messiah. Joachim Guhrt writes in his article on “time” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*:

...in the rabbinic Judaism at the turn of the era and in the apocalyptic of the 1st century AD…one finds a quite new use of *olam* [the Hebrew word usually translated “age” or “everlasting”] which exhibits a spatial significance as well as a temporal one. …Old Testament statements concerning primal and final time (Isa. 24-27; Joel 2) are here systematized into a doctrine of the two worlds (aeons).... From the Book of Daniel onwards, ‘eternal life’ is an expression of the longed-for eschatological blessings of salvation, life in the Age to come (cf. Dan. 12:2).


It is important to notice Guhrt referenced Daniel 12:2. The NIV is a typical translation.

Daniel 12:2 (NIV)

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

The phrase the NIV translates as “everlasting life” is the Greek phrase *zōē aiōnios* in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew text that was made about 250 BC. As Guhrt pointed out, the rabbis recognized that it did not so much refer to a duration of time as an independent age, i.e., the Messianic Age they were expecting. Thought of in those terms, a possible translation of Daniel 12:2 from the Septuagint could be: “And the multitude of those sleeping in the dust of the earth will awake, some to life in the Age to come, and some to shame; to contempt in the Age to Come.” In his article on “Age, Ages,” G. E. Ladd writes:

Theologically the most important usage of *aiōn* in the NT is that which designates two distinct periods of time: this age and the age to come.
This age will come to its end with the parousia [coming] of Christ (Matt. 24:3). The age to come is the age of eternal life (Mark 10:30), when the righteous will ‘shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father’ (Matt. 13:43). Mark 10:24, 30 equate the age to come with both eternal life and the Kingdom of God; and in Matt. 25:34, 46, the righteous inherit the Kingdom of God and enter into eternal life when the Son of man comes in his glory (Matt. 25:31) at the end of this age (Matt. 25:41). (Walter Elwell, editor, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, “Age, Ages”* pp. 19, 20.)

Like the noun *aiōn*, the adjective *aiōnios* can refer to a period of time and also to the characteristics or qualities of that period. As was stated above, while we can understand why Christian lexicographers see *aiōnios* in light of their theology and define it in terms of “eternal” or “everlasting,” that is not the full meaning of the word. Alan Richardson writes:

The fact is that in the New Testament, *zōē* or more fully *zōē aiōnios* is an eschatological conception [connected with the future times]; it is one of the characteristic marks of the Age to Come, like glory, light, etc. In the contemporary rabbinic conception, The Age to Come…as distinct this age, was to be characterized by *zōē*, that is *zōē aiōnios*, the life of the (coming) age. Thus, what appears in the English versions as ‘eternal life’ or ‘life everlasting’ really means ‘the life of the Age to Come.’ The phrase *zōē aiōnios* need not necessarily imply ever-lasting life (e.g., Enoch 10:10), but the usual meaning is life after death indefinitely prolonged in the World to Come (Dan. 12:12…). Throughout the NT, *zōē aiōnios* means ‘the life of the World to Come.’ (Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 73, 74.)

Nigel Turner also wrote that the Greek words *aiōn* and *aiōnios* referred not just to a duration of time, but specifically to an “age,” and points out that “eternal life” is an imprecise translation of *zōē aiōnios*.

But a peculiar meaning appears in Jewish and Christian Greek, and *aiōn* becomes one of the seven ‘ages’ or ‘dispensations’ which make up the world’s history according to some contemporary Jewish thought. …Sometimes the number of dispensations was simplified to two: ‘this *aiōn*’ and ‘the *aiōn* to come,’…In the NT, *aiōn* indicates not only this present period in which we live, but also a coming age of ‘eternal’ life which we strive to be worthy to obtain (Matt. 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 16:8; 18:30; 20:35). The life of the Coming Age is often described as ‘eternal’ life, but it must not be understood thereby that time and eternity are set in contrast, as if time was a quality of the present Age and ‘eternity’ was a quality of the future Age…. It would be…misleading to
translate the *aiōn* as ‘eternity,’ for the *aiōn* is still a period of time. It is no less imprecise to render ‘*aiōnios* life’ as ‘eternal life.’

If the noun *aiōn*, then, acquired new significance in biblical Greek, so did the adjective, *aiōnios*. …it changed its meaning in Jewish and Biblical circles. …The dispensation intended in this special sense was that of the future, the Kingdom of Christ, the reign of the Messiah. *Aiōnios* has a new meaning, and the ‘*aiōnios* Gospel’ is not therefore in Christian language the ‘everlasting Gospel.’ …it is the Gospel of, or concerning, the Kingdom-age (Rev. 14:6). …We read more than forty times of ‘*aiōnios* life,’ which is the life to come…. The expression stands primarily for the quality of life. We read of habitations belonging to the Messianic Age—*aiōnios* habitations (Luke 16:9; 2 Cor. 5:1). …The expression *aiōnios* life appears in the OT, both in the LXX and Theodotion’s version of Daniel (12:2), and later Jews continued the idea in the rabbinic phrase, ‘life of the Coming *olam*.’ …To denote the characteristic of everlastingness, there is a separate adjective in Christian Greek, *aidios*….” (Nigel Turner, *Christian Words*, pp. 459-457)

Turner makes a good point when he says there is another Greek word that can mean “everlasting” or “eternal” in a temporal sense, *aidios*, and it is used of God’s power in Romans 1:20. J. Louw and E. Nida, in the *Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, write:

> The most frequent use of *aiōnios* in the NT is with *zōē*, “life….” In combination with *zōē* there is evidently not only a temporal element, but also a qualitative distinction. …If one translates “eternal life” as simply “never dying,” there may be serious misunderstandings….” (J. Louw and E. Nida, *Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains, aiōnios*.)

We agree wholeheartedly with the conclusion of Louw and Nida that simply translating *zōē aiōnios* as “eternal life” can cause “serious misunderstandings,” and one of them, as we stated above, was that based on that translation, some people conclude that when a person believes, his “eternal life” starts right then instead of at the resurrection and start of the Age to Come. William Barclay writes that if we just think of *aiōnios* as “eternal” life we oversimplify what it means.

> Simply to take the word, *aiōnios*, when it refers to blessings and punishment, to mean *lasting for ever* is to oversimplify, and indeed to misunderstand, the word altogether. It means far more than that. (William Barclay, *New Testament Words*, pp. 37.)

The Greek word *aiōnios* is an adjective modifying the noun *zōē*, so a very literal translation of the Greek would be “Age Life,” and we considered using that translation in the REV. Nevertheless, we felt that most Christians would only be confused by “Age Life,” and competent scholars such as Bruce show that the meaning of the phrase is
indeed “Life in the Age to come,” so we felt it best to use that translation. Saved people do not have “everlasting life” now, as if they could not die, but rather they are promised “Age Life,” that is, life in the wonderful Messianic Age to Come.

Edward Fudge devotes an entire chapter of his book, *The Fire that Consumes*, to the word *aiōnios*. He points out that there is an impressive list of scholars who weigh in on the meaning of *aiōnios*, and their opinions vary from *aiōnios* always referring to a duration of time and never the quality of an age; to it always referring in a qualitative sense to an age, and never to duration of time; to it having both meanings. Thus he points out, “How the Bible uses a word is far more crucial for understanding a passage of Scripture than all the historians of any language.” (Edward Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, p. 39.) We have already seen many verses that refer to the Age to come, and have seen that verses such as Mark 10:30 show that everlasting life is a quality of the Age to come, not this age. Other verses confirm this. John 6:40 connects *zōē aiōnios* with the resurrection, not with the time someone believes in Jesus Christ, and so does John 6:54. In Titus 1:2, Paul refers to having “hope” of *zōē aiōnios*, but Romans 8:24 makes it clear that no one hopes for something he already has. Titus 1:2 is exactly correct, what we have now is hope for life in the Age to come, a hope that is based upon the promises of God and the mercy of Jesus Christ (Jude 21).

In closing, we have seen that, of the two ages, the present evil age and the Age to come, *zōē aiōnios* refers to the Age to come. We have also seen that there is a temporal meaning to *aiōnios*, and it is certainly true that people who have life in the Age to come will live forever. Those who are resurrected to “life in the Age” never die again. In that light, most places that the REV has “life in the Age to come,” we could have put, “everlasting life in the Age to come” but that conflation was thought too much for most contexts. Most people should quickly come to know that “life in the Age to come,” will last forever.
Appendix 3. Christ’s Future Kingdom On Earth.

Jesus made a very plain and simple statement in Matthew 5:5: “The meek will inherit the earth.” In point of fact, Jesus did not even make up that statement, but he quoted Psalm 37:11. Many of the Jews of Jesus’ time had lost sight of the hope that Israel would be restored on earth, and the situation is the same today. The simple meaning of Matthew 5:5 has been lost due to the traditional teaching that saved people live in heaven forever after they die. Actually, what the Bible teaches is that Jesus Christ will come down from heaven to the earth, fight and win the Battle of Armageddon, and set up his kingdom on earth, which will fill the whole earth (Dan. 2:35, 44; Rev. 19:11-21). He will set up his palace in the newly rebuilt Jerusalem, and for 1,000 years reign over all the earth. All those people who have been saved will be there by being raised from the dead. Many scholars refer to this 1,000 year kingdom as the “Millennial Kingdom.” It is the “Kingdom” that Jesus spoke about so often. After the 1,000 years are over there will be a great war (Rev. 20:7-10). Then there will be the second resurrection, and after that the Everlasting City will come from heaven to earth, in which the saved will live forever (Rev. 21:1-4).

Matthew 5:5 speaks of the “meek,” who are the people who have not been self-willed or selfish, but instead have believed and obeyed God and thus gotten saved. Then it says those meek will “inherit the earth,” meaning they will get to live on earth. That makes perfect sense because God’s original plan was that mankind would live on the earth. He created Adam and Eve, put them on earth in Eden, and told them to multiply. His intent was that mankind would fill the earth. The Fall ruined the earth, but it did not change God’s plan, which will be fulfilled in the future when Jesus comes down from heaven and sets up his kingdom on earth. After Jesus conquers the earth there will be the Resurrection of the Righteous, when righteous people like Abraham, Moses, David, Miriam, Deborah, and Ruth, will get up from the dead, and they will be a large part of the people who then populate the earth.

When Jesus said, “The meek will inherit the earth,” he was not teaching new doctrine. He was confirming and reestablishing for his day and time the clear teaching of the Old Testament that had been lost. The Old Testament said that God will destroy the wicked, but the righteous will inherit the earth.

- **Psalm 37:9–11 (abridged):** For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land. A little while, and the wicked will be no more...But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.
- **Isaiah 57:13:** The man who makes me his refuge will inherit the land.
- **Ezekiel 37:12 (abridged):** “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel.”
- **Revelation 5:9, 10:** “And they sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”
These verses are a small sampling from among the many verses in the Bible that indicate the everlasting home of Israel will be the earth. The Bible teaches us that our everlasting future is on earth in many different ways. Some verses specifically speak about being on earth, such as Psalm 37:9, 11, 29. Others are wishes for the future, such as the psalmist’s cry, “May sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked be no more” (Ps. 104:35). Some verses mention the attributes of the future earth, such as Isaiah 41:18, which speaks of places that are now deserts being places with springs and pools of water. Others speak specifically of the Kingdom on earth, such as Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. In the dream, the rock that smashed all the other kingdoms will “fill the whole earth” (Dan. 2:35). Others are prophecies of the future that speak of things such as each person having his own vine and fig tree and of swords being made into plows, which of course then till the earth (Mic. 4:3, 4). All these prophecies are visions and prophecies of the earth, not of “heaven.” In contrast to these clear prophecies about a future life on earth, there are no prophecies about life in heaven in the Bible, and the reason for that is simple and profound: we will not spend eternity in heaven, we will be on earth.

God blessed Abraham by promising him that his descendants would get the land forever. In fact, the reason that Israel is commonly called “the promised land” is that God “promised” it to Abraham and his descendants (cp. Gen. 13:15; 15:18; 17:18). God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), so one day His promises must be fulfilled. Since Abraham is dead, the only way that God’s promise to him and his descendants can be fulfilled is that God will give the Promised Land to them after they are resurrected. There are many other verses stating that, in the future, God’s people will be gathered to the land of Israel. These include Isaiah 11:10–16; Jeremiah 23:3–8; 30:3; 31:8–11; 33:7; Ezekiel 28:25; 37:15–28, and Hosea 1:10,11. Resurrected believers will again inhabit the land. At that time, what both the Psalmist and Christ said will be fulfilled: “The meek will inherit the earth.”

Another reason to believe that everlasting life will be on earth is that all the prophecies relating to the activities of Israel in the future are tied specifically to the earth. These include:

- The wolf lying down with the lamb and the lion eating grass like cattle (Isa. 11:6–9; 65:25).
- The land healed and the deserts blooming (Isa. 32:15; 35:1, 2, 7; 51:3).
- Israel becoming the glory of the earth (Isa. 60).
- The country of Israel being divided among the 12 tribes (Ezek. 47:13–48:29).
- The Messiah getting his own land area (Ezek. 45:7; 48:21, 22).
- A new temple being built in Jerusalem (Ezek. 40–44).
- A river flowing out of the temple and healing the land (Ezek. 47:8–10).
- The law going forth from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:1–3; Mic. 4:1, 2).
- People living in secure homes (Isa. 32:18).
- Each family having its own vine and fig tree (Mic. 4:4).

Not only is the earth going to be the home of believers, it is going to be their home forever. Psalm 37:29: “The righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever.” Since the earth is going to be restored to its Paradise state, and be the home of so many people, it is natural for people to think that eventually the Millennial Kingdom of Christ
will, like this earth, degenerate to being a polluted and politically corrupt place with poverty, hunger, and misery. It will not. Jesus will rule the earth with a “rod of iron” to make sure that does not happen (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15; 20:4, 5 KJV). Some of the clear promises about the Kingdom on earth are:

- There will be justice on earth (Isa. 2:4; 9:6,7; 11:1–5; 32:1,2,5,16,17; 51:5; Jer. 23:5,6; 33:15). “He [The Messiah] will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever” (Isa. 9:7).
- There will be no war (Isa. 2:4; 9:4–7; 60:18; Hos. 2:18; Mic. 4:3, 4; Zech. 9:9, 10). In Christ’s Kingdom on earth, “nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”
- The resurrected believers and Christians (who were in the Rapture) will enjoy perfect health (Isa. 29:18; 32:3,4; 33:24; 35:5,6; 57:19; Jer. 33:6; Mal. 4:2). “No one living in Zion will say, ‘I am ill’” (Isa. 33:24).
- Mankind will live safely on the earth (Isa. 11:6–9; 32:18; 54:14–17; 60:11,17,18; 65:17–25; Jer. 23:4; 30:10; 33:6; Ezek. 28:26; 34:25–31; Mic. 5:4,5; Zeph. 3:13–17). “They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD (Isa. 11:9).
- There will be no hunger because the land will be healed (Isa. 25:6; 30:23–26; 32:15; 35:1-7; 41:18–20; 44:3; 51:3; Jer. 31:5,11–14; Ezek. 47:1-12; Hos. 2:21,22; Joel 2:18-26; Amos 9:13). “Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs” (Isa. 35:6, 7).
- Theological arguments and bickering will come to an end. The house of Israel will know God (Isa. 29:23, 24; Jer. 31:33, 34; Ezek. 11:18–20), and Christians will “know fully” (1 Cor. 13:12). “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14).
- The people will be holy and blessed, and there will be joy (Isa. 4:2–5; 35:10; 51:3; 60:1–22; 61:4–11; 62:1–12; 65:17–25; Jer. 30:18,19; 31:4,12–14). “The ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away” (Isa. 51:11).
- People from other nations will come to Jerusalem to worship, and foreigners will be allowed to sacrifice at the Temple (Isa. 2:2,3; 14:1; 19:18–25; 56:4–8; 60:3,9,14; 66:21; Zech. 2:11; 8:20–23; 14:16). “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Isa. 56:7).

Still more evidence that the Kingdom will be on earth is that the jobs that are described in the Kingdom are jobs that we are familiar with on earth. The Bible specifically mentions many jobs in Christ’s world-kingdom, some having more honor, some having less. These include:

- builders (Isa. 54:12, 60:10, 61:4; Jer. 30:18; Ezek. 36:10, 33; Amos 9:14).
- farmers (Isa. 30:23 and 24, 32:20, 61:5, 62:9; Ezek. 36:9 and 34, 48:19; Amos 9:13).
- herdsmen (Isa. 30:23 and 24, 60:6 and 7, 61:5; Jer. 31:12).
• vinedressers and vintners (Isa. 25:6, 62:8; Jer. 31:5; Amos 9:13).
• metalworkers (Isa. 2:4, 60:17; Mic. 4:3).
• fishermen (Ezek. 47:10).
• landscapers (Isa. 60:13).
• servants (Isa. 14:2).
• cleanup duties and gravediggers (Isa. 9:5; Ezek. 39:14, 15). [There will be death in the Millennial Kingdom because there will be “natural people” there who survived the Tribulation, and whom Christ allowed into the Kingdom at the Sheep and Goat Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46; Isa. 65:20)].

The Bible does not name every job in the future kingdom of Christ. Enough are named to show us that the kingdom will be similar in diversity and needs to earthly kingdoms and nations of today. For more information about the Millennial Kingdom of Christ on Earth and the Everlasting Kingdom of Revelation 21 (which has streets of gold), see John Schoenheit, The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul. For more on rewards in the Kingdom, see commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:10.
Appendix 4. The Dead are Dead

The Bible teaches that when a person dies, he is totally without life, dead in every way and will not be alive until he is raised from the dead at the Rapture or a resurrection. This is a huge topic, and many books have been written about it. This appendix is only to cover some of the basic points and help explain some New Testament Scriptures that are germane to the subject. The teaching of the Bible is that when a person dies he is dead in every way: he has no life on earth, in heaven, or in Gehenna. At some point in the future, God will raise the dead, and this will occur at the Rapture or one of the resurrections, depending on when they lived and whether or not they were saved, and a person’s judgment before God will occur at that time.

Some of the clear Scriptures about death and resurrection

**Job 7:21** (ESV): Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity? For now I shall lie in the earth; you will seek me, but I shall not be.

**Job 10:20-22** (ESV): Are not my days few? Then cease, and leave me alone, that I may find a little cheer before I go—and I shall not return—to the land of darkness and deep shadow, the land of gloom like thick darkness, like deep shadow without any order, where light is as thick darkness.

**Job 14:12** (ESV): so a man lies down and rises not again; till the heavens are no more he will not awake or be roused out of his sleep.

**Psalm 6:5** (ESV): For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who will give you praise?

**Psalm 30:9** (ESV): “What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?

**Psalm 49:12** Man in his pomp will not remain; he is like the beasts that perish.

**Psalm 49:15** (ESV): But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. Selah

**Psalm 88:11, 12** (ESV): Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, or your faithfulness in Abaddon? Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

**Psalm 115:17** (ESV): The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any who go down into silence.

**Ecclesiastes 9:4-6** (ESV): But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.

**Ecclesiastes 9:10** (ESV): Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

**Isaiah 26:19** Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.

**Isaiah 38:18** (ESV): For Sheol does not thank you; death does not praise you; those who go down to the pit do not hope for your faithfulness.
Ezekiel 37:12 (ESV): Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel.

Daniel 12:2 (ESV): And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Daniel 12:13 (ESV): But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.”

John 5:28, 29 (ESV): 28 Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice 29 and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Death is the absence of life

The death referred to in 1 Corinthians 15:26 is death, the absence of life, not just the death of the body. In the Garden of Eden, God said to Adam that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would “die” (Gen. 2:17). God said “die,” not “live forever in a good place (“heaven”) or a bad place” (i.e., “hell”). When people die, they are “dead,” and by definition, death is the absence of life. When it comes to things that we cannot know, such as what happens when a person dies, we must trust that God has given us the answers in His Word. It is important to realize that because there are some people who assert that “death” means “separation,” but that is not biblically correct. First, it is wrong to assert that the words for “death” in Hebrew or Greek just refer to separation. They refer to death. Of course there is an aspect of separation to death because when a person “dies,” he is indeed “separated” from God and everything else. But he is not alive and somehow separated, he is dead and therefore separated. The Bible uses the same Hebrew and Greek words for the “death” of humans as for the death of animals and plants. There is no special word for the “death” of people that means “separation,” and therefore no actual basis for saying that the word “death” means “separation” when referring to a person but actual “death” when referring to an animal. There is a reason God uses the same words for the death of a human and the death of animals—death is the same for all of them, and “death” is the total absence of life.

In the Garden of Eden, the Devil contradicted God. God told Adam that if he ate of the tree he would “surely die” (Gen. 2:17), but the Devil said that he would “not surely die” (Gen. 3:4). That same basic lie about death has continued down through the ages and still today is a very common belief that people do not really die. Today many people believe that when a person “dies,” only his body dies but his soul or spirit lives on. If we take the time to study the idea that people live on after they die, we can see why the Devil and demons promulgate it and contradict God’s Word. One reason the Devil promotes the teaching that a person does not really “die” (lose all life) is that it waters down the value of living. If we are actually alive but just in another form after we “die,” then dying is not that bad after all. But death is that bad! There is nothing more precious than life, and the Devil knows that and wants us to treat this life lightly and give it up cheaply. The Bible says death is an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26). It is hard to see how death could be an enemy if it sent us to a better place and put us with God, Jesus, and those who have gone before us.

Another reason the Devil promotes that people are actually alive as a soul or spirit after they die is that if they are alive they can speak to us. The Devil and his demons do a
very good job of impersonating dead people in séances, and use that and similar strategies to feed untrue and even harmful information to people. There are a lot of people who knowingly or unknowingly disobey God’s command in Deuteronomy 18:11 and try to contact the dead even though it is an abomination to God. Since dead people are dead, it is only demons impersonating the dead that ever answer those who are seeking advice from dead friends or relatives. In fact, even if the dead were alive, they would never contact the living in disobedience to God’s command.

One way the Devil has been successful fooling people into believing the dead are actually alive is by promoting the belief in an “immortal soul.” According to the teaching on the “immortal soul,” the soul of a person is immortal and lives on after the person dies. The soul is not immortal, and the phrase “immortal soul” does not appear in the Bible—only in Christian literature. The Bible is very clear that the soul can die and be destroyed (Matt. 10:28).

The Bible has many verses that show that when a person dies he is dead in every sense of the word. Living people can think, but dead people “know nothing” (Ecc. 9:5; Ps. 146:4). In fact “Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished” (Ecc. 9:6). Thus, death is referred to as “the land of oblivion” (Ps. 88:12). Living people have hope, while dead people know nothing and have no hope. That is why the Bible says “a living dog is better than a dead lion” (Ecc. 9:4). In fact, in death, “there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom” (Ecc. 9:10; cp. Ps. 6:5). There is no profit in the death of a believer, because when he dies, he will no longer be able to praise God or testify about Him (Psalm 30:9; 88:10; 115:17; Isa. 38:18). The dead person has no consciousness and the body decays and disappears, so Job correctly said that when he died, “I shall lie in the earth; you [God] will seek me, but I shall not be” (Job 7:21). People die just as animals do (Ps. 49:12-14), but God promises that people will be raised from the dead. In fact, the very reason they must be raised from the dead is because they are dead, not alive. If they were alive, why have a resurrection?

Death is like “sleep”

Falling asleep or being asleep was a common biblical euphemism and metaphor for death. The Bible compares death to sleep many times, because just like in sleep, the dead person is not aware of the passage of time or what is happening around him. Also, just like sleep has a time when the person wakes up, dead people will be awakened at the resurrection and face their Judgment Day (cp. Job. 14:12; Ps. 13:3; John 11:11-14; Acts 13:36).

Death is so horrible that we can understand why people use the euphemism and say “asleep” rather than “dead.” Although death is called “sleep,” the metaphor, like all metaphors, is imperfect. There are similarities, which is why “sleep” is used for death, but there are also big differences. We will examine the similarities first.

• Both death and sleep are overpowering forces. We cannot prevent our death, and we cannot help falling asleep when we are tired. Even if we try to force ourselves to stay awake, eventually sleep will overpower us.
• There is no awareness of time in either death or sleep. Time passes and we do not know it.
• No productive work can be done when we are dead or asleep.
• In both death and sleep there is a continuity of the person. We know that when a person falls asleep, he is the same person when he wakes up. The process of sleep did not change him into someone else. Similarly, the person who dies and is resurrected is the same person. At the resurrection people will remember what they did in this life, and thus will understand why they are receiving the reward or punishment they are getting. Jesus Christ is our best example of someone having continuity of being after his resurrection. Jesus was the same person after his resurrection as he was before it, he just had a different body and more capabilities.

• Both death and sleep come to an end. Our death ends when we are resurrected, just as our sleep ends when we wake up.

Now that we have seen the similarities between sleep and death that were the reason death was called “sleep,” we must keep in mind that the metaphor is not totally accurate: death is not sleep. In sleep, the person’s bodily functions continue, and he will wake up on his own when his body is rested. In death, the body, soul, and spirit are all dead. The person cannot wake up on his own but must await the resurrection power of God.

Sometimes people use the phrase “soul sleep.” That was a term that was popularized by John Calvin (1509-1564), who used it in a pejorative way, criticizing the belief. Calvin believed that the soul lived on after a person died. Due to the pejorative nature of the term “soul sleep,” people who believed the soul ceased to exist when the body died generally referred to their belief in other ways, including “materialism,” “conditional immortality,” and since the 1970’s, “Christian mortalism.” Some of the “greats” of Christianity believed the soul did not live on after a person died, including William Tyndale, John Wycliffe, and Martin Luther.

**Why a resurrection?**

If people are really dead, as the Bible says, then the way to get them up from the dead is a resurrection. That is why 1 Corinthians 15:18 says that if there is no resurrection, the people have “perished.” Note that the Bible does not say that if there is no resurrection the person’s “body” has perished. No, it says the person has “perished.” Why? Because the person would stay dead forever. Many verses in the Bible speak of the resurrections, when all the dead people will be given life again and raised from the ground. Isaiah 26:19 speaks of the earth giving birth to her dead. Daniel 12:1 and 2 speak of the dead people who are now sleeping in the dust of the earth awakening to the judgment. Revelation 20:5 and 6 speak of the first resurrection, and those who did not get to be in it. There is not one single verse about the resurrection that says “bodies” will get up, or “bodies” will join with “souls,” as of the souls were still alive. All the verses speak of “people” getting up. All through the Bible dead people are said to be dead, not alive, and that is why they will have to be in the resurrection.

When people die, the actual people, not merely their bodies, die. Similarly, at the resurrection, the actual people, not just the person’s physical body, comes to life. Psalm 49:15 says that God will redeem people, not just bodies, from the grave. Jesus taught that the people in the grave would hear his voice and get up (John 5:28, 29). It is “people,” not just “bodies,” who are given life and raised up out of the graves (Ezek. 37:9-14).

**Why people think the dead are alive**
One of the reasons many Christians do not believe that the dead are actually dead is that sometimes dead people “appear” to people. We call these encounters “apparitions” or “ghosts,” and while it might be possible for God to make a dead person appear, this seems very unlikely because God was the One who forbade us to speak to the dead. Demons can and do impersonate the dead to further the Devil’s teaching that dead people are actually alive. Demons can affect the environment and cause noise or movement, cold or hot spots, or “hauntings,” and in basically the same way they can cause “ghosts” of different clarity to appear, including impersonations of dead people. Examples of this in the Bible include Job 4:15 and 1 Samuel 28:13-19 (what appeared to the medium at Endor was not Samuel, but a demon. It cannot be that a medium can make a godly man come from the dead and speak to the living in disobedience to God. The demon is called “Samuel” because it impersonated him so well).

Another reason people believe that the soul or spirit goes on living after a person dies is because of what is referred to as “near death” experiences. In these experiences, people who have clinically “died,” or been close to death, have seen what they report as the afterlife. There are a number of explanations why this could happen, and near-death visions can come from God, demons, or our own minds.

God can and does raise the dead, and although there is no record of a “near death” experience in the Bible, it is possible that a person would die and God both raise him from the dead and give him a vision of part of our glorious future life. God has given people visions of the life to come. Abraham, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Paul, and John, are some of the people who were given extraordinary information or visions about the future life. Thus it is quite possible that some of the people who have had “near death experiences” have had God-given visions of the next life to help them and others overcome their fear of dying and encourage them concerning the Hope. The mistake these people make is that they assume they would go to this future place right away. But the vision of God never promises that. The vision John had of the future that he wrote in the book of Revelation seemed very real to him, and we can imagine that someone seeing that might think that if he died he would be part of it right at that time, but it has been 2000 years and it has not happened yet.

Another reason people could have “near death” experiences is due to demonic visions. Demons can give people hallucinations and visions, and it makes perfect sense that they would do that as part of their overall agenda to promote that people are not actually dead when they die. Also, part of the Devil’s agenda is to make God seem cruel and thus cause people to misunderstand God, or be afraid of Him, or even ignore the things of God altogether. Some of the more terrifying visions of “hell” that some people claim to have had clearly contradict the loving nature of God, and the Bible only describes Gehenna as a lake of fire into which the unsaved are thrown and then burn up, not as a multi-level torture chamber.

Still another reason some people have “near death” experiences is simply due to how the mind works. We are all familiar with the “dream-like” state that can occur to a person just before he falls asleep or just when he is waking up, at which time the mind can blend thoughts and dreams, and thought-images can seem very real and yet not be. Most people have ideas about the next life that have been implanted in their minds from their culture or religion, and it is reasonable that many times these would surface if the body was close to death or the mind thought death was imminent. We have instruments
that can measure the activity of life in a person, the electricity the body produces, brain wave activity, etc., but no scientist would say that our instruments are sensitive enough to pick up the exact moment of death—they are not that sensitive. So a third cause of “near death” experiences is simply the mind imagining those things at a time when it is not fully capable of separating fact from fiction, imagination from reality.

It is also important to note that not one person in the Bible who was raised from the dead said anything about the afterlife. This includes people who had been dead for hours or days such as the Shunammite woman’s son (2 Kings 4:35), the man from Nain (Luke 7:15), the synagogue leader’s daughter (Mark 5:42), and Lazarus, who had been dead four days (John 11:39, 44). If they experienced anything good or bad after they died, surely they would have talked about it. The fact that they did not, and no one even asked them, is good biblical evidence that nothing happens in death—no thoughts or experiences—there is just the absence of life.

The Bible is full of examples of people, like Eve, who trusted what they thought and felt more than God’s Word, with disastrous results. God has made it clear in His Word that when a human dies, he is dead. We dare not abandon the clear teaching of Scripture, especially when the Devil has such a clear agenda to undermine it, because of what we see in the physical world. There are godly explanations for what we see, including near death experiences.

There are verses in the New Testament that are important to the study of the state of the dead that are not covered in this appendix. For more information look those verses up in the body of the commentary. For more information on the dead being dead and not alive in any form, see, Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, *Is There Death After Life*. For information on people being annihilated in hell and not burning forever, see the commentary on Revelation 20:10.
Appendix 5. Annihilation in the Lake of Fire

Through the years many people have had difficulty believing that God would torture people eternally, and for a number of important reasons. For one thing, it is not logical that someone could commit sin in one short lifetime that would be justly recompensed by being tormented forever. How can that be just, righteous, or loving? Furthermore, it makes the saved people seem very cold-hearted. Can it really be that the saved are rejoicing forever while hearing the screams of people being tortured forever? Remember, in Jesus’ teaching in Luke 16:24 the rich man in torment could actually converse with Abraham. And frankly, even if the saved could not hear the cries of the damned, would that make such a big difference? Civilized people will not even torture their worst enemies here on earth, does that change when the saved are perfected? The teaching that unsaved people are tormented forever contradicts many clear and simple scriptures.

Revelation 20:10 contains the figure of speech hyperbole (pronounced hī-per'-bō-lee), an exaggeration or overstatement of the truth. The reality is that the Devil, his demons, and some extremely evil people, will burn in the lake of fire for a very, very long time before dying and being consumed and annihilated, but they will not be tormented “forever” (“hyperbole” will be covered in more detail below).

One of the best known principles of biblical exegesis is that God’s Word is internally consistent, i.e., verses cannot contradict each other. If verses appear to contradict, any unclear verse must be interpreted in harmony with the clear verses on the subject. The Bible says in many different ways and in many places that the unsaved will be totally destroyed. In contrast, there are only a few verses that seem to say the unsaved will not be destroyed. Thus we can safely conclude that the unsaved will be destroyed. Furthermore, when we closely examine the few verses that seem to say the unsaved will burn forever, each of them can be explained from grammar or customs in a way that is consistent with the clear verses.

1. The Old Testament says the wicked will be destroyed.

When studying whether the wicked are annihilated or live forever in torment, the most natural place to start is in the Old Testament. When we read it, we see that it says over and over in many different ways that the wicked will be annihilated and be gone forever. They will:

- “be no more” (Ps. 37:10; Prov. 10:25)
- “be forever destroyed” (Ps. 92:7; cp. Ps. 73:17-19; cp. Ps.145:20; Prov. 13:13 KJV)
- “die” (Ezek. 18:4, 20; 33:13-16)
- “perish” (Ps. 1:6; 37:20; Isa. 41:11)
- “perish forever (Job 20:7)
- “be as nothing” (Isa. 41:12)
- have “everlasting ruin” (Ps. 52:5)
The Old Testament also says that moths will eat them up like a garment, and worms devour them like they devour wool (Isaiah 51:8), which are both illustrations showing nothing will be left of them. It also says that wicked people will fly away like a dream and be found no more (Job 20:8). They will “be consumed like dry stubble” (Nahum 1:10; cp. Isa. 29:20); and will “vanish like smoke” (Ps. 37:20) because “his [God’s] fire will consume them” (Ps. 21:9). No one will see them any more (Job 20:9).

The illustrations in the above verses do not portray eternal torment, but total destruction. And there is even more support for annihilation of the wicked than what we have just seen. Notice the way Malachi refers to the future of the wicked.

Malachi 4:1

“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them.”

Like the other Old Testament verses we have seen, Malachi does not give us a picture of eternal torment, but of total destruction. Nothing, not one root or branch, will be left to the wicked, which means they will be totally consumed, totally gone. Later on in Malachi, the same picture of total destruction is put a different way: “[the wicked] will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things” (Mal. 4:3). The wicked are not pictured as being tortured forever, but eventually will become “ashes.”

Still another way God portrays the destruction of the wicked is by saying they will be “cut off.” The phrase “cut off” is used in several different ways in the Old Testament. It is used of physical death (1 Sam. 24:21; 1 Kings 18:4; Isa. 53:8; thus some versions have “killed”), and it is also used of people who will be “cut off” in the next life (Ps. 12:3; 37:9, 22; Nahum 1:15). Just as when a person was cut off in his first life and ceased to live, so when he is cut off after the Judgment he will cease to live, and then cannot “live” in torment. In contrast to these clear verses that say the wicked will be destroyed and be no more, there is not one clear Old Testament verse that shows the wicked living forever in torment.

2. The New Testament says the wicked will be destroyed.

Having now seen more than a dozen different ways the Old Testament says that wicked people will eventually be destroyed and cease to exist, we will see that the New Testament continues the same idea, saying that the wicked are totally consumed and become non-existent.

John the Baptist compared the wicked with chaff that is burned (Matt. 3:12). Jesus compared the unsaved to trees that do not produce fruit and so are cut down and burned (Matt. 7:19); to weeds that are gathered and burned (Matt. 13:40); and to vine branches that do not produce fruit and so are cut off and burned (John 15:6). None of these illustrations give the impression that the burning lasts forever. Instead, they all convey the simple truth that was well known in the biblical culture: chaff, weeds, or wood that is thrown into a fire burn for a short time and then are completely consumed. If John or Jesus knew that people burned forever in the lake of fire, they should have used illustrations that made that point, or added some comments to make their illustration clear. However, it surely seems that John and Jesus both knew exactly what their
illustrations conveyed—the total destruction of the wicked—and chose their illustrations on purpose to make that exact point and fit with the rest of Scripture. Just as the chaff, weeds, or wood, burn for a time in the fire and then are consumed and gone forever, the wicked suffer some retribution in the lake of fire and then die and are burned up completely.

Another New Testament illustration that teaches the ungodly will be destroyed is the comparison of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah to the destruction of the wicked. The book of 2 Peter says that God, “by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly” (2 Pet. 2:6 ESV). Sodom and Gomorrah were not tormented forever, but burned to ashes and became “extinct,” and that is exactly what will happen to wicked people.

3. The vocabulary of the New Testament shows us the wicked will be destroyed.

As well as illustrations and comparisons about the destruction of the unsaved such as those we have seen above with trees, weeds, or Sodom and Gomorrah, the New Testament uses more than half a dozen Greek words to describe what will happen to the unsaved, and they each refer to death and destruction, not continued life in torment. If we are going to arrive at the true meaning of Scripture, we must pay careful attention to the vocabulary it uses because God chooses His vocabulary carefully. When it comes to the total annihilation of the wicked, God uses many different Greek words to make the point again and again that the wicked will be destroyed.

The best way to study this subject is by studying the individual Greek words themselves. For one thing, usually a Greek word will be translated as several different English words depending on the context. For another thing, different Greek words will sometimes be translated by the same English word. This makes trying to do biblical research by studying the English words confusing and can lead to false conclusions. For example, apollumi is translated “destroy,” “perish,” “lose,” etc., depending on the context, but there are also other Greek words (cp. apōleia and o lethros) that are sometimes translated “destruction.” If we follow the Greeks words and understand their meanings, we can arrive at truth no matter how the translators brought the Greek into English. Below is a list of Greek words God uses to portray the destruction of the wicked.

1. **Apōleia** (Strong’s #684 ἀπώλεια). Apōleia means “the destruction that one experiences; annihilation” (A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, by Arndt and Gingrich; abbreviated BDAG). Jesus said that the road is narrow and the gate small that leads to “life,” while the broad road and broad gate leads to “destruction” (Matt. 7:13, 14; apōleia). Philippians 3:19 and 2 Peter 3:7 say the end of ungodly men and the enemies of God is “destruction,” and Romans 9:22 speaks of vessels (i.e., people) prepared for “destruction.” Hebrews 10:39 (KJV) says that believing results in the “saving of the soul,” while unbelief results in “destruction,” i.e., annihilation. To contrast apōleia with other words that mean destruction or total destruction, perhaps “annihilation” would be a clear translation. So apōleia is just one word that shows the end of the unsaved is annihilation, not eternal torment.
Something that will help us understand that most of the words in this study, like *apōleia* (destruction) refer to total annihilation is to remember that some words are inherently telic (they have an endpoint), while other words are inherently atelic (they do not have an endpoint). Words like “torture,” “pain,” and “suffering” are atelic; the words themselves do not have an endpoint. Torture and suffering may go on a minute, a month, a year, or forever. The vocabulary word itself does not have an inherent boundary—it may go on forever. In contrast, words such as “destruction,” “annihilation,” and “extinction” are telic, they have an inherent endpoint. If nothing is ever finally destroyed, then what happened was not “destruction.” The same is true with “annihilation.” If in the end nothing is “annihilated,” then the process was not “annihilation.” Similarly “extinction” is not “extinction” if in the end something is not “extinct.” It is important to understand the difference between telic and atelic words because the vocabulary God uses when it comes to the wicked is telic. They are destroyed, annihilated, and extinct. They no longer exist.

A closing comment on *apōleia* is appropriate: We should pay attention to the fact that Jesus contrasted “life” with “destruction” (Matt. 7:13, 14). That clearly implies that “life” is not “destruction,” that is, those who are alive are not destroyed, and those who are destroyed are not alive. Jesus did not say that there was “life” for both the good and wicked, and the only difference between them was the quality of their life (joy or torment). We contend that Jesus chose his words carefully and accurately, and taught the great truth that the wicked are annihilated in the lake of fire.

2. *Apollumi* (Strong’s #622 ἀπόλλυμι). *Apollumi* means “to cause or experience destruction” (BDAG). The Gospel of Matthew says that we are to fear God, who is the one who can “destroy both soul and body” in Gehenna (Matt. 10:28), and John 3:16, using the same Greek word, says that the unsaved will “perish,” but those who believe will have everlasting life. Romans 2:12 also says the unsaved will “perish.” These verses give more evidence that the fate of the wicked is everlasting destruction, not everlasting torment.

3. *Esthiō* (Strong’s #2068 ἐσθιῶ; in some lexicons it is listed as the unused root, *phagō*, Strong’s #5315 φάγω). *Esthiō* means “eat,” and thus by extension it also came to mean “to do away with completely; consume; devour” (BDAG). James 5:3, speaking of wicked people, says their gold and silver will “eat [esthiō; consume] your flesh like fire,” meaning that the greed and possessions of the wicked will be the cause of them being consumed after the Judgment. Hebrews 10:27 speaks of a “fire that will consume [esthiō] the enemies of God.” Hebrews 12:29 says God is a “consuming fire,” but in this verse the Greek word for “consuming” is *katanaliskō* (Strong’s #2654 καταναλίσκω), which means “consume” (BDAG), to do away with completely. That is exactly what fire does to things, it burns them up until they are totally consumed. The translation of Hebrews 10:27 in many versions, that a fire will “consume” the enemies of God is simple, clear, and accurate. There is no “eternal torment,” but there is everlasting death, the unsaved are consumed in the lake of fire.

4. *Exolethetauō* (Strong’s #1842 ἐξολέθρησθω). This is an amplification of *olethros* (2 Thess. 1:9) below, and means to destroy completely. Peter used it in Acts 3:23 (quoting Deut. 18:19) to show that anyone who did not listen to the prophet who was foretold to come (i.e., the Messiah), would be completely destroyed and not be part of
the people of God. *Exolethreúō* is used frequently (over 200 times) in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was made around 250 BC, and it sometimes refers to a person’s destruction in this life, and sometimes refers to their complete destruction in the next. That is certainly the way Peter used it in Acts 3:23, and an example of the total and everlasting destruction of the wicked in the Old Testament is Psalm 37:9.

5. **Katastrophē** (Strong’s #2692 καταστροφή). 2 Peter 2:6 says that God reduced Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes as an example of what would happen to ungodly people. Some Greek texts include the word *katastrophē*, which means “condition of total destruction” (BDAG), which is why the ESV reads that God “condemned them to extinction….” The ESV has chosen a good English word, “extinction,” to separate *katastrophē* from other Greek words that mean destruction. “Extinction” exactly describes the fate of the unsaved, they are not tormented forever.

6. **Olethros** (Strong’s #3639 ὀλέθρος). *Olethros* means “a state of destruction, destruction, ruin, death” (BDAG). 2 Thessalonians 1:9 says that people who do not obey God will be punished with everlasting “destruction” [*olethros*]. Perhaps simply to distinguish *olethros* from other Greek words that mean destroy, it might be helpful to use “destroy completely” a definition that can be found in Friberg’s Greek Lexicon.

7. **Phthora** (Strong’s #5356, φθορά). *Phthora* means the “total destruction of an entity” (BDAG). 2 Peter 2:12 says that the wicked will be caught and “destroyed.” Galatians 6:8 uses the same Greek word and says that people who sow to the flesh reap “corruption,” while people who sow to the Spirit and reap everlasting life. Since *phthora* means “total destruction,” and in Galatians is contrasted with everlasting life, “total destruction” would be a good translation of *phthora* in both 2 Peter 2:12 (the wicked are totally destroyed) and in Galatians 6:8 (the wicked reap total destruction).

8. **Thanatos** (Strong’s #2288 θάνατος). *Thanatos* means “death; the termination of physical life” (BDAG). Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin is “death” in contrast with the gift of God, which is “life.” The choice God gives people is the choice between life and death, not between “everlasting life in pleasure” and “everlasting life in pain.” Each person is given the choice between everlasting life and everlasting death. The end of people’s first life is “death”—no life, no body, no consciousness—until the resurrection. At the resurrection God raises the body from the dead and reanimates it with life. At that point, saved people go on and live forever, but the unsaved are thrown into the lake of fire which is called the “second death” precisely because it is like the first death; people burn to the point they have no life at all; they are annihilated. The second death is mentioned four times in Revelation (2:11; 20:6, 14; and 21:8). Since the Bible cannot contradict itself, it cannot say that the lake of fire is the second death and also say people live forever in torment. One category of those statements would have to be figurative, and we are seeing that the figurative verses are the few that seems to say people will burn forever; they are the figure hyperbole, exaggeration.

### 4. Death is really death.

In response to our assertion that the Bible teaches that people will “die,” some Bible teachers say that “death” is not really death (the total absence of life), but just
“separation from God.” Although there are times when the word “death” is used in a limited way, such as when describing the “spiritual death” of an unsaved person (Eph. 2:1), the word “death” still means something is dead. For example, when a person is referred to as spiritually “dead,” their spiritual life is not just separated from God, it is “dead.”

The way to see whether the word “death” is used in a limited sense or its standard meaning is to study the whole scope of Scripture on the subject. In this case, the many clear verses that say the wicked will be destroyed lets us know that when God says the unsaved will die a second “death,” He is using “death” in the standard way, meaning there is no life at all. God said in many different ways the wicked would be annihilated, and by saying they are “dead” He is further explaining what eventually happens to the wicked.

Another way we can tell that “death” does not mean “alive but separated from God,” is that the same Hebrew and Greek words that are used for the death of plants and animals are used for the death of humans, and no one would say dead animals are not “dead,” just separated from God. There are no unique words for “dead” that apply only to humans but not to other things that die, but that unique vocabulary would have to exist if humans had a unique kind of “death” that was not experienced by other things that die.

5. “Gehenna” was the name of the garbage dump south of Jerusalem, and no one expected the garbage to burn forever.

Gehenna is a Greek word that is a transliteration from the Hebrew ge Hinnom, which is the name of a valley (the Hebrew word ge means “valley,” and Hinnom was the name of the man who owned the valley). In the Old Testament the valley is known both as the Valley of Hinnom (Ge Hinnom; Neh. 11:30; and some Hebrew texts of Josh. 15:8) and also as the “valley of the sons of Hinnom” (Ge ben Hinnom; Josh. 18:16; 2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 7:31). The Hebrew ge Hinnom came into Greek as the word “Gehenna.”

The Valley of Hinnom came to be used as the garbage dump by the people of Jerusalem. The inhabitants of Jerusalem would carry their garbage, including dead animals, bones and other waste, outside the south gate of the city (still to this day the gate going down to the Valley of Hinnom is called “the dung gate”), down the hill and into the Valley of Hinnom. The waste that was dumped there was then either burned up in the fires that usually burned there, or it rotted away, being eaten by maggots and worms. The people Jesus taught knew Gehenna very well, and a large percentage of them had probably thrown garbage there. They understood Jesus’ teaching that if a person was wicked before God, then at the judgment he would not be let into the kingdom, but like the garbage, would be thrown out and destroyed.

When we put ourselves in the place of Jesus’ audience we can see Jesus’ simple teaching. Things thrown into Gehenna were destroyed. The wicked would be thrown there on the Day of Judgment, so they would be destroyed too. If Jesus were trying to teach that the wicked would burn forever, then he would have had to add that detail to his teaching about Gehenna, but he never did. Why? The answer is simple and biblical: the unsaved do not burn forever, but like the garbage in the Valley of Hinnom, are totally destroyed.
The Greeks transliterated the Hebrew words Ge Hinnom into Gehenna, but sadly, many English translators did not transliterate Gehenna into our English versions, but translated it as “Hell.” But that totally loses the simple truth that Jesus was speaking of a literal valley where garbage was thrown. Then, to make matters worse, many erroneous ideas were attached to what Jesus supposedly said about “hell,” including that he was speaking of a place of eternal torment. He was not. He was speaking of the simple concept that the wicked and unsaved will be totally destroyed, just like the garbage in the Valley of Hinnom was. [For more on Gehenna, see commentary on Matthew 5:22].

6. The “immortal soul” is not biblical; the Bible never says the soul is immortal.

Most orthodox theologians acknowledge that a sinner’s body is destroyed after he dies, but they assert that it is the “immortal soul” of a sinner that remains in torment forever. The concept of the “immortal soul” came mainly from Greek philosophy, and entered into Christian teaching mainly through two different pathways. The first way was from Jews who converted to Christianity. After Alexander the Great conquered Israel and Egypt in 332 BC, many of the Jews who lived there came to accept Greek beliefs as true, and when they converted to Christianity they brought those Greek beliefs (myths) with them. The second way the belief in the immortal soul entered Christianity was from the Greeks who converted to Christianity as the Christian Faith began to grow and spread.

It is widely believed that the “immortal soul” is a biblical concept, but it is never mentioned in the Bible. Much has been written showing the soul is not immortal, but it is too much information to expound in this commentary article. (See Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, Is There Death After Life, pp. 17-28; Edward Fudge, The Fire that Consumes, pp. 65-76; Leroy E. Froom, The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers, pp.529-802; Anthony Buzzard, Our Fathers Who Aren’t in Heaven, pp. 208-225.)

The most common use of “soul” in the Bible is its being used to mean a person, an individual, such as when Acts 27:37 says there were 276 “souls” on board the ship (KJV). This is true both in the Old Testament, where “soul” is a translation of the Hebrew word nephesh, (pronounced nĕ'-fesh) and the New Testament, where it is the translation of the Greek word psuche (pronounced soo'-kay). However, due to the common belief that the “soul” lives on after the body dies, it is important that we highlight some verses that show that the soul, as well as the body, is destroyed.

The clearest verse that shows the soul can be destroyed is Matthew 10:28. Jesus was teaching people not to be afraid of people, but to “be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell [Gehenna].” This clear teaching by Jesus should have settled the point that both the body and the soul are “destroyed” in the lake of fire. The soul does not live on forever in torment. Ezekiel 18:20 says that soul that sins will die (KJV). Hebrews 10:39 mentions people who “believe to the saving of the soul” (KJV; the word “soul” is in the Greek text, but not translated as “soul” in many versions). It contrasts those saved souls with the people who draw back from God resulting in destruction (annihilation; Greek = apôleia; see #1 above).

Jesus also taught, “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it” (Matt. 16:25). In this verse, the word “life” is “soul” in the Greek text, and the word “lose” and “loses” is the Greek word apollumi, which was covered above and refers to destruction. So although it is not clear in most English translations, when the Greek text is more literally translated the meaning of the verse...
becomes clear: “For whoever wants to save his soul will destroy it….” Thus this verse too shows that the “soul” can be destroyed. James 5:20 says the person who “converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death…” (KJV). Although “soul” in this verse seems to mean “person,” it includes the life of the person, the soul, which it says without salvation will die.

The verses above all show that the soul is not immortal, but can be destroyed, and more verses could be added from the Old Testament, such as those that say the “soul” of sinners will be “cut off” (Lev. 7:20; 18:29; Num. 15:30, 31). In concluding this point we need to restate that there is no such thing as the “‘immortal soul” in the Bible, and many Scriptures, and especially the teaching of Jesus, show us the “soul” can be destroyed.

7. **“Spirit” is not immortal**

One reason that some people say there must be eternal torment for the unsaved is that they claim that people have a spirit, and spirit cannot die. That spirit cannot die is a traditional belief, but it is not a biblical belief. Like the belief in the “immortal soul,” the belief that “spirit” lives forever is not biblical; there is simply no verse to support it. No verse says, “spirit is immortal,” or “spirit lives forever.” On the contrary, we know that “soul” is a kind of “spirit” like “oak” is a kind of tree [see Appendix 6: “Usages of “Spirit””] and soul can be destroyed. So we know that at least some kinds of spirit can be destroyed. Further evidence for that fact is that animals have spirit: “Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?” (Ecc. 3:21 ESV). This fact is collaborated because the word ruach (“spirit” “breath” or “wind”) is used of animals on several different occasions (cp. Gen. 6:17; 7:15; 7:22; Ps. 104:29; Ecc. 3:19). Although each of these could be rendered “breath,” they could as easily be rendered “spirit,” and the fact that animals have both a ruach (“spirit”) and nephesh [“soul;” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”] shows that “spirit” and “soul” can indeed be destroyed. Given that fact, in order to be able to say that the “spirit” in man cannot be destroyed we would have to have a verse that expressly states that fact, but there is no such verse. The scope of Scripture plainly testifies that people can be totally annihilated in the Lake of Fire.

8. **The Hebrew word Sheol shows us dead people are dead.**

More evidence that the soul can be destroyed comes from studying the Hebrew word Sheol. The Old Testament made it clear that when a person died, he went to Sheol. Neither Greek or English has a good equivalent word for Sheol, because it is not a “physical place” where dead people go, like the grave, but rather it is a “state of being;” it is the state of being dead? (Ecc. 3:21 ESV). Perhaps a good English equivalent of Sheol would be “grave-dom,” the “reign of the grave.” That Sheol is the state of being dead can be easily confirmed by examining the uses of Sheol in the Old Testament. It is undisputed that when a person dies, his body disintegrates and ceases to exist. But not only does the body cease to exist, the life (sometimes called “soul”) of the person does too. Thus, a person who is dead is dead in every way, not alive in heaven or “Hell.”

There are many verses that show that when the body died, the person, both body and soul, were totally dead. Death and being in Sheol is compared to sleep in many verses (Job 7:21; 14:12-14; Psalm 13:3; 90:5; Dan. 12:2; John 11:11; 1 Cor. 11:30; 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:14; 5:10). The comparison is valid because just as there is no consciousness in
sleep, there is none in death. Once a person dies, he does not remember God (Ps. 6:5). In fact, dead people “know nothing” (Ecc. 9:5). They cannot praise God or speak of His goodness (Ps. 30:9; 115:17; Isa. 38:18), they cannot thank God or hope in Him (Isa. 38:18); and they have no knowledge or wisdom (Ecc. 9:10). Obviously, these dead people are not rejoicing in heaven or suffering in “Hell.”

When a person dies he goes to Sheol, which, as we have just seen, is the state of being dead where there is no knowledge, wisdom, memory, praise, or hope. Similarly, when a person dies in the lake of fire and experiences the “second death,” he will again be in Sheol and have total non-existence. In that light, it is important that we notice that Psalm 9:17 (ESV) says, “The wicked shall return to Sheol, all the nations that forget God.” Although this verse may have a couple different meanings included in it, and may refer to the first death as well as the second death, the ESV translation is certainly correct that the verse does include the idea of the wicked making a “return” to Sheol. Wicked people die the first time and are in Sheol, then are resurrected to the Judgment. If they are judged unworthy of everlasting life, they are cast into the lake of fire and die again, thus returning to Sheol, the state of death. Thus Psalm 9:17 is another clear verse that teaches the wicked do not suffer forever in the lake of fire. Eventually the wicked return to Sheol and are totally dead.

One of the ways that some Jews came to believe in the “immortal soul” is that when the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek in the version we call the Septuagint (done about 250 BC, a few generations after Alexander conquered Egypt), the Hebrew word sheol was translated as the Greek word ἑδής. This created a huge error to occur among the Greek speaking Jews, because in sheol everyone was dead, but in the Greek ἑδής, everyone was alive. The Greek language, like English, had no word for “the state of being dead.” Given that fact, the Jews who translated the Septuagint should have transliterated sheol into Greek, like they did for Gehenna. Instead, they translated sheol as ἑδής, and by doing that they gave life to the dead. Then, after that time, the Jews who read the Septuagint naturally thought that the dead were alive, a belief that the Pharisees held at the time of Christ, and many of them brought their belief that the dead were alive into Christianity when they converted.

9. The figure of speech hyperbole.

Saying that the Devil and some wicked people will be tormented “for ever and ever” is the figure of speech hyperbole, or exaggeration. Hyperbole was common in the biblical culture, just as it is common in our culture today. Common hyperboles in Western culture are when we are hungry but we say, “I’m starving,” or when we are cold but we say “I’m freezing.” The hyperbole communicates both the intensity of the feeling and the emotion of discomfort that goes with the physical feeling itself. In his book, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, E.W. Bullinger has six pages of examples of hyperboles found in the Bible, and there are many he did not list.

There are other examples of hyperbole that are associated with the Devil, the last days, and the Judgment. For example, by hyperbole the Devil is said to be accusing Christians before God “day and night.” Of course, this is not literal, because there are times when the Devil is on earth and leaves God’s presence (Job 1:12; 2:7; 1 Pet. 5:8). Also, Jesus used hyperbole to good effect when he taught about avoiding Gehenna. He said, “If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away” (Matt. 5:29).
Jesus did not expect anyone to literally obey him, but the hyperbole effectively communicates that, although we should not gouge out our eye, we should not be complacent about the sin in our lives but should take drastic action to cleanse ourselves of sin. The hyperbole in Revelation 20:10, “to the ages of the ages” accomplishes two things. First, it graphically makes the point that the torment will go on for a long time and second, it elicits emotions such as horror, or perhaps satisfaction, that accompany the retribution that has come upon the wicked.

Perhaps another reason for God’s use of hyperbole was the inability of the Greek and Latin languages to express a very large number. The roman numerals used in biblical times had an “I” for ones, an “X” for tens, an “L” for 50, a “C” for 100, a “D” for 500, and an “M” for 1000, but nothing larger than that. Thus numbers in the billions could not be expressed in writing, or for that matter in oral communication. If we postulate that the Devil will burn only one year for every life he has ruined, the number would be in the billions, far too much to express in Roman numerals and put in the Bible. This put the biblical writers in a bind. They had no way to express how long the Devil would actually burn! Thus, the use of hyperbole here is a very fitting way to say that the Devil will be tormented longer than could be easily expressed, but we can see from the scope of Scripture that is was not forever.

10. People will be punished in proportion to their sin.

Scripture says people will receive punishment for what they have done, and that the punishment will be in proportion to the sin they have committed. Romans 2:5 says of stubborn people, “you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath.” Just as godly people by their good works store up treasure for the life to come, wicked people store up wrath for themselves [For more about this, see the commentary on Romans 2:5]. The clear message of Scripture is that unless people get forgiveness for their sins they will receive punishment for the evil they have done (Ps. 62:12; Ecc. 11:9; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 2:23). Beings such as the Devil and his demons have stored up much wrath for themselves, and will be punished for a very long time before they are destroyed. God metes out two different types of justice: corrective justice and retributive justice. Corrective justice is punishment that is meant to correct a behavior, while retributive justice is retribution, or repayment for something that the person did (see commentary note on 2 Thess. 1:8). Torment and then destruction in the lake of fire is not corrective, but retributive; it is a righteous repayment for harm done. The demons knew this justice was coming, and so said to Jesus, “Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?” (Matt. 8:29).

Some theologians have argued against annihilation because they say it would not make sense for God to resurrect someone from the dead only to kill them again. That misses the fact that God’s annihilation in the Lake of Fire is a judgment, a retribution, a fulfillment of a promise, and a lesson, not just a punishment. We can assume many evil people, the Pharisees are a good example, have died in complete confidence that they will be saved, and, as rich and powerful people, often died in the comfort of their own home, well fed and cared for.

Not only do wicked people such as those Pharisees need to be judged and fulfill the promise that “every knee will bow,” but their annihilation is not immediate. The wicked are annihilated after a period of suffering, and that period of suffering fulfills the
Word of God and the justice of God. It seems clear that not every sinner spends equal time suffering, but the more wicked a person is, the more severe the punishment, fulfilling the Scripture that they have stored up wrath for the Day of Wrath (see commentary on Rom. 2:5: “corresponding to your hardness”). It is God’s just retribution that those who have ignored God and caused pain and suffering on earth will suffer in proportion to the evil they have done.

Also, the suffering of the wicked before they are annihilated will show those who have everlasting life that God is truly just. God, through Jesus Christ, offered to pay for the sins of anyone who wished to accept that payment. Those people who rejected God’s offer, and thereby decided by default to pay for their own sins, had to make good their decision, and pay for their sins with suffering and death, just as Scripture said.

In conclusion, the verses above are very descriptive of the final end of the wicked, which is total annihilation. No one should use the very few unclear verses that can seem to say that evil people will suffer forever to overturn the dozens of different verses and illustrations that tell us the wicked will be totally destroyed. The overwhelming biblical evidence in both the Old Testament and the New Testament is that wicked people are not tormented forever but are destroyed in the lake of fire, which is the second death.

[For information on the fact that dead people are dead and not alive in any form, see Appendix 4: “The Dead Are Dead”. For more on the punishment of the wicked being in proportion to the wrong they have done, see commentary on Rom. 2:5; for more on Gehenna not being a place of eternal torment see commentary on Matt. 5:22].
Appendix 6. Usages of “Spirit”

The word “spirit” has many meanings. This is true in English, and also true in Hebrew (ruach = spirit) and Greek (pneuma = spirit). The Greek noun pneuma comes from the verb pneō, “to blow or breathe.” Thus, to the ancient Greeks, pneuma was “breath,” and it came to be associated with invisible things that exerted a force or power. Although pneuma is a noun, it is a “verbal noun,” (a noun that has the inherent characteristics of a verb or is grammatically related to a verb), so pneuma is always associated with the invisible power exercised by it. The word “wind” is a good example of a verbal noun, a noun that cannot be divorced from the power or force associated with it. There is no such thing as “wind” without action, even though “wind” is a noun. Similarly, pneuma is associated with its action or power. In fact a good basic definition of pneuma, “spirit,” is something invisible that exerts a force. That is why some of the things that are called “spirit” in the Greek language are: God (John 4:24); the gift of God known as holy spirit (Acts 2:38); angels (Heb. 1:14); demons (Matt. 8:55); “breath” or “life” (Luke 8:55); wind; and attitudes, thoughts, or emotions (Matt. 26:41). All of these things are invisible but exert force or power.

Since pneuma can refer to so many different things, the way to tell what it refers to in any given verse is by the context, and this is not always an easy task.

1. **Pneuma is used of an immaterial “substance.”**
   John 4:24 says, “God is spirit.” God is an immaterial substance.

2. **Pneuma is used for “wind.”**
   This was certainly true in the secular Greek writings, but it is not used that way in the New Testament unless Hebrews 1:7 is an example.
   The Hebrew word for “spirit,” ruach, is also used of the wind (cp. Gen. 8:1; Exod. 10:13; 1 Kings 18:45; Job 21:18; Ps. 18:42; Prov. 25:14; Isa. 17:13; Jer. 2:24).

3. **Pneuma is used for “breath.”**
   It was common in Greek writings for pneuma to be used of breath, but it is uncommon in the Bible. Revelation 11:11, speaking of God’s two witnesses, says, “the breath of life” entered them (the Greek text reads, pneuma zōes; “spirit of life,” or “breath of life”). The same phrase is used in the Septuagint in Genesis 6:17, which says that when the Flood came, God would destroy “all flesh in which was the breath of life.”
   The Hebrew word for “spirit,” ruach, is also used for the breath (cp. Job 19:17; Ps. 135:17; Isa. 30:28; 33:11).

4. **Pneuma is used as a name for God.**
   Since God is “spirit” (John 4:24), it is natural that He would be called “the Spirit.” Thus, John 3:8 speaks of being born of “the Spirit,” i.e., of God; and Matthew 12:31 says that blasphemy against “the Spirit,” i.e., God, would not be forgiven. The Bible has many names that refer to God. Because God is holy (Isa. 6:3; John 17:11), He was also known as “the Holy,” which usually gets translated as “the Holy One” (2 Kings 19:22; Job 6:10; Ps. 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Isa. 1:4; 29:23; Luke 1:49; John 17:11).
   Sometimes “Spirit” is combined with “holy,” and God is called “the Holy Spirit,” pneuma hagion. In fact, holiness and “spirit” are so essential to God that it would be strange if “the Holy Spirit” were not one of His names. Thus, in Acts 5:3, Peter told Ananias, “You have lied to the Holy Spirit,” whom he identified in verse 4 as “God.” Every name of God emphasizes a different aspect of His character. Since “spirit” is used
of invisible power, when God is called “the Spirit,” or “the Holy Spirit,” it emphasizes His invisible power at work. The Gospels say Mary was impregnated by “the Holy Spirit,” (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35), because that name emphasized God’s power at work. That “the Holy Spirit” is a name for God and not a separate being explains why Jesus is always called “the Son of God” and never the Son of the Holy Spirit.

There is no reason to make “the Holy Spirit” into a separate “Person,” as Trinitarians do. We do not make any of the rest of God’s names into other “Persons.” There is one God, and He has many names. Every use of “the Holy Spirit” and “holy spirit” can either be explained as being a name for God or the name of the gift of God.

5. Pneuma is used as a name of Jesus Christ in his resurrected body.

Just as there are many names for God in the Bible, there are many names for Jesus, and one of them is “the Spirit.” Luke 24:39 makes it clear that Jesus had flesh and bone and was not a spirit being like an angel. However, Jesus’ resurrected body was animated and empowered by spirit, and God has given him immense spiritual power, so the name “the Spirit” is appropriate. 1 Corinthians 15:45 says that Jesus Christ became a “life-giving spirit” [pneuma], and 2 Corinthians 3:17 and 18 says, “Now the Lord is the Spirit...the Lord, who is the Spirit.” Jesus refers to himself as “the Spirit” many times in the book of Revelation (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13 and 22). Other verses that refer to Jesus as “the Spirit” are Romans 8:16 (the first “Spirit” in the verse), and Revelation 14:13 and 22:17.

6. Pneuma is used of the gift of holy spirit that God put upon certain believers, such as prophets, before the day of Pentecost.

The original man, Adam, was a body made from the ground that was animated by nephesh, usually translated “soul” (Gen. 2:7). Adam was the pattern of all humans ever since, and each of us has a physical body that is animated, made alive, by “soul.” Although God can communicate in various ways with the natural human of body and soul, in order to communicate with the natural person more directly, in the Old Testament and Gospels God put “spirit,” upon certain people. This can be seen quite clearly in Numbers 11:16, 17, 24 and 25.

Before the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), when God gave His gift of spirit to people, He:
1. Gave it to only some people,
2. Gave different measures to different people,
3. Could take it away from those people to whom He had given it, just as He did with King Saul.

Examples of the spirit of God coming upon Old Testament people include: Exodus 31:3; 35:31; Numbers 11:17, 25; 24:2; 27:18; Judges 3:10; 1 Chronicles 12:18; Isaiah 42:1; and Ezekiel 2:2. The “spirit” that God put upon some people is more fully referred to as the “holy spirit” (Ps. 51:11; Isa. 63:11). Some New Testament believers who had holy spirit upon them before the Day of Pentecost were Elizabeth (Luke 1:41), Zechariah (Luke 1:67), Simeon (Luke 2:25), and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15).

As He had done with the prophets of the Old Testament, God put holy spirit upon Jesus Christ (Luke 3:22), something that had been foretold in the Old Testament (Isa. 11:2; 61:1; cp. Matt. 12:18; Luke 4:18).

7. Pneuma is used of God’s gift of holy spirit that has been given in birth to every believer since the day of Pentecost.
God put His gift of holy spirit upon only certain select people in the Old Testament, but now He puts His gift of holy spirit into each Christian. Indeed, it is the presence of the holy spirit which is born into and sealed inside a person that, in God’s sight, makes that person a Christian. However, the gift of holy spirit we have today is different from the gift of holy spirit God gave to some believers in the Old Testament and Gospels, and it did not exist before it was given on the Day of Pentecost. John 7:39 says, “Now he said this about the spirit, which those who believed on him were going to receive, for as yet there was no spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (see commentary on John 7:39). The gift of holy spirit is mentioned many times in the New Testament (cp. Acts 2:33, 38; 8:15, 17, 19; 9:17; 10:45, 47; 15:18; 19:2; 1 Cor. 6:19; Eph. 1:13; 1 Thess. 4:8; 1 Pet. 1:12).

8. *Pneuma* is used of good of spirit beings.

Good spirit beings are referred to as “spirits.” There are different types of “spirits.”

Angels (divine messengers), are one type of spirit. Hebrews 1:14 says, “Are not all angels ministering spirits.” (cp. Heb. 1:7). Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5 and 5:6 are examples of good “spirits” that are apparently not angels, and the cherubim and seraphim mentioned in the OT are spirit beings but apparently not angels.

The Hebrew word for “spirit,” *ruach*, is also used of good spirit beings (cp. Ps. 104:4).

9. *Pneuma* is used of evil spirit beings.

Evil spirit beings are referred to as “spirits.” At least some of these evil spirits are “demons” (cp. Matt. 4:24; 10:8; 12:22). Matthew 10:1 says “He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits [*pneuma*] and to heal every disease and sickness.”

Like the Greek, the Hebrew word for “spirit,” *ruach*, is also used of evil spirit beings (cp. Num. 5:14; Judg. 9:23; 1 Sam. 15:16; 1 Kings 22:23; Job 4:5; Isa. 19:14; Hos. 5:4; Zech. 13:2).

10. *Pneuma* is used of the natural life of the body, often called “soul.”

We generally think the natural life of the body as being “soul,” which is the Greek word *psuchē* (Strong’s #5590 ψυχή; pronounced “psoo-kay”). However, the *psuchē*, “soul,” that animates the body is invisible and exerts a force that can be seen, so it is a kind of *pneuma*, “spirit,” and therefore “soul” is sometimes referred to as “spirit.” Luke 8:55 says that Jesus raised a little girl from the dead, and “her spirit [*pneuma*] returned, and at once she stood up.” James 2:26 also uses *pneuma* to refer to the life of the body when it says “the body without the spirit [*pneuma*], is dead,” meaning the body without the life is dead. [For more on “soul” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

Some people do not understand the many meanings and applications of “soul” (*psuchē*) and “spirit” (*pneuma*) in the Greek language, so they read verses such as James 2:26 and think that there is something they call “the spirit of man” that is part of a person’s natural body. This theology makes the natural man a being with a physical body, an invisible animating force (soul) and an invisible spiritual essence (spirit). However, Genesis is clear that when God created mankind, He made a physical body and then gave it life when He animated it by “soul” (Gen. 2:7; Lev. 17:11). The few times mankind is said to have a “spirit” can all be easily explained when we understand that “soul” is a kind of “spirit.” There is no need to make the natural man a being of body, soul and spirit, and the saved individual a being of body, soul, spirit, and holy spirit. Also, the
Hebrew words *nephes* (soul) and *ruach* (spirit) have the same kind of flexibility that the Greek words *psuche* and *pneuma* do, so Old Testament verses about soul and spirit can be explained in the same way verses in the New Testament can.

The Hebrew word for “spirit,” *ruach*, is also used of the natural life of the body (cp. Gen. 6:17; 7:15, 22; Job 12:10; Ps. 104:29; 146:4*; Ecc. 3:19*; Hab. 2:19* (* These could also be “breath”)).

11. *Pneuma* is used of the “spirit” (the invisible life force) that will animate the resurrected bodies of those who are saved.

   Our human bodies are now animated by a kind of spirit that the Bible calls “soul.” However, when dead people are raised at the resurrection, or when people are changed at the Rapture, we will no longer be animated by “soul” but will be animated by a new kind of life. That life will be a kind of spirit, just like the life force that we now call “soul” is a kind of “spirit.” Thus, Ezekiel 37:5-14 refers to God putting *ruach*, “spirit,” into people and making them come alive. Unfortunately, most versions translate the Hebrew word *ruach* as “breath” and not “spirit,” but some versions, such as the Douay-Rheims, NAB, Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible, and YLT, say “spirit” in these verses. While “breath” is a legitimate translation of *ruach* in some contexts, “breath” is what happens after the person is alive. A study of the whole Bible on this subject shows that God puts *ruach*, spirit, into the dead bodies which then come alive and begin to breathe as a result of the life God put in them. (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:44).

12. *Pneuma* is used of manifestations that are produced by God’s energizing of the gift of holy spirit, particularly prophecy.

   The Greek text of 1 Corinthians 14:12, when translated literally, says that people are to be “zealous for spirits,” meaning, be “zealous for spiritual utterances,” i.e., things said by the power of the gift of holy spirit. (See commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:12).

13. *Pneuma* is used of attitudes, emotions, etc.

   The word *pneuma* can refer to a person’s emotions, attitudes, thoughts, desires or his will.

   • Matthew 5:3: “Blessed are the poor in spirit [*pneuma*]...” The phrase “poor in spirit” does not refer to the amount of holy spirit one has received from God, but rather refers to an attitude of meekness in the mind. Blessed are those who are humble in attitude.

   • Matthew 26:41 (REV): “Stay awake and pray, in order that you do not enter into temptation. Indeed, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” The “spirit,” the attitude is willing, but the flesh is weak.

   • Acts 18:25 (HCSB): “This man [Apollos] had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught the things about Jesus accurately.” Apollos was fervent in his attitude and emotions when it came to the things of God.

   • Galatians 6:1: “Brothers, if a person gets overtaken in some trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of meekness.” Here, “a spirit of meekness” means an attitude of meekness.

   • 2 Timothy 4:22: Paul wrote to Timothy: “The Lord be with your spirit.” In other words, may the Lord be with you and keep your attitude and emotions positive (cp. Philemon 1:25).
• Romans 12:11 (HCSB): “Do not lack diligence; be fervent in spirit; serve the Lord.” In other words, be fervent in your attitude.

The Hebrew word for “spirit,” ruach, is also used of people’s thoughts, attitudes, and emotions (cp. Gen. 26:35; 45:27; Exod. 6:9; Deut. 2:30; Josh. 2:11; 5:1; Judg. 8:3; 1 Sam. 1:15; 1 Kings 10:5; 21:5; Job 7:11; 17:1; 21:4; Ps. 34:18; 51:17; 143:4; Prov. 16:18, 19, 32; Ecc. 1:14; Isa. 54:6; Ezek. 11:5; and Haggai 1:14).

Pneuma can also be used to intensify an emotion. The Greek text of Mark 8:12 is literally translated, “And he sighed in his spirit [pneuma].” The word pneuma shows that Jesus’ sigh was an action of the mind, from the heart of Jesus’ emotions. Thus the NIV translated the verse “He sighed deeply and said...” “Sighed deeply” is exactly what Jesus did, represented in the Greek text as “sighed in his spirit.”

14. **Pneuma is used as a part of a person put in place of the whole person, via the figure of speech Synecdoche.**


There are places in the Bible where a person’s spirit, pneuma, seems to be used for the whole person. In Luke 1:47, Mary says, “...my spirit [not just her spirit, but her entire being] rejoices in God my Savior.” (It is possible but less likely that this is a use of spirit as “attitude or emotion”).

15. **Pneuma is used by the figure of speech Metonymy for a related noun.**

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated. A good example of the word “spirit” being used in a Metonymy is John 6:63, when Christ said, “The words I have spoken to you are spirit.” The words themselves were not spirit, they were words, but Jesus referred to them as “spirit” because they produced spiritual life in all those who believed.
Appendix 7. Usages of “Soul”

The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (♯5590 ψυχή; pronounced psookay’), and *psuchē* has a large number of meanings. Any good Greek lexicon will show many of the ways that *psuchē* can be translated. For example, some of the meanings in the BDAG Greek-English lexicon are: that which animates animal and human life; life; that which possesses life; the person himself; and the seat and center of the inner human life in its many and varied aspects, which includes desires, the seat of enjoyment, and the emotions and feelings. As well as our emotions and feelings, *psuchē* includes our attitude.

Although some of the definitions of *psuchē* are found more clearly in Greek literature than in the Bible, many of them are clearly in the Bible. Meanings of “soul” (*psuchē*), that we find in the Bible include:

A. The life force that animates the body, both human and animal. Matthew 2:20 says the angel told Joseph to take Jesus back to Israel from Egypt because “those who were trying to take the child’s life [soul] are dead” (NIV). In Matthew 20:28, Jesus said he came “to give his life [soul] as a ransom for many.” Acts 20:10 speaks of Paul raising a boy from the dead and saying, “His soul [i.e., his life] is in him” (cp. John 10:11; Acts 20:24; Rom. 11:3). Revelation 8:9 speaks of the creatures of the sea that have “soul” will die. In other words, the living sea creatures will lose their life and die. The Hebrew word for soul is *nephesh*, and the Old Testament also uses “soul” as the life of the body (cp. Gen. 9:4; 35:18; Exod. 21:23; Lev. 17:11, 14; 24:17, 18; Num. 35:31; Deut. 12:23; 19:21; 2 Sam. 1:9; Job 12:10; Prov. 12:10; Jer. 38:16; Jonah 1:14).

B. Emotions, attitudes, thoughts, and feelings. The phrase, “My soul is troubled” (John 12:27) is roughly equivalent to “I am feeling troubled.” When the prophet Simeon told Mary, “A sword will pierce your soul” (Luke 2:35), he was saying that Mary would be terribly hurt mentally and emotionally by things that would happen to her son, Jesus. When Acts 14:2 says, “The Jews who did not believe stirred up the souls of the Gentiles,” it means that the Gentiles were mentally and emotionally upset. In Philippians 2:20, “equal-souled” means to think alike, or feel the same way about, something; thus the translation, “like-minded.” The Old Testament also uses *nephesh*, soul, in the same way, meaning thoughts, emotions, attitudes, etc. (cp. Gen. 23:8; Exod. 15:9; 23:9; Lev. 26:16; Nu. 11:6; Deut. 6:5; 24:15; 28:65; Judges 10:16; 16:16; 18:25; 1 Sam. 1:10; 2 Sam. 17:8; Job 7:11; Ps. 35:13; Ecc. 6:7; Isa. 38:15).

C. The person; the individual: Acts 2:43 says, “Every soul kept feeling a sense of awe,” and it means that every person felt awe. Acts 27:37 says, “And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls [i.e., people].” Romans 13:1 says, “Let every soul [person] be subject to the higher powers.” (cp. Acts 7:14). The man in Luke 12:19 says, “I will say to my soul,” meaning, “I will say to myself.” The Old Testament also uses *nephesh*, soul, to mean a person or individual (cp. Gen. 14:21; 46:15, 18, 22; Exod. 1:5; 12:4; Lev. 11:43; 16:29; 17:12; Num. 15:27; 19:18).
As the life force that animates the body, “soul,” is a type of “spirit,” so to better understand “soul” we must understand “spirit.” The Greek noun *pneuma* is derived from the verb *pneuō* (blow, breathe out) and it refers to something invisible that exerts a force that can be seen. The Greeks used *pneuma* to refer to “wind,” “breath,” “life,” “attitude,” and “emotion,” as well as “spirit.” These are all invisible, but produce results that we can see. Many things are called *pneuma* in the Greek New Testament. A partial list includes God (John 4:24); the gift of God known as holy spirit (Acts 2:38); angels (Heb. 1:14); demons (Matt. 8:55); breath or life (Luke 8:55); wind (John 3:8); and attitudes, thoughts, and emotions (Matt. 26:41). All of these are invisible but can exert power that can be seen. As a kind of spirit, “soul” is invisible but it exerts a force that can be seen, both as the life that animates the body and as the emotion or attitude we express.

It can be confusing that animal and human life, as well as our emotions, feelings, and attitudes are sometimes called “spirit” and sometimes called “soul,” but that is because “soul” is a type of spirit. “Soul” is the specific type of spirit that animates and gives life to the body. We do not get confused when sometimes a dog is called an “animal” and sometimes it is more narrowly called a “dog,” and we should not get confused when sometimes human life or feelings are sometimes called “spirit” and sometimes more specifically referred to as “soul.”

There are some very common mistakes people make when thinking about soul. One is that people have souls but animals do not. A second is that the soul is immortal. A third is that soul lives on after the body dies such that the person is still alive, but as a soul without a body. A fourth is to think that when “soul” is used in the Bible, it is exclusively (or even primarily) used of the life force of the body.

As to the mistaken belief that humans have a soul but animals do not, both the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and the Greek text of the New Testament make it clear that both humans and animals have “soul” that makes them alive. Sadly, that is not at all clear in the majority of English translations, which do not translate the word “soul” literally in those verses. It is in large part because English versions do not translate “soul” literally from the Greek and Hebrew that the average Christian does not know animals have a soul. Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible often translates “soul” literally when it appears in the Hebrew text. Thus the following verses make it plain that animals have soul as well as man does:

- “And God said—Let the waters swarm [with] an abundance of living soul…And God created the great sea-monsters,—and every living soul that moveth—[with] which the waters swarmed after their kind” (Gen. 1:20, 21 Rotherham).
- “And God said—Let the land, bring forth, living soul, after its kind, tame-beast and creeping thing and wild-beast of the land, after its kind. And it was so” (Gen. 1:24 Rotherham).
- “I have given…to every living thing of the land—and to every bird of the heavens, and to every thing that moveth on the land, wherein is a living soul, every green herb for food” (Gen. 1:29, 30 Rotherham).
- “I, therefore, behold me! establishing my covenant with you [Noah],—and with your seed after you; and with every living soul that is with you, of birds, of tame-beasts, and of all wild-beasts of the earth, that are with you,—of all coming forth out of the ark” (Gen. 9:9, 10 Rotherham).
“And if a man takes the life [soul] of any human being, he shall surely be put to death. And the one who takes the life [soul] of an animal shall make it good, life [soul] for life [soul]” (Lev. 24:17, 18 NASB. Even Rotherham has “life” instead of “soul” in this verse, which is understandable since the “soul” refers to the life of the man or animal in these verses).

• “and the third of the creatures which were in the sea, which had life [“soul”], died, the third of the ships, was destroyed” (Rev. 8:9 Rotherham; cp. Rev. 16:3).

There are many other verses in the Bible that show that birds, land animals, and sea creatures have soul, and these can easily be discovered by doing a search on the Hebrew word nephesh (#5315 נֶפֶשׁ) and the Greek word psuchē.

Historically the reason that it has been taught that humans have a soul but animals do not is that it has been wrongly believed that the soul was immortal. Thus, through the years it has been taught that it was the soul that allowed a person to live forever in heaven or hell, but animals did not live on after their body died because they did not have an immortal soul. However, that teaching is not biblical. For one thing, as we will see below, the soul is not immortal. Furthermore, it is not the presence of soul that allows a person to live forever, but the power of God to resurrect people. Believers will be resurrected in new bodies like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21), and that new body will not be animated by soul, but by spirit, a different kind of spirit (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:44). In this life, both humans and animals have a life force that animates the body, and the Bible calls that life force “soul.”

As for the mistaken belief of the soul being immortal, there is no such thing as an “immortal soul.” That is a traditional belief, but it is not a part of Scripture. The phrase “immortal soul” is not in the Bible, and neither is the concept of an “immortal soul,” a soul that cannot die. The Bible says very clearly that “soul” can be destroyed (Matt. 10:28). Ezekiel 18:4 says, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die,” and although that verse is using “soul” to refer to a person, the point of the text is that the person will die because his soul, his life force, will die. Furthermore, the Bible says that Jesus gave his soul as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). Most English versions say that Jesus gave up his soul, his life, as a ransom for many, meaning that his soul died. It had to. If Jesus did not really die, then he never paid the price for our sin, which is death. When God raised Jesus from the dead, his body was no longer powered by soul, but by spirit. Actually, many verses in the Bible refer to the “soul” dying or being dead, although often psuchē is translated “life” in those verses, with the result that people reading the English Bible cannot see that the soul dies (cp. John 10:11, 15, 17; 13:37, 38; Acts 20:24; 27:10; 1 John 3:16; Rev. 9:8; 12:11; 16:3).

It is also a mistaken belief that the soul lives on after the body dies. When the body dies, the soul is dead; gone. There were cultures such as the Greeks who believed the soul was something like a ghost that lived on after the body died, complete with memory, cognition, and emotion. In fact it was the Greeks who were in large part responsible for that belief coming into Christianity; first from the Jews and then by Greek converts to Christianity. The Greeks conquered Egypt in 332 BC, and greatly influenced the Jews who lived there to believe that the soul inhabited the body and lived on after the body died. Around 250 BC, Jews in Egypt produced the Greek translation of the Old
Testament we know as the Septuagint, which translates the Hebrew word sheol as the Greek word hadēs. That was a very inaccurate translation because sheol is “the state of being dead,” “gravedom” (the reign of the grave), and people in sheol were dead and not alive in any form. In contrast, in the Greek language hadēs was the place that human souls go to live after the body dies, and in hadēs the souls are alive. Thus, by the stroke of a pen, the translators of the Septuagint gave life to the dead, and the Bible of those Jews who did not read Hebrew now said that when a person died, he was alive in hadēs. At the time of Christ the group we know as the Pharisees were one group of Jews who believed that the soul lived on after the body died (the Sadducees did not). When those Jews were converted to Christianity, many of them continued to believe what they had always believed, and thus brought the belief of the immortal soul into Christianity.

Later, when Greeks were being converted to Christianity, they often held on to their belief that the soul lived on, and thus that belief was brought into Christianity by the Greeks as well as by some of the Jews. Eventually the belief that the soul lived on after the body died became the traditional belief of the Church. Nevertheless, that belief is not biblical. “Soul” is simply the life that empowers the body of humans and animals, and when a person or animal dies, the soul is just gone; it does not “go” anywhere, it just dies.

It will help to clarify our thinking on the subject of the death of the soul life if we think about soul on a cellular level. Soul is not a unified thing like a ghost in our body. “Soul” is the life that animates our body—each and every cell. Furthermore, the soul that animates a body cannot live on its own. It is sustained by a functional body. It is clear from the book of Genesis that God made “soul” to make the body alive. God formed Adam’s body from the ground, and then put soul into it. Adam’s soul could not live before his body was made, but the body was not alive until it had soul.

Every cell in the body has “soul,” and indeed, the existence of the soul in the cell is what differentiates a living cell from a dead one. So, for example, if a carpenter cuts off a finger, it remains alive for a short time, and during that time it can be reattached to his body. Why? Because the “soul” that is in each cell of the finger has not died yet, so the cells are alive. In time, the cells of the finger “die” because the soul that made each of them alive dies. At that point the finger cannot be reattached to the body. It is dead. Yet no one asks, “Where did the soul life in the finger go?” No one thinks the finger (more accurately, the individual cells in the finger), was supposed to go to heaven when it died. We are content to say that the finger “just died,” and that is the truth.

God did not design soul life to be something that lived forever on its own. He designed it to give life to a body and then die and be gone. There are scientists who have kept individual heart cells alive in laboratories for years. These living heart cells are alive because they have “soul,” and when the environment they live in no longer supports life, they die. At that time, the soul that animated them does not “go” anywhere; it just dies and is gone. Similarly, when a person dies, the soul life in each cell of the body dies, cell by cell. “Soul” is “soul” and it does not “go” anywhere, no matter if all the cells of the body die at approximately the same time, such as happens in a normal death, or if just some of our cells die but the person lives on, such as would happen if a soldier had an arm blown off in battle.

“Soul” is not immortal, it can and does die. However, soul can live on year after year if it has a viable body that supports it. We have the same soul as Adam. That soul was created by God for Adam about 6000 years ago (which God then took and put in Eve
also), and it has been passed down from generation to generation in the living eggs of
women and the living sperm of men. The reason that an egg is alive and can be fertilized
it that is has soul, and the reason a sperm is alive and can fertilize an egg is because it has
soul. In the lifetime of a woman thousands of living eggs die, and in the lifetime of a man
millions of living sperm die, yet in those cases we do not ask where the “soul” goes. It
just dies. Since “soul” empowers every cell, God never designed the soul that animates
our cells to live forever. If it did, every hair that was ever pulled out of our heads by the
roots would still be alive somewhere, and every sperm or egg that was ever produced by
a man or woman would still be alive somewhere. Instead, God originally designed our
bodies to be a perfect and ongoing environment for soul to stay alive and thus animate
our bodies forever. When that perfect environment is gone (when we die), the soul in us
dies and is simply gone.

When the person dies, he is said to be “asleep.” That does not mean that the
person, his soul, or his spirit, are literally asleep. The person is dead and the soul and
spirit are gone, as we have just seen. For why the Bible calls death sleep, see commentary
on Acts 7:60.

Another question that understanding “soul” answers is, “When does human life
begin?” The life of a new human starts when a living egg (an egg that has soul) is
fertilized by a living sperm (a sperm that has soul). That fertilization starts the life of a
new organism, a new person, who has “soul,” i.e., human life. The soul inside the new
fetus is actually the soul that has come down from Adam, and the new fetus is clearly
alive: it has metabolism, growth, movement, response to stimuli, excretion, and secretion.

It has been argued occasionally that the fetus is not alive because it does not
“breathe.” Actually, the fetus does breathe, just not through its own lungs. It gets oxygen
through the umbilical cord of the mother and metabolizes it into carbon dioxide that then
has to be removed back through the umbilical cord. Thus the baby “breathes” in basically
the same way a person on a lung-bypass machine breathes. Doctors doing lung surgery
on patients keep them alive by using a lung bypass machine that oxygenates the blood. If
a doctor turned off the machine, the patient would suffocate and die. Similarly, if a
pregnant woman is killed, the most common way the baby dies is by suffocation—the
mother stops breathing and oxygen stops flowing to the fetus, which then suffocates. At
birth, a valve in the baby’s heart that allows blood to flow to the lungs and get oxygen
opens for the first time, and the baby can then get oxygen through its own lungs. At that
point the umbilical cord is no longer needed, but at the cellular level the use of oxygen
and the expelling of carbon dioxide is the same as when the baby was in the womb and
the umbilical cord was its lung by-pass machine.
Appendix 8. On Calvinism and Predestination

In Ephesians 1:5, the Greek word proorizō (#4309 προορίζω) is an aorist participle. The basic meaning of the word is to “decide upon beforehand. Proorizō is a good example of a word whose meaning has to be defined from the context and scope of Scripture. In a context like this, proorizō could possibly refer to God choosing ahead of time each person He will save and each whom He will condemn, with the person having no choice in the matter, and there are many theologians who think that is what the verse is saying. However, in Ephesians 1:5 proorizō can also refer to God’s choosing the path or plan to salvation, determining ahead of time how people will receive everlasting life—in this case, that path or plan being by way of faith in Christ.

This latter explanation is the understanding of the verse that those denominations that believe in salvation by freewill choice hold to, and we believe it to be the proper one. In that sense, some versions have translated it “plan.” Phillips New Testament reads: “He planned, in his purpose of love, that we should be adopted as his own children through Jesus Christ.” The Source NT by A. Nyland also uses “plan.” David Stern’s translation, although not using “plan” makes it quite clear that the “plan” (i.e., what God determined in advance), was salvation through Christ. Stern translation reads, “He determined in advance that through Yeshua the Messiah we would be His sons....” (Complete Jewish Bible). The meaning of the verse could be expressed in the translation, “having determined beforehand, for Himself, that we would be adopted into His family through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will.”

Much of the problem in understanding this verse is caused by reading it in phrases instead of seeing the whole sentence. Notice that what God did was mark us out “to adoption...through Jesus Christ.” The New English Version reads, “and he destined us—such was his will and pleasure—to be accepted as his sons through Jesus Christ.” What is being “destined” is that salvation would come through Christ, and people would become saved when they accepted Christ.

There are many reasons why predestination can be seen to be a false doctrine. By “predestination,” we mean it in the Calvinistic sense that everything that happens is God’s will, and God chooses those who will be saved and those who will be condemned to Gehenna (not all “Calvinists” believe exactly that, but that is a major tenant of what John Calvin, and his followers such as Jonathan Edwards believed and taught). The doctrine of predestination and Calvinism are inextricably linked, and there are more erroneous doctrines in Calvinism than just predestination, so although most of the things below apply to predestination, it will also deal with what are to us are some of the more obvious errors in Calvinism. It is important to note that some people claim to be Calvinists without believing in what is referred to as “five-point” Calvinism, but for the purpose of this entry, a Calvinist is someone who adheres to the full teaching of five-point Calvinism, although most of the points below also apply to anyone who calls himself a Calvinist, including “four-point” Calvinists.

1). Calvinism makes God unloving. It asserts that God condemns people to Hell just because He decided to. Calvinists and non-Calvinists argue over whether predestination is “single predestination” or “double predestination.” In double
predestination, God actively predestines some people to heaven and the rest to “Hell.” In single predestination, God predestines people to heaven, and people go to “Hell” due to their own sin.

To us and many other theologians the difference between double and single predestination is only semantic. If God predestines only some people to heaven, then by default He predestined the rest to Gehenna. Single-predestination Calvinists claim that God did not force sinners to sin, but by His predetermining the Fall of mankind, and by His unwillingness to help sinners escape sin, He rendered their sin certain, and thus actually predestined them to Gehenna.

We assert that since Calvinism teaches that people can only choose heaven when God enables them to, and it is God Himself who makes the decision not to enable the doomed to go to heaven, then in fact He does choose some people for Gehenna. Interestingly, double predestination Calvinists themselves say that “single predestination” is doubletalk: if God predestines one group, then by default He predestines the other.

As we stated, to us the doctrine of predestination makes God unloving. If a person motors a boat past a drowning man but does not rescue him even though he could have done so, we would say the man in the boat was unloving. Similarly, if God saves only those He chooses and leaves the rest to Gehenna even though He could have saved them, that makes God unloving.

2). **Calvinism makes God the author of sin and evil.** Since according to strict Calvinism everything that happens is God’s will, then the sin and evil that occur are His will also. Many Calvinists admit this, but refer to it as a necessary consequence of God’s sovereignty. To us, saying God is the author of sin and evil contradicts the most fundamental tenants of the Bible, and can on that basis be seen to be a false doctrine.

Some Calvinists try to explain that what looks evil to us is not really evil because it is in the master-plan of God. To us this is double-talk. Jesus said that we could know people by their fruit. God defines love in many places, among them 1 Corinthians 13. If God is the author of sin and evil, then either love is not what He says it is, or He is not loving. The easy and biblical solution is that Calvinism is wrong, and God is not the author of sin or evil.

3). **Calvinism forces God to have two different wills.** Some Calvinists refer to these as God’s decretive will (His sovereign and efficacious will; it is what will happen) and God’s preceptive will [From the word “precept,” it is what He commands]. The reason that Calvinism forces God to have two different wills is that God has hundreds of commands in which He tells us to behave in a certain way (“Do not steal,” “Do not commit adultery,” etc.), and yet via predestination He made it certain that people would sin and break those very commands. For example, according to Calvinism, God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree in the middle of the Garden (His preceptive will), while at the same time having determined from eternity past that they would eat of the tree (His decretive will) in disobedience to His command.

To us this makes God schizophrenic and it certainly seems to contradict the Scripture that God cannot lie. If God commands us not to do something while willing and predetermining that we do it, then He is a liar. The fact that Calvinism forces God to have two different wills that often contradict one another is to us clear proof the doctrine is false.
4). **Calvinism makes it unavailable to read the Bible and believe it at face value.** According to Calvinism, an unregenerate person who is not empowered by God cannot choose to do anything good. Yet God asks everyone, in many different ways and places, to do good. For example, God asks people to “choose life” (Deut. 30:19), but according to Calvinism people cannot “choose life” on their own, but have to have God’s enabling power to do so.

In Ezekiel 33:11 God says, “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?” To us this verse makes no sense when read from a Calvinist point of view. The verse says God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but according to Calvinists, God gets glory from their death and He planned it in the first place. Furthermore, in the verse God is pleading with people to turn from their evil, but according to Calvinists, they cannot turn without God’s help. So God is pleading with them to do something He knows they cannot do. Worse, He could help them turn from their sin, but He refuses to. This makes God’s plea disingenuous and misleading.

On the other hand, if Ezekiel 33:11 is read from the point of view that people have freedom of will to choose good or evil, it makes perfect sense. God does not want anyone to be wicked and die, so He pleads with them to turn from their evil ways, and He saves them when they do.

There are many verses that do not make sense if Calvinism is correct. For example, God’s statement just prior to the Flood: “So the LORD said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground…for I am sorry that I have made them” (Gen. 6:7 RSV). If Calvinism is right, all those people God is sorry He made were doing exactly what He wanted them to do. So why is He sorry? Another example is Luke 7:30 (NIV84) “But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves…” Unless there is genuine freewill, how could anyone reject God’s purpose for themselves? Or, Isaiah 1:2 (NIV84), “…the LORD has spoken: ‘I reared children…but they have rebelled against me.” If everyone is doing what God predestined for their life, then no one is “rebelling” against God, they are all obeying Him. These examples could be multiplied a hundred fold, and they show that if Calvinism is correct, the Bible cannot be read and believed at face value.

5). **If Calvinism is correct, then we humans cannot trust our senses.** To us, we actually make choices, even the choice to accept Christ. Furthermore, God tells us that wisdom is the principle thing, and above all to be wise (Prov. 4:7). The reason wisdom is so important it that it enables us to discern good choices from bad ones. But if predestination is correct, we do not actually make the choice for Christ on our own, but God enables us to make the choice, which we then automatically make even though it feels like we are making the choice on our own. Similarly, unsaved people think they could choose Christ but simply refuse to, when that is not the case at all—they are actually unable to choose Christ.

6). **Calvinism claims that God never intended to save everyone, in direct contrast to the simple teaching of Scripture.** For example, the Bible says God so loved the “world” that He gave His Son, that “whosoever” believes will be saved. But that simple scripture contradicts the fundamental tenant of Calvinism that God never intended to save everyone in the world; only the ones He chose. Some Calvinists try to skirt this...
issue by redefining “world” or “whosoever” (and “all people” in 1 Tim. 2:4) by saying that these words are being used in a limited sense, not a universal sense, but there is no actual justification for that explanation other than it fits Calvinist doctrine.

There are Calvinists who admit that “world” and “whosoever” refers to everyone, but then they go so far as to say that God does love the “world,” and sending people to the Lake of Fire is an expression of His love because they get to suffer eternally for His glory. The old Calvinist saying is that, “those who find themselves suffering in hell can at least take comfort in the fact that they are there for the greater glory of God.” To us, this makes God, along with anyone else who torments people for their own glory, unlovable. To us, God saying that He loved the world and sent His Son to save anyone who would believe is simple and straightforward, and shows that people do indeed have genuine freedom of will.

7). If Calvinism is correct, evil does not actually exist. Many Calvinists assert that everything—every single thing—that happens is God’s will; God predestined and controls everything that happens on earth. Since, by definition, God is good and God is love, that means that everything that happens is good and loving but people cannot see that because they cannot see “the big picture of God’s master plan.”

We disagree, and say that God gave us His Word to teach us about Him and life, and it clearly reveals good and how to act in a good way, and evil and what kinds of thoughts and actions are evil. The Bible even says, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil” (Isa. 5:20). By making everything that happens part of God’s master-plan and predestined by God Himself, we assert that Calvinists make evil into good. Furthermore, the Bible clearly distinguishes between good and evil, so Calvinism cannot be right in making everything God’s will and therefore good.

8). Calvinism creates a paradox for Christians. It makes God the author of sin and evil. The Bible tells us to be imitators of God (Eph. 5:1), so to do that we would have to sin and cause evil. But the Bible commands Christians not to sin and do evil. Since we are not fully imitating God unless we cause some sin and evil, but since causing sin and evil is breaking God’s commands, Calvinism creates an obeyable paradox for Christians.

The simple and biblical answer to the paradox is that God is not the author of sin and evil. As the Bible says, God is good and loving, and He commands us to be that way too. Some people say they are Calvinists and also assert that God does not cause sin, He only “permits” it. However, Calvinism asserts that God is the Author and Designer behind every action and event, and everything that happens is according to His will, so to then say He only permits sin is a contradiction and doubletalk. The only way that there can be sin without God’s being the Author of it is for people to have genuine freewill.

9). Some Calvinists claim that people do have free will even though God predetermines their destiny. To believe those seemingly contradictory things, Calvinists who assert there is free will define it as a person doing what he wants to do even though he cannot make a choice to do something else. For those Calvinists, the fallen nature of man and God’s predestination makes it certain that people whom God does not help are only able to make bad choice after bad choice, but those bad choices are “freely” made. We would answer that if a person cannot choose to do anything other than what he is doing, he does not have freewill. He certainly does not have the freewill to choose everlasting life with God rather than Gehenna.
We assert that the historic Armenian or libertarian definition of free will is the correct definition: the ability to decide to do, and do, other than what one is doing. According to this definition of free will, a sinner can make the decision to stop sinning and accept God’s offer of salvation.

10). Calvinism overstates the power of the fallen nature of mankind. While it is true that every human is fallen and has a sin nature, Calvinists teach that the fallen nature makes it unavailable for the unsaved to make a truly “good” choice, such as choosing salvation. Calvinists teach that fallen man can only make the choice to do one bad thing over another, but not to choose a “good” thing instead of a bad thing. However, this is just an assumption made to fit their theology. There is no verse that says the fallen nature of mankind keeps people from making a good choice. Quite the opposite. When we read the Bible in a simple and straightforward way we can see that God asks fallen people to choose Him and salvation. Furthermore, it shows that God is upset and angry when unsaved people do not make the choice to do good. Unsaved people make “good” choices all the time; choices about their money, jobs, friends, health, etc. Making the choice to live forever instead of die is a “naturally” wise choice, like eating healthy and exercising to live better and longer is a “naturally” wise choice. Neither of those wise choices takes divine intervention.

11). Calvinism distorts repentance and forgiveness. Forgiveness, in any meaningful sense of the word, presupposes guilt. And there are conditions that must be met in order for a person to be guilty: for one thing, the person must be responsible in some way. A person is not responsible for something he did not do and could not prevent, or for something he could not help but do.

If Calvinism is true, then God did not create people with the ability to make a “good” decision without His help; especially the decision to repent and ask God to forgive their sin. But if a person cannot repent on his own, then God cannot righteousness hold him responsible for not repenting. It would not be righteous or loving for God to hold people accountable for something they cannot do. Yet the Bible presents “repentance” as something that every person is asked to do: “...now he [God] commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30; cp. Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15; 6:12; Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 26:20).

The straightforward reading of the Bible is that God asks everyone to repent, which means that people have the ability to obey God’s command if they want to of their own free will. Calvinism is forced to say that God asks “all people everywhere” to repent, but it is not a genuine invitation because He knows He is asking them to do something they cannot do—actually, He is being disingenuous. Or, Calvinism is forced to say that the phrase “all people everywhere” uses “all” in the restrictive sense of “all those He plans to save anyway.” But that causes another problem: Since Calvinism teaches “irresistible grace,” is it really accurate to say that God “commands” people to do something they cannot help but do? Can God meaningfully command us to breathe, for example? The fact that John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, Paul, and others faced crowds of unbelievers and commanded them to repent is prima fascia evidence that they had free will and could do what they were being asked to do.

12). Calvinism makes Jesus’ statement, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9), meaningless, in fact, erroneous. According to Calvinism, there are many, many people God could save that He refuses to, and instead has them suffer in
torment in Gehenna. Furthermore, God is the ultimate cause of every disaster. We cannot imagine Jesus allowing anyone to suffer if he could have helped that person, and we cannot imagine Jesus causing disasters. Jesus taught us that we would know evil people by their fruit, and if Calvinists are correct that God is in control of the world today, then the fruit of His control is horrible. In general, the world is a hard and dangerous place. We believe God so loved mankind He gave control of the world to Adam and Eve who ended up giving it to the Devil (Luke 4:6), and the Devil is now in control of the world (1 John 5:19), and has the power of death (Heb. 2:14). Furthermore, there is a real, genuine war between Good and Evil (Dan. 10; John 8:42-45; John 10:10; Rev. 12:7), and God is good and fighting for good. Like Jesus, God is good, giving, selfless, and sacrificial. He gave His only Son so that anyone who wanted to could be saved, and then He honors our choice as to whether to accept salvation or not.

To see whether Calvin’s God was selfish or selfless all we need to do is ask the question, “Why would God willfully choose to not empower certain people to be saved, knowing they will then be damned forever?” Although a Calvinist might assert that why God did not save everyone is a mystery, the traditional Calvinist answer to that question is that God does all things for His glory, even predestining people to suffer in Gehenna. To us, caring more about our own glory than the well-being of others, and allowing others to suffer so we will be glorified, is the height of selfishness and is diametrically opposed to the loving character of God as set forth in Scripture.

13). It is a common Calvinist claim that if God is not totally in control of life, then God would not be God. Our answer to that assertion is, “Who says?” There is no verse that says any such thing; that is just an unsupported assertion. God does not have to control the destiny and actions of everyone in order to be God. We assert just the opposite: that God is God because He is the way He plainly reveals Himself to be in His Word. He is loving and kind, and allows people to make their own freewill choice as to whether or not they want to spend eternity with Him.

In fact, we believe that if God is love, then He would not control the freewill choices angels and humans make. It is universally recognized that controlling other people who have the maturity to make their own decisions is not loving, kind, or even good. Humans are created in the image of God, and people resent it when others are overbearing, micromanaging, and controlling, and God made us to feel that way so we would do something about the situation and assert who we are as individual creations of God. So we believe that for “God to be God,” He cannot be using “irresistible grace” to control the decisions that people make.

14). Calvinism makes being an ambassador for Christ meaningless (2 Cor. 5:20). According to Calvinism, no one we approach with the Gospel can believe without God's help. But if God is the one who gives people the ability to see the truth and get saved, then they can see the value of Christ on their own without our help. Churches that are Calvinistic, such as the Presbyterian Church, never do altar calls or ask if anyone wants to be saved, because they do not believe that anyone’s response matters. They assert that God will save those He wants saved. This contradicts the command in Scripture that we witness for Christ and try to spread the Gospel.

Scripture says, “We plead on Christ’s behalf, ‘Be reconciled to God.’” (2 Cor. 5:20 HCSB). We assert that God has made us ambassadors for Christ and told us to plead
with others on behalf of Christ because the need to hear about the Gospel in order to
make their own choice for Christ out of the freedom of their will.

15). Calvinism is not uncontestably supported by Scripture, as many
Calvinists claim. The verses that seem to support predestination and Calvinism in some
translations, such as Ephesians 1:5 and Romans 8:28, can all be either translated, or
understood, in a non-Calvinist way. In contrast, there are hundreds of very simple and
clear verses that support genuine freedom of will. These verses, such as John 3:16, have
to misread or redefined by Calvinists to fit their theology.

God authored the Bible so that the average believer could read it understand the
heart and message of God, and there are hundreds of plain and straightforward verses in
which God asks people to choose Him, to have faith in Christ, obey God, etc. The
message of free will and personal responsibility for accepting or rejecting God is
throughout the Bible and is clearly and simply written. God wants all people to be saved;
He so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whosoever believed would be
saved; and He pleads with us to “choose life.”
Appendix 9. Fool and Foolish

Fool and related words:

**Anoetos** (453) “without noeo (3539).” *Nooe* = to perceive or observe with the mind. Thus it is “without comprehension; lacking intelligence; unreflecting.” Used of one who is unwilling to use one’s mental faculty to understand; also used of one who does not govern his lusts and acts out his passions without thinking. Foolish, unthinking.

“Unthinking; foolish.”
- Christ told the two men on the way to Emmaus they were “foolish” and “slow of heart to believe” (Luke 24:25).
- The Galatians were foolish because although they had believed in the risen Christ, they wanted back under the law, and although they had believed in justification by faith, they wanted back under works (Gal. 3:1; 3:3).

**Anoia** (454). “without nous (3563).” *Nous* = mind, the organ of mental perception.

Folly, madness, lack of understanding (with the implication there is an unwillingness to understand). “Irrational.”
- When Christ healed the man with the crippled hand, the religious leaders were filled with *anoia*, they became as insane, mad (as in the “mad hatter” of Alice in Wonderland), totally without reason (Luke 6:11).
- The men of depraved minds who oppose the truth are *anoia* (2 Tim. 3:9).

**Aphron** (878). “without phren (5424).” The *phren* is the diaphragm, that which restrains. Thus figuratively it is used of the mind, the seat of mental and emotional activity, which governs one’s life. *Phren* means the mind, the disposition, feelings. Thus *aphron* = imprudent, inconsiderate, rash, senseless, unwise, foolish, destitute of sound principle. “Senseless.”
- The man who had goods for years and said “Eat, drink and be merry” is senseless, rash (Luke 12:20).
- Paul said he had become a fool, a senseless one, in his boasting (2 Cor. 12:11).
- Christians are realize the seriousness of the times and not be fools be senseless, acting without restraint by getting drunk and wasting time (Eph. 5:17).

**Aphrosune** (877). Feminine noun from aphron. Not using the capacity for understanding. Folly, foolishness, lack of sense, unwise. “Senselessness.”
- Paul told the Corinthians to bear with him in his “folly,” his senselessness, (figure of speech: irony) as he fought for them against the “super-apostles” (2 Cor. 11:1, 17).

**Asosoph** (781). “without sophos (4680).” *Sophos* = wise, prudent, skilled, knowledgeable. Thus: Unwise, foolish, not walking the way God expects. Used only once. “Unwise.”
- Christians are not to be unwise (asosophos), but wise (sophos) (Eph. 5:15).

**Asunetos** (801) “without sunetos (4908).” *SUNETOS* = to reason out, perceive, understand, gain insight. Thus asunetos is to be without understanding or without insight.

“Without understanding; devoid of understanding.”
- Jesus was amazed that the disciples had no understanding, no insight, into what he had taught (Mat. 15:16).
• Those who reject God and have no understanding became darkened (Rom. 1:21).

Kenos (2756). “Empty, hollow.” When used of people, the implication is that since they are “empty” concerning good or godliness, and since nature abhors a vacuum, evil of some type has filled the void. Empty, vain, fruitless, false (empty words are false for the simple reason that they are not true). “Empty; worthless, empty-headed.”

• The son of the landowner was sent away empty, with nothing (Mark 12:3).
• If Christ is not raised from the dead, Paul’s preaching is “empty” and so is our faith (1 Cor. 15:14).
• Let no man deceive you with empty words (Eph. 5:6)
• Do you not know, O empty-headed man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:20).

Moros (3474). Used of people who are foolish, dull or silly with an emphasis on moral worthlessness. The moros person is a fool, uncultured, uncouth, with no discernment, committing countless blunders, in a stupor in the face of God’s revelation. Versus raka (4469). Moros scorns one’s heart and character. “Fool; no-good.”

• If you call someone a “no-good” you will be in danger of Gehenna (Matt. 5:22)
• Christ called the Pharisees “no-goods” and blind (Matt. 23:17).
• The virgins were “no-goods” and did not bring oil (Matt. 25:2, 3, 8).
• God’s most no-good, foolishness is still wiser than men (1 Cor. 1:25).
• God chose the no-goods of the world to confound the wise (1 Cor. 1:27).
• Avoid “no-good” questions (Titus 3:9).

Raka (4469). Empty, therefore foolish, stupid, worthless. This scorns the mind and calls the man “Stupid,” whereas moros scorns his heart and character. “Stupid.”

• The man who calls someone “Stupid!” will be in danger of a lawsuit (Matt. 5:22).

Skotizomai (4654) “to darken.” Figuratively used of moral darkness (Rom. 1:21; 11:10).
• but their thinking (dialogismos = internal dialogue) became futile and their foolish (asunetos) hearts became darkened.

Tuphlos (5185) “to envelope with smoke,” i.e., to be unable to see clearly. Hence, “blind.” The common word used when one is blind in the eyes. Figuratively, unable to comprehend, unable to see the end result of the action one is taking. Usually translated “blind.”

• Jesus called the religious leaders, “Fools and blind!” (Matt 23:17)

Tuphloo (5186) “to blind.”

From the dictionary:
Fool = One who is regarded as deficient in judgment, sense or understanding.

From the thesaurus: English words close to fool.

Appendix 10. The Greek Words for Prayer

Pray, a prayer.

The Greek verb euchomai (#2172 εὔχομαι) and the noun euche (#2171 εὐχή) are prayer in the general sense. The verb euchomai is used 7 times, and the noun euche 3 times. The semantic range of these words includes to pray to God, and prayer in the general sense; and it can include the idea of wishing, i.e., to wish. The noun euche can also mean a vow, and of its three uses, twice it is used to mean vow (Acts 18:18; 21:23) and once to mean prayer (James 5:15).

Our Translation:
(1) “To pray” (Five uses of euchomai: Acts 27:29; 2 Cor. 13:7; 13:9; James 5:16; 3 John 1:2)
(2) “To wish” (Two uses of euchomai: Acts 26:29; Rom. 9:3). The usage in Acts 26:29 employs the optative mood of the verb, which signifies wishing or possibility (Dana and Mantey, §164); Rom. 9:3, on the other hand, is the “potential imperfect” indicating “I could wish,” (Robertson; Grammar, p. 886).
(4) “A prayer” (One use of euche: James 5:15).

Pray, a prayer.

The Greek verb proseuchomai (#4336 προσεύχομαι) and its noun form proseuche (#4335 προσευχή), like euchomai and euche, denote prayer in the more general sense. This means the content of the prayer may include various specific requests (aitema), supplications (deēsis), intercessions (enteuxis), etc. However proseuchomai and proseuche are only used as prayer to God (the prefix pros means towards)—whereas euchomai and deēsis are not restricted in this way (Trench, Synonyms). It generally “seems to indicate not so much the contents of the prayer as its end and aim” (Thayer).

Our Translation:
(1) “To pray” (85 verb uses).
(2) “Prayer” (36 noun uses).

Ask; question.

Erōtaō (#2065 ἔρωταω) is a Greek word for ask, and can mean (1) to ask a question or (2) to ask a request, i.e., entreat, beg, beseech. We have chosen the English ask to represent both meanings. One must examine the context to see if the asking is done to seek information or to acquire action of some kind. According to Thayer, erōtaō puts the emphasis on the “request [of] a person to do (rarely to give) something; referring more directly to the person, it is naturally used in exhortation.” Whereas aiteō “signifies to ask for something to be given not done, giving prominence to the thing asked for rather than the person and hence is rarely used in exhortation” (under aiteō entry). However, not all lexicons agree on this distinction; see aiteō below.

Our Translation:
(1) “Ask” (58 verb uses).
(2) “Question” (1 verb use: John 16:30). Erōtaō was translated “question” in John 16:30 for sake of clarity: “We know that you know all things, and do not need that any man should question you.” The context shows that Christ has no need for anyone to ask him questions, because he is speaking plainly, i.e., not in parables.

Ask, request.

The Greek verb aiteō (#154 αἰτέω), like erōtaō, means to ask. Its noun form aitēma (#155 αἰτήμα) means “that which is being asked for,” i.e., requests. “In distinction from deēsis, aitēma points to the content of the request” while deēsis points to the urgency or need of the request (TDNT).

Lexicographers differ regarding the distinction between aiteō and erōtaō. Some think the two words were interchangeable. But others, such as Trench, Bullinger, and Vine hold that aiteō is more submissive, being used by an inferior to a superior, while erōtaō implies a more equal footing between the two parties. The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament agrees: “aiteō seems to presuppose a lesser degree of intimacy than erōtaō.” The entire Greco-Roman world was built on a patronage system, with sharp distinctions between classes, ranks, and the “haves” and “have nots,” so it makes sense that there would be different words for asking an equal for something and asking a superior for something. However, since that distinction does not clearly exist in our culture or the English language, it is difficult to bring into modern English.

Thayer and some other scholars, on the other hand, reject this understanding. Thayer claims the difference between the words lies not in the “relative dignity of the person asking and the person asked” but rather, in emphasizing the thing being given (aiteō) verse placing the emphasis on the person being asked to do something (erōtaō). But even if he is right, it remains difficult to see what English words would bring this distinction over from the Greek. Thus we have chosen ask to represent both erōtaō and aiteō.

Our Translation:
(1) “Ask” (70 verb uses).
(2) “A request” (3 noun uses: Luke 23:24; Phil. 4:6; 1 John 5:15).

Implore, supplication.

The Greek verb deomai (#1189 δέομαι) and the noun deēsis (#1162 δέησις) also means to ask, but connotes urgency and necessity. “To make known one’s need, urgently request, supplicate, beseech” (Bullinger, Lexicon). The noun form deēsis is specifically petitionary as opposed to the more general proseuche. The former usually emphasizes the “particular benefits” of the thing being asked for (Trench, Synonyms). Further, deēsis can be used in relation to man, while proseuche is used only to God. Commenting on the differences, Thayer writes, “In 1 Tim. 2:1 to these two words is added enteuxis, which expresses confiding access to God; thus, in combination, deēsis gives prominence to the expression of personal need, proseuche to the element of devotion, enteuxis to that of childlike confidence, by representing prayer as the heart’s converse with God.” The English term “implore” captures the sense of urgency implied in the Greek, while “supplication” denotes the earnest, humble sense of the noun.
Our Translation:
(1) “Implore” (22 verb uses).
(2) “Supplication” (18 noun uses).

Entreat, call on, beg, urge.
The Greek verb *parakaleō* (παρακαλέω) and its noun form *paraklēsis* (παράκλησις) have a very wide range of meaning. Further, they appear quite often in scripture (109 verb uses; 29 noun uses). The words’ basic meaning is *to call to one’s side.* “To call some one hither, that he may do something…to use persuasion with him” (Bullinger). The calling along can be meant to appeal or plead; encourage or urge; to comfort; summon or invite; only once is it applied to God and that by the Lord Jesus (Matt 26:53).

Our Translation:
Verb Forms: (106 uses).

(2) “Call on.” (Matt. 26:53).
(4) “Exhort.” (Luke 3:18; Acts 2:40; 11:23; 14:22; 1 Cor. 16:12; 2 Cor. 6:1; Phil. 4:2; 1 Thess. 2:11; 4:1; 2 Thess. 3:12; 1 Tim. 6:2; 2 Tim 4:2; Tit. 2:15; Heb. 3:13; 10:25; 13:22; 1 Pet. 5:1; 5:12).
(6) “Plead.” (Acts. 21:12; Matt. 8:34; Mark 5:17; 2 Cor. 12:8).
(7) “Encouraged.” (Acts 15:32; 16:40; 20:1; 20:2; Rom. 12:8; 2 Cor. 13:11; Eph. 6:22; Col. 2:2; 4:8; 1 Thess. 5:11; 1 Tim. 5:1; Tit. 1:9; 2:6).
(8) “Appeal.” (2 Cor. 5:20; Philem. 1:9; 1:10).

Noun Forms: (29 uses).

(1) “Consolation” (Luke 2:25 Consolation emphasizes the alleviating of grief or the mitigating of the sense of loss,” whereas comfort “implies imparting cheer, strength, or encouragement as well as lessening pain.” (Webster’s dict. of syn.) In the context of waiting for Israel’s redemption from Roman rule, consolation seems to be emphasized); (2) “Comfort” (Luke 6:24; 2 Cor. 1:3; 1:4; 1:5; 1:6; 1:7; 7:4; 7:7; 7:13; 2 Thess. 2:16).
(3) “Encouragement” (Acts. 4:36; 9:31; 15:31; Rom. 12:8; 15:4; 15:5; 1 Cor. 14:3; Phil. 2:1; Philem. 1:7; Heb. 6:18; 12:5).
(5) “Pleading” (2 Cor. 8:4).
(6) “Appeal” (2 Cor. 8:17; 1 Thess. 2:3 (following appeal in Rom. 5:20)).

Intercession, petition.

The Greek verb entynchanō (#1793 ἐντυγχάνω) has a basic meaning of “to fall in or happen with.” This falling in occurs when one party meets with another especially for the purpose of supplication or making intercession or petition on behalf of another. Thus the noun enteuxis (#1783 ἔντευξις) is a falling in with, a coming together esp. for the purpose of making petition on behalf of someone or something. The interceding may also be for negative purposes (Acts 25:24; Romans 11:2), which we have represented with the word petition. When applied to God, enteuxis implies free familiarity in the prayer (Trench).

In his Word Studies in the New Testament, Marvin Vincent takes the position that the meaning is deeper than just intercession of one party for another, and that included with it is the idea of personal involvement. Vincent says, “The verb signifies to fall in with a person; to draw near so as to converse familiarly hence, ἔντευξις is not intercession in the properly accepted sense of that term, but rather approach to God in free and familiar prayer. ἔντυγχανειν is not “to make intercession” but to “intervene, interfere” thus in Romans 8:26 it is not that the Spirit pleads on our behalf, but that he throws himself into our case; takes part in it. So Hebrews 7:25: not that Jesus is ever interceding for us, but that he is eternally meeting us at every point, and intervening in all our affairs for our benefit. In ἔντευξις here the idea of interposition is prominent: making prayers a factor in relations with secular rulers.” (Vincent’s Word Studies, Vol. IV, p. 216; not on 1 Tim. 2:1).

Our Translation:

(1) “Petition:” (2 verb uses: Acts 25:24; Romans 11:2)
(2) “Intercession:” (3 verb uses: Rom 8:27; 8:34; Heb. 7:25).
(3) “Intercession” (2 noun uses: 1Tim. 2:1; 4:5).

Intercede.

The Greek verb huperentynchanō (#5241 ὑπερεντυγχάνω) is simply the verb entynchanō with the prefix huper. It means to intercede on behalf of another; the huper emphasizes that the intercession is on behalf of another and that it is above and beyond. Interestingly, its only occurrence is found in Romans 8:26 where “the spirit itself intercedes for us.”

Our Translation:

(1) “Intercedes” (1 verb use: Rom. 8:26).
Appendix 11. Greek Prepositions

Why Prepositions Are Important:
There are seventeen prepositions in the Greek language, and each can perform several functions. It is very important to understand the uses of prepositions, for nearly every verse in the New Testament contains them, and the meaning of a verse can be drastically affected by the meaning of a preposition. For example, note the difference in meaning between the translations, “I have sinned against heaven” and “I have sinned for heaven” (Luke 15:18). The difference is explained by the uses of the preposition *eis*; the preposition *eis* can mean “for” (e.g., Rom. 15:26) or “against” (e.g., Luke 12:10). In this case, what *eis* means is very obvious: it is the *eis* of disadvantage (“against”) rather than advantage (“for”). However, many times the context is not as clear, and translators then go by their theology, their particular understanding of the scope of Scripture, in their choice of how the preposition is to be translated. Usually, the translators of the Bible do a good job of translating the prepositions, but occasionally a Christian might question the translation of a preposition, and at those times it is beneficial for each of us to know the various meanings of the prepositions so that we know the possible ways a verse can be translated.

General Information:
• Prepositions stand in relation to nouns and verbs—they further define and explain how a verb’s action is related to a noun.
  o E.g., “Jesus came into the house” (Matt. 9:23). The preposition *into* relates how the action of the verb *came* is related to the noun *house*. Jesus did not come “beside” the house, “upon” the house, “through” the house, or “away from” the house, but *into* the house.
• To properly understand how a preposition modifies a noun, it is important to know the case of the noun being modified.
  o Some prepositions only take one case, meaning all nouns modified by such prepositions are always in that one and same case.
    ▪ E.g., *ek*, meaning “out,” takes the genitive, so all nouns being modified by *ek* will be in the genitive case: in the phrase “out of Egypt” (Heb. 3:16) the noun *Egypt* is in the genitive case.
  o However, some prepositions take multiple cases, and the meaning of the preposition will depend on the case of the noun.
    ▪ E.g., the preposition *dia* can modify nouns in the genitive or accusative case. If the noun is in the genitive it will most likely be translated *through* (e.g., Acts 20:3), but if in the accusative it will be translated *because of, for the sake of* (e.g., John 2:24).
    ▪ You cannot mix the uses from case to case. E.g., if *dia* modifies a noun in the genitive, you cannot translate the preposition to read “because of.”

Procedure for Researching a Preposition:
1. Using an interlinear, Bible software, or concordance, find out what the Greek preposition is in the verse you are studying.
2. Find out what noun it modifies. (E.g., in the phrase, “Jesus went into the house,” the preposition into is modifying the noun house).
3. Find out the case of the noun being modified. (E.g., house is in the accusative case).
4. Using the list below, find the possible uses of the preposition for that case.
5. Determine from the context and scope of scripture which usage is most likely.


**Ana** (#303 ἀνά): Ana only takes one case, the accusative. When ana modifies a noun, the noun will be in the accusative case and the preposition will be understood in one of these four ways:
1. Distributed: in the midst of, among.
   E.g., “his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat” (Matt. 13:25).
2. Spatial (used as a prefix to verbs): up
   E.g., “David did not ascend into the heavens” (Acts 2:34).
3. Sequential: in sequence, in turn
   E.g., “let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn” (1 Cor. 14:27).
4. Distributive with numbers: each, a piece
   E.g., “each one of the gates was a single pearl” (Rev. 21:21).

**Anti** (#473 ἀντί): Anti only takes the genitive case. When anti modifies a noun, the noun will be in the genitive case and the preposition will be understood in one of these three ways:
1. Substitution: on behalf of, in place of
   E.g., “you will find a coin; take that and give it to them for you and me” (Matt. 17:27).
2. Exchange: for, as, in the place of
   E.g., “See that no one repays anyone evil for evil” (1 Thess. 5:15).
3. Causal: because of, for the purpose of
   E.g., “you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words” (Luke 1:20; Eph. 5:31).

**Apo** (#575 ἀπό): Apo only takes the genitive case. When apo modifies a noun, the noun will be in the genitive case and the preposition will be understood in one of these five ways:
1. Separation: away from a person or place
   E.g., “cut off from Christ” (Rom. 9:3).
2. Source: from, out from
E.g., “there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation” (Acts 2:5).

3. Causal: because of, on account of
   E.g., “he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not” (Luke 19:3).

4. Partitive (in place of partitive genitive): of, from
   E.g., “a man from the crowd cried out” (Luke 9:38).

5. Agency/Means (very rare): from
   E.g., “The merchants… who became rich from her will stand at a distance” (Rev. 18:15; cp. John 7:28 for agency).

**Dia** (#1223 δία): Dia can modify a noun in either the genitive or the accusative case.

With Genitive:
1. Agency: by, through
   E.g., “the Lord had spoken by the prophet” (Matt. 1:22).
2. Means: through, by means of
   E.g., “Though I have many things to write to you, I don't want to do so with paper and ink” (2 John 1:12).
3. Spatial: through
   E.g., “he decided to return through Macedonia” (Acts 20:3).
4. Temporal: throughout, during
   E.g., “they were continually [lit. ‘through everything’] in the temple” (Luke 24:53).

With Accusative:
1. Causal: because of, on account of, for the sake of
   E.g., “They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold” (Acts 28:2).
2. Spatial (very rare): through
   E.g., “Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee” (Luke 17:11).

**Eis** (#1519 εἰς): Eis only takes the accusative case. When eis modifies a noun, the noun will be in the accusative case and the preposition will be understood in one of the following ten ways:
1. Spatial: into, towards, in
   E.g., “he stood up and went to his home” (Matt. 9:7).
2. Temporal: for, throughout
   E.g., “the one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matt. 10:22).
3. Degree: up to, completely
   E.g., “wrath has overtaken them completely” (1 Thess. 2:16).
4. Purpose: in order that, to, for
5. Result: so that, with the result that
   E.g., “you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.” Cp. NIV: “you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us” (2 Cor. 7:9).
6. Reference/Respect: with respect to, with reference to
   E.g., “It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile” (Luke 14:35; cp. 2 Tim. 4:11).
7. Advantage: for
   E.g., “make a contribution for the poor” (Rom. 15:26; cp. Col. 1:25).
8. Disadvantage: against
9. Instrumental (very rare): by, with
   E.g., “You received the law as transmitted by angels” (Acts 7:53; cp. Mark 5:34).
10. Used in place of en: in
    E.g., “And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter” (Mark 10:10; cp. Luke 9:61). [Note: eis here does not mean “into” but is used like en, meaning simply “in”].

**Ek** (#1537 ἐκ): Ek only takes the genitive case. When ek modifies a noun, the noun will be in the genitive case and the preposition will be understood in one of these six ways:
1. Source: out of, from
   E.g., “she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:18; Luke 3:8).
2. Separation: away from, from
   E.g., “Out of Egypt I called my son” (Matt. 2:15).
3. Temporal: from
   E.g., “he saw a man blind from birth” (John 9:1; Acts 15:21).
4. Causal: because of
   E.g., “And if by grace, then is it no more of works” (Rom. 11:6; cp. Mark 9:15).
5. Partitive (in place of partitive genitive): of, from
   E.g., “they will put some of you to death” (Luke 21:16; cp. 2 John 1:4).
6. Means: by, from
   E.g., “supporting them from their possessions” (Luke 8:3; cp. 16:9).

**En** (#1722 ἐν): En only takes the dative case. When en modifies a noun, the noun will be in the dative case and the preposition will be understood in one of these ten ways:
1. Sphere: in
   E.g., “I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences” (2 Cor. 5:11).
2. Spatial: in
   E.g., “there was a woman in the city who was a sinner” (Luke 7:37).
3. Temporal: in, while, during
   E.g., “in the days of Herod the king” (Matt. 2:1; cp. Matt. 11:22).
4. Association: with
   E.g., “the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (John 10:38; cp. John 14:20).
5. Causal: because of
6. Instrumental: by, with
E.g., “[Will not the King] consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand” (Luke 14:31).
7. Agency/Means: by means of
E.g., “the Pharisees said, ‘He casts out demons by the prince of demons’” (Matt. 9:34).
8. Thing possessed: with, which possesses
E.g., “there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit” (Mark 1:23; cp. Eph. 6:2).
9. Standard/Dative of Rule: according to the standard of
E.g., “as to the righteousness which is in the Law, [I was] found blameless” (Phil. 3:6; cp. 2 Tim. 3:16).
10. Used in place of eis with verbs of motion
E.g., “to turn… the disobedient to the wisdom of the just” (Luke 1:17; 9:46).

**Epi** (#1909 ἐπί): The preposition *epi* can modify nouns in the genitive, dative, or accusative case.

With Genitive:
1. Spatial (with places, things): on, upon, at, near
   E.g., “he was alone on land” (Mark 6:47; John 21:1).
2. Spatial (with persons): before, in the presence of
   E.g., “you will stand before governors and kings for my sake” (Mark 13:9).
3. Temporal: in the time of, during
   E.g., “This happened during the reign of Claudius” (Acts 11:28; cp. 1 Pet. 1:20).

With Dative:
1. Spatial: on, upon, against, at, near
   E.g., “recognize that He is near, right at the door” (Mark 13:29).
2. Temporal: at, at the time at, during
   E.g., “he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages” (Heb. 9:26).
3. Causal: on the basis of
   E.g., “Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4; Acts 4:21).

With Accusative:
1. Spatial: on, upon, to, up to, against
   E.g., “Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion” (Mark 4:38).
2. Temporal: for, over a period of
   E.g., “the sky was shut up for three years and six months” (Luke 4:25; cp. Acts 3:1).
3. Purpose: for
   E.g., “when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them…” (Matt. 3:7).
**Kata** (#2596 κατά): The preposition *kata* can modify nouns in either the genitive or accusative case.

With Genitive:
1. Spatial: down from, throughout
   E.g., “the whole herd rushed *down* the steep bank into the sea and drowned” (Matt. 8:32).
2. Opposition: *against*
   E.g., “whoever speaks *against* the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven” (Matt. 12:32; Mark 14:55).

With Accusative:
1. Standard: in accordance with, corresponding to
   E.g., “purification *according to* the Law of Moses” (Luke 2:22; cp. 1 Cor. 15:3).
2. Spatial: *along, through* (extension); *toward, up to* (direction)
   E.g., “in the synagogues or *throughout* the city” (Acts 24:12; cp. Acts 16:7).
3. Temporal: *at, during*
   E.g., “*At* the appointed time I will return” (Rom. 9:9; Heb. 1:10).
4. Distributive (dividing a whole into parts):
   E.g., “*one by one* they said to him, ‘Surely not I?’” (Mark 14:19; cp. Rom. 12:5).
5. Purpose: for the purpose of
   E.g., “there were six stone water jars there *for* the Jewish rites of purification” (John 2:6).
6. Reference/Respect: with respect to, with reference to
   E.g., “Not that I speak *in respect of want*”-KJV (Phil. 4:11).

**Meta** (#3326 μετά): The preposition *meta* can modify nouns in either the genitive or accusative case.

With Genitive:
1. Association/Accompaniment: *with, in company with*
   E.g., “a servant girl came up to him and said, “You also were *with* Jesus the Galilean” (Matt. 26:69).
2. Spatial: *with, among*
   E.g., “He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place *with* the unbelievers (Luke 12:46; cp. Luke 24:5).
3. Manner (Attendant Circumstance): *with*
   E.g., “…and then you will begin *with* shame to take the lowest place” (Luke 14:9; cp. Eph. 6:7).

With Accusative:
1. Temporal: *after, behind*
2. Spatial (very rare): *after, behind*
   E.g., “*Behind* the second veil there was a tabernacle” (Heb. 9:3).

**Para** (#3844 παρά): The preposition *para* can modify nouns in the genitive, dative, or accusative case.
With Genitive: *from the side of:*
1. Source/Spatial: *from*
   E.g., “I will send to you *from* the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds *from* the Father” (John 15:26; cp. Luke 2:1).
2. Agency: *from, by*
   E.g., “This came about *from the Lord*”-NASB (Matt. 21:42; cp. John 1:6).

With Dative: suggesting *proximity* or nearness.
1. Spatial: *near, beside*
   E.g., “[Jesus] took a little child and had him stand beside him” (Luke 9:47).
2. Sphere: in the sight of, before (someone)
   E.g., “the hearers of the law are not righteous *before* God, but the doers of the law” (Rom. 2:13; cp. 1 Cor. 3:19).
3. Association: *with* (someone/something)
   E.g., “Peter stayed in Joppa for some time *with* a tanner named Simon (Acts 9:43).

With Accusative:
1. Spatial: *by, alongside of, near, on*
   E.g., “Jesus was walking *beside* the Sea of Galilee” (Matt. 4:18).
2. Comparison: in comparison to, more than
   E.g., “One person esteems one day as better *than* another” (Rom. 14:5).
3. Opposition: against, contrary to
   E.g., “watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles *contrary* to the doctrine that you have been taught” (Rom. 16:17; Gal. 1:8).
4. Causal (very rare): *because of*
   E.g., “…it would not *for that reason* cease to be part of the body” (1 Cor. 12:15).

*Peri* (#4012 περί): The preposition peri can modify nouns in either the genitive or accusative case.

With Genitive:
1. Reference: concerning, about
   E.g., “all were questioning in their hearts *concerning* John, whether he might be the Christ” (Luke 3:15; Cp. Luke 19:37).
2. Advantage/Representation: *on behalf of, for*
   E.g., “Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God *for him*” (Acts 12:5; cp. Heb. 13:18).

With Accusative:
1. Spatial: *around, near*
2. Temporal: *about, near*
   E.g., “*About* the third hour he went out…” (Matt. 20:3; cp. Mark 6:48).
3. Reference/Respect: with regard to, with reference to
   E.g., “Show yourself *in all respects* to be a model of good works” (Tit. 2:7; cp. 1 Tim. 6:21).
Pro (4253 πρό): Pro only takes the genitive case. When pro modifies a noun, the noun will be in the genitive case and the preposition will be understood in one of these three ways:

1. Spatial: before, in front of, at
   E.g., “Peter was standing in front of the gate (Acts 12:14; cp. James 5:9).
2. Temporal: before
   E.g., “many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves” (John 11:55; cp. 2 Cor. 12:2).
3. Rank/Priority: before
   E.g., “But above all, my brothers, do not swear” (James 5:12; cp. 1 Pet. 4:8).

Pros (4314 πρός): Pros mostly takes the accusative case, although there is one occurrence with the genitive and six occurrences with the dative.

With Accusative:
1. Purpose: for, for the purpose of
   E.g., “[Moses] used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away” (Acts 3:10; 2 Cor. 3:13).
2. Spatial: toward, near
   E.g., “The whole town gathered at the door” (Mark 1:33; cp. Mark 5:11).
3. Temporal: toward, for (duration)
   E.g., “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent” (Luke 24:29; cp. 1 Thess. 2:17).
4. Result: so that, with the result that
   E.g., “I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death” (1 John 5:16; cp. 1 Cor. 14:26).
5. Opposition: against
   E.g., “Previously, they had been hostile toward each other”-HCSB (Luke 23:12; cp. Col. 3:13).
6. Association: with, in company with (used with stative verbs, i.e. verbs that explain states and are not used with the continuous tenses)
   E.g., “And are not all his sisters with us?” (Matt. 13:56; cp. 1 Thess. 3:4).

With Genitive (1 occurrence):
1. Advantage: for the advantage of
   E.g., “I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your preservation” (Acts 27:34).

With Dative (six occurrences).
1. Proximity: near, at, by
   E.g., “A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside (Mark 5:11; Luke 19:37; John 18:16; 20:11; 20:12; Rev. 1:13).

Sun (4862 σύν): The preposition sun only takes the dative case; when sun modifies a noun, it will indicate either accompaniment or association.

1. Accompaniment/Association: with, in association with
   E.g., “Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at the table” (John 12:2; cp. Phil. 2:22).
**Huper** (#5228 ὑπέρ): The preposition *huper* can modify nouns in either the genitive or accusative case.

**With Genitive**

1. **Representation/Advantage:** *on behalf of, for the sake of*
   - E.g., “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made *for everyone*” (1 Tim. 2:1; Acts 21:26).
2. **Reference/Respect:** concerning, with reference to
   - E.g., “And Isaiah cries out *concerning* Israel…” (Rom. 9:27; cp. 2 Cor. 1:8).
3. **Substitution:** in place of, instead of
   - E.g., “we are convinced that one died *for all*, and therefore all died” [One died “in place of” all] (Rom. 9:3; 2 Cor. 5:14; Philem. 1:13).

**With Accusative:**

1. **Spatial (very rare): over, above**
   - E.g., “*Above* the ark were the cherubim of the Glory” (Heb. 9:5).
2. **Comparison:** more than, beyond
   - E.g., “[Do not] be inflated with pride in favor of one person over another” (1 Cor. 4:6; cp. 1 Cor. 10:13).

**Hupo** (#5259 ὑπό): The preposition *hupo* can modify nouns in either the genitive or accusative case.

**With Genitive:**

1. **(Ultimate) Agency:** *by*
   - E.g., “This Jesus is the stone that was rejected *by* you, the builders” (Acts 4:11; cp. 2 Cor. 1:4).
2. **Intermediate Agency (with active verbs): through**
   - E.g., “[They were given power to kill] *by* the wild beasts of the earth” (Rev. 6:8).
3. **Means (very rare): by**
   - E.g., “[They] were destroyed *by* serpents (1 Cor. 10:9).

**With Accusative:**

1. **Spatial:** *under, below*
   - E.g., “Is a lamp brought in to be put *under* a basket, or *under* a bed, and not on a stand?” (Mark 4:21; cp. Luke 13:34).
2. **Subordination:** *under* (the rule of)
   - E.g., “For I myself am a man *under* authority, with soldiers *under* me” (Matt. 8:9; cp. Gal. 4:2)
Appendix 12. The Role of Women in the Church

1 Corinthians 14:34-35: One of the advantages of living in our modern age is that we continue to improve in our ability to reconstruct the “original” text. Of course this is of inestimable value because the original God-breathed Word is priceless, but it also allows us to see into the mindset of the copyists who sometimes altered the text. Although often changes to the biblical text were just simple copying mistakes, sometimes they were an attempt to “correct” the Bible, and reflected the theology and culture of the time. When scholars encounter a word (or words) that is in some ancient manuscripts but not in others, they have certain tests they apply to see whether the word was added to the original, or omitted from it. Scholars consider things such as age of the manuscripts, the type or style of the writing, the ink that is used, and the “manuscript family” the texts come from. A very important principle in finding the original text is that the more difficult reading tends to be original. That is because scribes tended to alter texts to make them easier to understand, or to fit into accepted theology more easily.

One test of the originality of a verse is its placement in the Bible. If a phrase is in the original text, then obviously, when it is omitted, it is always omitted from the same place. However, if a phrase is not in the original text, a scribe adds it but a later scribe, thinking it fits better somewhere else, adds it in a different place or moves it somewhere else. The sentiment that women should not be leaders, or take a prominent role in the Church, caused scribes and copyists to change quite a few biblical texts about women, and the fact that 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 35 do not appear in the same place in every manuscript of 1 Corinthians, is one reason some scholars conclude they were added to the text by a copyist. Alan Johnson (The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians, p. 271), and Richard Hays (A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: 1 Corinthians, p. 247), are two such scholars.

Additions to the text often break the context and even cause contradictions, and that is the case here. Scholars have long noticed that 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 35 break the flow of the passage, which makes perfect sense without them. Verse 36 makes perfect sense after verse 33, because the prophets who spoke had a revelation (v. 30), but they still must listen to other prophets. The word of the Lord had not come “to you only,” i.e., only to those prophets. However, if we add verses 34 and 35, we create contradictions in the text.

One of the contradictions created by the addition of these verses is that there is no evidence any women thought the Word of God came to them only, as verse 36 asserts. There is nothing in Greco-Roman or Jewish culture, or in the context of these verses, that
leads us to think that the women in Corinth asserted that the Word of God came only to them, or only out from them. The fact that the women of Corinth wore head coverings as a sign of the authority over them (1 Cor. 11:5) is evidence that they were not being rebellious or acting as if God was speaking only to them. Paul’s comment in verse 36 seems especially inappropriate if addressed to the women because it is harsher than a simple statement, it is, as Robertson and Plummer point out, actually sarcasm (Robertson and Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 326).

Being sarcastic to the women is inappropriate and out of place. On the other hand, writing the phrase about the Word of God coming to “you only” would make perfect sense if it were written to one of the prophets. A prophet who got a revelation from God, as is indicated in verse 30, might have felt so strongly about his revelation that he might try to persuade the entire congregation of his point of view no matter how other prophets saw the situation. Since it can take a real jolt to convince a prophet to let go of his idea, if the sarcastic sentences in verse 36, and the phrase, “has it come to you only” is applied to the prophets in verses 29 and 30, they fit perfectly. That verse 36 applies best to the prophets of verse 30 and not to the women of verses 34 and 35, is powerful evidence that the verses about the women being silent were added.

The phrase about the women “asking their husbands” at home is more good evidence these verses were added to the text. Earlier in Corinthians the Word of God says, “But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I [Paul]” (1 Cor. 7:8 NASB). How “good” would it be to remain as a widow if it meant that you could not express yourself in the church and also had no husband at home to ask questions and represent you in the Church? It seems quite insensitive and disingenuous for God to say in chapter 7 that it would be good for a woman to remain single and then in chapter 14 to say she cannot express her opinions in church, and to ask her “husband.”

Another problem with limiting women to asking their husbands is that not every husband could answer the questions of their wives. The wording of the text would leave the women who had no husbands, or whose husbands could not answer their questions, with no clear instruction about what God wanted them to do. Still another problem with “asking the husbands at home” is it unrealistically limits the reasons that women speak in meetings. Women speak in the church for a lot more reasons than just to ask questions so they will “learn.”

Another clear contradiction caused by 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 35 is that the women were in fact speaking in the first century Church. The immediate context mentions prophecy, and even scholars who believe that women should not lead or teach admit that God allows women to prophesy in the congregation. At the very start of the Church when the gift of holy spirit was poured out, Peter made it clear that both men and women would receive holy spirit, and both would prophesy (Acts 2:17-18). Since it is quite clear even
from Paul’s epistle to the Corinthians that women could prophesy and pray openly in the church (1 Cor. 11:5), it makes no sense that Paul would immediately follow a verse about them prophesying with a verse saying they had to be “silent” and not speak.

But the women were regularly speaking up besides just giving prophecy. One verse that gives evidence for that is 1 Corinthians 14:26 (the word “brothers” is often used to refer to both men and women; cp. Matt. 25:40, Rom. 8:29, Eph. 6:23, Rev. 12:10). Both the context of 1 Corinthians 14:26 and its contents make it clear that everyone, not just the men, were speaking. As for women teaching in the Church, the fact that some of the Church Fathers spent time condemning teaching by women seems to be a good ancillary argument that they did teach, something confirmed in 1 Timothy 2:12, a verse that has been historically mistranslated and misunderstood (see commentary on that verse).

Furthermore, in the book of Revelation, the prophetess Jezebel is castigated because “she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols” (Rev. 2:20 NASB). It is important to note that she is not reproved for teaching, but for teaching error.

Another very good piece of evidence that 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 35 was added to the text is the phrase, “as the Law also says.” Scholars have long had a problem with this phrase, because the Law does not say women should be silent. Commentators have tried very hard to justify Paul’s supposed statement by coming up with verses from the Law which would support the idea that women should be silent, and cited verses such as Genesis 2:20-24; 3:16, and Job 29:21, but these verses do not say women should be silent. In fact, there is nothing in the Law about women being “silent.” Would the actual Word of God contain a contradiction as blatant as this one seems to be? We say, “No.”

Another problem with 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 35 is that they contradict 1 Timothy 2:12 (This is true no matter how the verses in Timothy are translated or understood.) When properly translated and understood, 1 Timothy 2:12 confirms that women can teach in the Church, see Catherine Clark Kroeger and Richard Clark Kroeger, I Suffer Not a Woman (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992), pp. 79-113, and also the commentary on that verse). As traditionally understood, however, 1 Timothy 2:12 says that women cannot teach. But 1 Timothy was written a decade or so after 1 Corinthians, and if Corinthians said that women could not even speak, then there is no logical reason that Timothy would be more lenient than the verses in Corinthians, perhaps even causing confusion in the Church. Timothy is a leadership epistle, and it is a general tenet of the leadership epistles that the directions within them are more specific and more stringent than the directions within the epistles written to the Church in general. Therefore, if 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 35, which say women should not speak, are actually in the original text, it makes no sense that Paul would seem to water that down in Timothy and say the women could not teach. In reality, there was no confusion in the early Church because the verses we know as 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 35 were not in the original text.
Yet another piece of evidence that Paul did not write 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 35 is that those verses contain some vocabulary that is not characteristic of Paul. This is something that has been pointed out by a number of Greeks scholars, and in and of itself would be a weak argument that the verses were not written by Paul. However, given the other weighty evidence that the verses were a scribal addition, the unPauline vocabulary is more evidence that leads us to the conclusion that the verses were not part of what Paul originally wrote (cp. Gordon Fee, The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1987), p. 702).

Another reason that it would not be out of the ordinary for these harsh verses about women speaking in the Church to be added to the biblical text was that soon after the era of the first apostles, an anti-feminine bias entered the Church from the Greco-Roman culture. This bias against women eventually became so strong that women were denied positions of authority in the Church and the men who ran the Church, the clergy, was forced to be celibate. In time, many verses that elevated women were changed by scribes. One text that scribes changed was Acts 18:26. The original text listed Pricilla before Aquila, but it was “corrected” by scribes so that Aquila came first in the list. Since this error was in the Byzantine manuscripts that were used in translating the King James Version, the KJV has Aquila first.

Another place the text was altered to minimize the importance of women was Acts 17:12. The original text read καὶ τῶν Ἑλληνίδων γυναικῶν τῶν εὐσχημόνων καὶ ἄνδρῶν ὁικόλιγοι. (“also of the prominent Greek women, and of the men, not a few”). In codex Bezae, a fifth century manuscript, the text was altered to καὶ τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ τῶν εὐσχημόνων ἄνδρες καὶ γυναῖκες ἱκανοὶ ἐπίστευσαν (“and many of the Greeks and men and women of high standing believed;” See Metzger; Textual Commentary on the Greek NT). This shows us that by the 400’s AD it was offensive enough to some scribes that the woman were referred to as “prominent” and were placed before the men, that they would change the text so that the men and women were both said to be prominent, and the men came before the women.

Another example of bias against women in the Church is Romans 16:7, in which the feminine name “Junia” was altered to the masculine name “Junias” (see commentary on that verse).

Another place the text about women was altered is Mark 3:31. The original text, which read “his mother and brothers” (referring to Mary and Jesus’ brothers), was changed to “his brothers and his mother.” This was the reading of some of the Byzantine texts that were used as source texts for the King James Version, and so “brothers” comes before “mother” in the KJV. Interestingly, the word “mother” was allowed to remain first in verse 32.
A place where the text may have been altered to minimize the influence of women is Acts 17:34. Although the original text contained the line, “and a woman named Damaris,” that line does not appear in codex Bezae. The scholars are divided as to whether the omission of the line about Damaris is a case of anti-feminine bias in the Church or was accidental.

One thing that Christians can be thankful for is that when something is wrong with Christian doctrine, the spirit of God usually moves powerfully in people to overcome the problem. That certainly is the case when it comes to 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 35. Perhaps no supposed command of God is as regularly ignored as this one. In churches and fellowship halls around the world, women speak up. Even in many denominations that do not allow women to teach the congregation, they are allowed to contribute before or after the sermon.

Their speaking up is even more apparent in the many house churches and cell groups that are being run all over the globe. In those small settings, women often openly share the Word of God, their testimonies, ideas, and opinions. This is important, because when Corinthians was penned by the Apostle Paul around the middle of the first century, house churches were the only “churches” that existed. Were first-century house church meetings so different from ours today? Could it be that a spirit of rebellion is running rampant in today’s Christian women who speak up in spite of the command not to, and Christian men either cannot seem to hear the spirit of God or are too spineless to force the women to be silent? That is not likely. It is much more likely that God did not tell the women to be silent in church, but rather that was the opinion of a copyist or scribe that years later became copied into the Bible, and the spirit of God is moving in people today to ignore that spurious command.

In spite of the evidence the verses were added, many scholars feel that 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 35 are original, even though they are “difficult.” This has led to a large number of ways, some of them quite imaginative, that these verses have been explained. The explanations generally fall into two general categories. The first category is that the verses are literal and women should not speak at all in the Church, and the second is that women can speak, but with limitations as to who and when.

Commentators who fall into the first category, saying that women are to be silent in public worship, must explain the verses that say they can speak, and frankly they have been unsuccessful in doing that.

The second category of dealing with the verses is to say that it cannot be God’s true intention to have all women be silent and never speak, so therefore the verses must mean something other than what they literally say. Some commentators say that Paul only meant for these verses to apply in Corinth, but the actual language of the verses themselves does not support that conclusion. Some scholars say that these verses apply only to married women, but again, the verses do not say that, and besides, married women such as Prisca
(or Priscilla in some versions) did lead in some ways and are commended by Paul. Other commentators say that these two verses were not Paul’s position at all, but that of people opposing him and that Paul was actually refuting that position. However, again, a straightforward reading of the verses does not show that. Some commentators say that the Greek word translated “speak,” laleō, refers to “chatter,” speaking that is not pertinent to the meeting. However, a study of laleō even in just the 34 times it is used in the epistle of 1 Corinthians shows that it has a wide range of meaning, so saying it means “chatter” in this particular verse is just an arbitrary explanation without actual support. The truth of the matter is that there is no explanation of this verse that actually explains what the verse says in plain Greek (or English), which is strong evidence that the verse is not part of the original text in the first place.

In spite of much evidence that 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 35 were added to the text, we must still admit to the possibility that they were original. If they are original, then they need to be understood and acted upon like the other verses that are in the original text but are specifically applicable to the culture of the time when Paul wrote. What they say must be understood in a limited sense that would apply to the church at Corinth due to the customs and culture of the time. In that sense, they would be similar to other verses such as those that say women should wear a head covering when they pray or prophesy, or those that direct women not to cut their hair but leave it long. These are understood to have applied to the church at Corinth but are not generally applicable today. If God authored these verses due to the specific circumstances of the first century, then it should be obvious that today, when women are as educated and equipped as men to minister in the church, they should be allowed to do so, especially since it is clear that there is neither male nor female in Christ. Thankfully, women are leading and teaching in the Church today, and the evidence from congregations around the globe is that they are as spiritually able to minister as the men.

Our Adversary, the Devil, has worked overtime to keep Christians from fulfilling their God-given calling. Let’s not allow the Devil, or people who have been tricked by him, to limit the effectiveness of half of the Body of Christ by some mistranslations and misunderstood verses. Women have an important place in the Body of Christ and a calling on their lives, and the Church needs them fulfilling their ministries. [For more about women’s position in the family, society, and Church, see commentary on Acts 17:12; 18:26; Rom. 16:7; 1 Cor. 7:2; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12; 3:2; 5:14; and 1 Pet. 3:7].

1 Timothy 2:12: In light of the complex grammar, and the literally hundreds of pages of commentary that have been written on 1 Timothy 2:11 and 12, we will be setting forth our view of the text and limiting our comments to some major points we feel need explanation. One thing that seems to be self evident is that the interpretation has to fit with both the immediate context, the historical context, and the scope of Scripture. Whenever a verse is capable of multiple translations, it is even more important than usual that the
interpretation fit with both the context and historical context, and that the explanation be logical (God tells us that wisdom is the principle thing, so we dare not discard wisdom when trying to understand a verse of Scripture). Some commentators have done massive word studies on the vocabulary of the verse and in part based their interpretation on the weight of numbers (a certain word means this more often than it means that). That is not the right way to interpret verses, because even if a given Greek word in the text is translated one way many times and another way only a few times, the few times are still valid if that translation best fits the context and historical context.

We feel there are serious problems with the standard interpretation of the verse, that women are not to teach or have authority over men. R. T. France is correct that if Paul meant the verse to be interpreted as the orthodox Christians do, then he worded the verse in a very obscure way. We believe there is a much better translation that better fits both the historical context and the context of the chapter.

1) “Teach.” We believe that the meaning of the verb “teach” (didaskō; #1321 διδάσκω) must be understood in light of the verb authenteō (#831 αὐθεντέω; traditionally “exercise authority”). It does not stand on its own, making the verse mean that women cannot teach to men, period. The essence of the meaning of the verse seems to be well expressed by the Kroegers (I Suffer Not a Woman) and by A. Nyland (The Source NT): that Paul did not permit women to teach a specific thing, in this case that a woman is the originator of man.

One reason we say that the verb “teach” is not forbidding women from teaching men is that women did teach in the early Church. It had always been a practice among the Jews that if a woman had the spirit of God, she could teach what the Lord had taught her. A good example of this is Deborah the prophetess, who was a Judge over Israel (Judges 4 and 5), and the Bible gives other examples of prophetesses to whom men went for guidance and direction, even kings. That brings us to Acts 2, when Peter quotes the book of Joel and makes the point that now, in the Christian Church, both men and women have the spirit of God and will prophesy and dream dreams (Acts 2:17, 18). Can it really be the case that in the Old Testament a woman with the spirit of God could instruct men, but today women with the spirit of God cannot? That seems very unlikely, especially given what we know about the manifestations of holy spirit, including the revelation manifestations, which are given to both men and women “for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7; cp. commentary on 1 Cor. 12:7-10).

Also, when someone came into a church, that person could be prophetically called to account and convicted by the “whole church,” both the men and women. Furthermore, today in the Church, all the members are “one,” and there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28). God recognizes the sexes, but we are “one” because “we were all baptized in one spirit into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13). It is the gift of holy spirit born inside every Christian that makes men and women equal in Christ, and it is the degree to which people dedicate
their lives to the Lord that determines how spiritual, and how spiritually powerful, they are. It is due to the spirit of God that a woman can be an apostle (Rom. 16:7) or a deacon (Rom. 16:1; 1 Tim. 3:11). In fact, Ephesians says that when Christ assembled, he gave gifts to people (Eph. 4:8; *anthropos* is not “men,” but collectively to “people.”). These gifts include “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.” It is well known that the purpose of these equipping ministries is to build up the Body of Christ, but how are women who have these ministries supposed to walk in the fullness of them if they cannot teach? For example, is it really the will of God that a woman evangelist can teach about Jesus to women everywhere, but only to men if they are in “informal settings?” Or can a woman pastor give helpful advice to women anywhere, but only to men if the men are in “informal settings?” Given what we know about proper decorum and wisdom when it comes to men and women being together, it actually makes more sense that a woman would speak to a group of men rather than just to one man alone.

When we study the history of women as teachers, we find there is historic precedent for women teaching in religious settings in both the Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures. In some of the worship of Roman gods and in the Roman mystery religions, women led the religious services and/or acted as priests. Among the Jews, in spite of the fact that it was usual for women to not be educated like the men were, there were exceptions, and thus sometimes women acted both as elders in synagogues and even sometimes as synagogue leaders (cp. Nyland; *The Source NT*; note on 1 Tim. 2:11). Thus as the Christians Church developed and it was accepted that both men and women had holy spirit and could walk in the inspiration and power of God, it would have been culturally accepted for women to actively participate in Church meetings. The Bible teaches that women can pray in meetings (1 Cor. 11:5), speak in tongues (1 Cor. 14:5, 23), interpret tongues (1 Cor. 14:5), prophesy (1 Cor. 14:24), receive revelation from God (1 Cor. 12:8; cp commentary), and contribute that revelation in the meeting (1 Cor. 14:26).

As for women teaching in the Church, we have seen in 1 Timothy 2:11 that women were to learn, and one of the main reasons for learning was to be able to raise up disciples. We have seen that Priscilla taught the great orator Apollos (Acts 18:26). Colossians 3:16 says Christians are to teach one another. Furthermore, in the book of Revelation, the prophetess Jezebel is castigated because “she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols” (Rev. 2:20 NASB). It is important to note that Jezebel is not reproved for teaching, but for teaching error. Furthermore, some of the Church Fathers spent time condemning teaching by women, which is good ancillary evidence that women did teach in the Church. We should also note that historically, by the time of the Church Fathers, the orthodox Church was returning to the cultural belief of the Greco-Roman world that women were inferior to men. Thus the problem that the Church Fathers had with women teaching was not a continuation of Apostolic beliefs, but a return to the error of the culture around them, an
error that even led to the teaching that marrying these “inferior women” made a man less pure or powerful spiritually, which then led to the doctrine that clergy should be celibate (a direct contradiction of the Word of God).

Commentators such as Thomas Schriener who defend the traditional orthodox understanding of 1 Timothy 2:12, agree that the Bible says Priscilla taught Apollos, but asserts her teaching him was okay with God because she did so as “private teaching.” He also notes that Col. 3:16 can be taken to mean that women can teach men, but says that was “mutual instruction that occurs among all the members of the body [of Christ]” (Women in the Church; p. 128). Similarly, most conservative commentators recognize that God permits women to instruct men and have authority in settings outside of “formal church,” such as scholastic settings, job related settings, etc., but they say that in a formal assembly of the church, God has limited the teaching to men. Does the “setting” make that much difference to God? We think not, and believe 1 Timothy 2:12 should not be interpreted the way it usually is in the orthodox Church.

We must keep in mind that for the first two or three centuries after Christ, almost every Christian church was a home church or a church in a small setting such as the catacombs or in an outdoor setting (cp. Acts 16:13). After more than 40 years of house church ministry across the globe, we of STF have seen that most house churches are a dozen or less people, and even large house church meetings are less than two dozen people. Can it really be true that it would be fine for Priscilla to teach Apollos one on one, but as soon as eight or ten people gather in a house, the women can no longer contribute until the meeting breaks up and there is “mutual instruction?” Frankly, most home churches we know of are run in such a way that “mutual instruction,” i.e., people speaking up and contributing as the opportunity presents itself, occurs throughout the meeting.

At this point it is helpful to remember that the typical Western teaching format used in schools and big churches that consists of a teacher in front of a class reading from a book and mostly talking about information and theories while students sit quietly paying attention, was only a small part (and sometimes not a part at all) of the biblical style of “teaching.” We have no examples of Moses, Samuel, or Elijah lecturing students, yet they were all revered teachers. When Jesus taught, he spoke to audiences, but he also taught by example, told stories, and shared his experiences. Jesus taught everywhere he was, but the only time he is recorded actually having a text of the Bible in front of him was when he was in a synagogue. Thus, “teaching” was not connected to a certain style, it was whatever best communicated information in the situation.

It was not easy for people in the small first century churches to open a Bible and teach from it. For one thing, only a small percent (10% or less) of the population could read. Also, the books of the Bible were on individual scrolls, and every scroll was handwritten and very expensive. Thus, although most churches might have a piece of the Bible, almost none would have even a large part of it, much less an entire Bible (it took a
scribe about a year to hand copy the entire Bible—imagine how much a Bible would cost if it cost a year’s salary for a professional writer). We assert that in small home meetings, both ancient and modern, women often openly shared their experiences, testimonies, ideas, and opinions—which biblically is “teaching.”

Seen in that light, the supposed prohibition against women teaching in a “formal” setting cannot be the correct interpretation of the verse. That interpretation would make the Bible say that women can learn (2:11). However, if they learned something and wanted to share it, they could tell it to all their male acquaintances one at a time, but if the church was meeting and all their male acquaintances were at one place at one time, then God forbids them from sharing what they have learned. God tells us to rule our lives by wisdom (Prov. 4:7; 16:16), but there does not seem to be any wisdom in that interpretation of the text.

Once we understand that “teaching” was not just explaining a text of Scripture, but was communicating the heart of God to people to help them live more godly lives, we can see how limiting it would be to say women cannot “teach” men. For example, if a man and woman go on a missionary trip together and are invited to speak at their church and share their experiences, that, biblically, is “teaching,” because people are learning from their experiences. The orthodox interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12 would dictate that the man would be allowed to share his experiences with the church, but the woman would not. Interestingly, this is ignored even by Churches that strictly prohibit women from “teaching” from the pulpit on Sunday morning, because almost all of them allow women missionaries or women who have had powerful personal experiences to share them from the front of the Church. So in fact, even churches that say women should not teach, often allow them to “teach” without knowing it.

Another reason we believe that 1 Timothy 2:12 is not saying that women should not teach men is the “reason” for that prohibition, which is given in verses 13 and 14. The standard conservative orthodox answer to why woman cannot teach men is the “reason” given in verses 13 and 14: that Adam was created before Eve, and Eve, not Adam, was tricked by the Devil. We will have more to say about their order of creation later, but if the reason woman cannot teach men was that Adam was created before Eve, then Adam’s primacy is a “creation ordinance,” i.e., linked to the very creation of men and women. But if women cannot teach men because Eve was created after Adam, then women should never be able to teach men at any time, not just in “formal church.” To say, “Adam was created first, so women cannot teach men in church, but they can teach men in the workplace, the university, and informal settings” invalidates the very “creation ordinance” argument. Worse, if we say that God does not permit women to teach because they are more likely to be deceived than men based on Eve’s example, then we have to say that men are more likely to sin deliberately than women based on Adam’s example (Adam sinned deliberately; cp. Rom. 5:12-14). But to us it seems worse to let deliberate sinners teach than people who can be tricked into sinning. These problems leave the conservative
orthodox scholar with no logical reason women are not supposed to teach men, and in fact show that the conservative interpretation of the verse is in error.

Another reason why 1 Timothy 2:12 should not be interpreted in the standard orthodox way is that there is nothing specifically stated about the setting (“Church”) in the context of this verse. The assertion that this verse is speaking of women teaching men in a formal church setting is actually unsubstantiated in the text, but is an arbitrary explanation without any solid evidence to back it up. The first verse in the chapter starts with prayers, and prayers are offered in both formal and informal settings. The context then shifts to the behavior of men, admonishing that men be holy “in every place.” Then the context shifts to the adornment of women, that they should dress modestly, which also applies everywhere, certainly not just in “formal Church situations.” Then the context shifts again to the section about women learning and teaching (vs. 11-15). But there is nothing in those few verses that dictates that the Bible is now only referring to a formal church setting. After speaking of activities of Christian men and women that can and do occur everywhere, we should assume that the next verses continue that same idea unless we are clearly directed otherwise by the text, which we are not. In contrast, if the verse is about teaching error like we assert it is, then like prayer and modest attire, teaching doctrine that blatantly contradicts the Bible is forbidden in every place.

One thing that Christians can be thankful for is that when something is wrong with Church doctrine, the spirit of God usually moves in people to overcome the problem. That certainly is the case when it comes to 1 Timothy 2:12 and women teaching men. The supposed command is regularly ignored in the Church. Although there are a denominations that do not allow women in the pulpit, even in those denominations women do often end up teaching men in many contexts. More and more denominations and churches either ordain women, or allow women to speak from the lectern on certain occasions. Furthermore, many denominations that do not allow women to teach the congregation allow them to contribute to any discussion before or after the sermon. Also, more and more women are writing books on theological subjects that are used for reference in seminaries and churches, and women are also included on the translation committees of many of the newer versions of the Bible. Also, women teachers can be found instructing boys in Christian schools across the world, and whether we want to admit it or not, the female instructors in Christian colleges are not teaching “male children,” but men, many of whom are supporting themselves and sometimes are married and the fathers of children. Does it make sense that God allows a woman to teach men as long as she is standing behind a desk in a classroom and the men are in sitting in chairs behind desks, but He does not allow her to teach those same men if she is standing in a pulpit and they are sitting on benches we call pews? We say it does not.

When properly translated and understood, 1 Timothy 2:12 is one more verse among many that supposedly is against women but is actually not. Interestingly, even the way this
verse has been interpreted by more conservative commentators, it is still less restrictive
than the way it is acted out in many conservative Churches. When properly translated and
understood in light of both the Jewish and Greco-Roman culture of its day, it is obvious the
New Testament was a Magna Carta for women, giving them rights and privileges they had
never had before. [For other verses in the NT that elevate women’s position in the culture,
see commentary on 1 Cor. 7:2; 14:34, 35; 1 Tim. 2:11; 3:2; 5:14; and 1 Pet. 3:7].

2) “Claim authorship.” The Greek verb is authenteō (#831 αὐθεντέω; traditionally
“exercise authority”). Since this word is used in combination with “teach,” above, in order
to fully understand it, that entry should be read first. Authenteō is a very rare word, with
several meanings. Traditionally it is said to mean “authority,” but many scholars take issue
with that definition here. After pointing out that authenteō is a rare word even in Greek
literature, and used nowhere else in the Bible, R. T. France says: Had he [Paul] wished to
speak about authority in the normal sense, he could have used a more regular Greek verb,
such as proistēmi...or the noun exousia. ...If he intended to say that no woman may ever be
in a position where she has authority over a man, he has chosen an unnecessarily obscure
way to say it! (Women in the Church’s Ministry, pp. 65, 66). France makes a powerful
point. If Paul simply meant to say that he did not want women to teach, and he did not
want them to have authority over men, he had easy and clear ways to say that. The fact that
both the grammar and the vocabulary of verse 12 are obscure should lead us to the
conclusion that translating the verse as if it was saying something that ordinarily would
have been said in a much more straightforward way is probably a poor translation.

In the previous commentary on this verse, we have seen why the standard
conservative orthodox translation, that women cannot teach or have authority over men, is
almost certainly not what God meant. Another major problem we face if we translate
authenteō as “authority,” is that it does not make sense, even in a formal church context.
What would it mean to say that a woman should not have authority over men in a formal
church service? The act of teaching or preaching is not “authority.” Every teacher knows
this, and both men and women often modify or ignore what the teachers say. So what kind
of “authority” does the person in front of the congregation have? He cannot make the
congregation arrive for the service on time or stay for the whole church service, he cannot
order them to behave in certain ways, he cannot make the congregation believe what he
says. There is no actual “authority” in leading a Church service.

Genuine “authority” over others in a church service would have to involve some
kind of ability to command people, or exercise church discipline. However, an individual
leading the meeting almost never has autonomous “authority” to discipline a person in the
church, and if he tried to “command” people, he would soon see his building empty.
Leaders almost always must have the consent of others before they direct the congregation,
and usually any actual “discipline” that is carried out is merely enforcing the rules and
regulations that have been established beforehand by committees or the vote of the
congregation. Most matters that actually do involve the “authority” of the church, such as what is proper attire at church functions, what kinds of music can be played in a worship service, what version of the Bible will be used, and what behaviors are allowed or forbidden, are voted on by the members of the church, or the decision is made by church staff or committees. But since church congregations are usually more women than men, and since church staff and committees almost always have women members, the fact is that the real “authority structure” in the Church includes women.

Thus, there are a couple serious problems that occur if we try to translate authenteō as “authority.” The first is, as we have seen, that even a man does not have “authority” over men in the formal church service, so saying a woman should not have authority over men in that formal setting does not make sense. The second is that although there is no real authority in leading a church service, there is real authority in the church, but that authority is based on the decisions that have been made by the congregation, staff, or committees in the church, and these almost always involve women. It makes no sense for God to command that women cannot “lead meetings,” which does not involve any genuine authority over men, but then allow women to make decisions on church policy, which does involve genuine authority over men. On this basis, it seems clear that “authority” cannot be the correct translation of authenteō, and cannot be what the verse is speaking about.

In light of the problems with the standard translation and meaning, scholars have set forth many other interpretations. Some say the verse refers only to wives, but that ignores the context, which is not about wives. Some scholars point out that authenteō is often related to violence (especially murder), and think the verse means something like Kenneth Baily’s paraphrase of the verse: “I do not allow these ignorant women to batter the men. They are to stop shouting and calm down” (quoted in R. T. France, *Women in the Church’s Ministry*; p. 66). Although that could be a legitimate translation of the Greek (as we already pointed out, the Greek is very complex and can be translated many ways), it does not fit with the context, which is about Adam being created first and Eve being tricked by the Devil.

The best answer we have found to the difficult grammar and the difficult context of 1 Timothy 2:12 are solutions set forth in works such as *I Suffer Not a Woman* by Richard and Catherine Clark Kroeger, and *The Source New Testament* (text and notes) by Dr. A. Nyland. Although the Clark Kroegers offer several translations (pp. 103, 191, 192), and these differ from Nyland’s translation, the gist is the same. Paul was writing to Timothy, who was based in Ephesus. Between some types of Gnostic doctrine, and some of the types of the “mother goddess” worship of Asia Minor, it was being taught in the culture surrounding Timothy that a female god created Eve before Adam, or that God created Eve before Adam. It is typical of converts to Christianity that they blend Christian beliefs with their past pagan beliefs (this is referred to by scholars as syncretism, and is how orthodox Christianity picked up many of its modern beliefs and practices, such as “Easter Sunday”).
Syncretism could have certainly been occurring in Ephesus, and would have been a very important reason why Paul would tell the women to learn, but forbid them from teaching things from their pagan past such as that a woman was the origin of men.

Added to the above historical context is that authenteō can mean “originator” or “author,” and when linked to the word “teach,” can refer to a person teaching that woman is the originator of man. The translation given by the Clark Kroegers that they feel is the most likely is: “I do not allow a woman to teach nor to proclaim herself author of man” (p. 103, 192). However, they also say the verse could be translated: “I do not permit a woman to teach that she is the originator of man...” (p. 191), or “I categorically forbid a woman to teach [anyone] to maintain that she is responsible for the origin of man” (p. 192). Nyland translates the verse: “I most certainly do not grant authority to a woman to teach that she is the originator of man....”

Given the historical context of 1 Timothy, the difficult vocabulary and grammar of the verse, and the “reason” for the verse in the first place, which is verses 13 and 14, we felt that the best understanding of 1 Timothy 2:12 was the general understanding of Nyland and the Clark Kroegers, that Paul was forbidding women to claim feminine origin of man.

3) “Not to cause a disturbance.” [For commentary on this phrase, see 1 Tim. 2:11]. We should pay attention to the fact that en hēsuchia (ἐν ἡσυχία; #2271) is in verse 11, then repeated in this verse. Why would it need to be repeated, which is obviously for emphasis? Could it really be that the Christian women, who supposedly had been commanded to be silent in the Church (1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12), were being so rebellious that they had to be told twice in these two verses to be silent? That hardly seems credible. It is much more likely that the women had never in fact been told to be silent in the Church, but instead were used to speaking up and expressing their thoughts and deeply held convictions. However, in areas where those deeply held beliefs contradicted true biblical teaching, such as about the origin of men, the women had to be told and reminded not to press their traditions and cause a disturbance, but to be in subjection to what they were learning and those they were learning from.

One of the points that conservative scholars make against the translation that Paul is forbidding women from teaching feminine origination of men is that if that erroneous teaching was being circulated, it would make sense that Paul would not just forbid women from teaching it, but would forbid anyone from teaching it. This argument seems to make sense on the surface. But when we read the leadership epistles, we can see that there are a number of issues that actually pertain to both men and women that are addressed only to one or the other. For example, is it the case that only men should pray everywhere and be holy (1 Tim. 2:8), or does that apply to women also? Similarly, should only women dress modestly and adorn themselves with good deeds, and not be gossips (1 Tim. 2:9, 10; 3:11), or do those things also apply to men? We know that those things apply to men and women, but are more appropriated for the gender to whom they are addressed. Similarly, it would
be the normal tendency for women to be more vocal and defensive than men about the teaching that Eve was created before Adam, so it makes sense that Paul would address that reproof to women.
Appendix 13. The Bride of Christ

There is a lot of confusion in Christendom concerning the “Bride of Christ.” Some people say it is Israel, others say it is the Christian Church, others say it is both, and so forth. The two primary reasons for the confusion on the subject of the bride are failure to carefully read what the Bible actually says, and failure to identify and understand important figures of speech God uses in the Bible. We will start our study on the bride by studying the figures of speech of comparison, because we will never be able to understand why Israel is called a “virgin,” a “daughter,” “bride,” or “wife” unless we understand those figures of speech.

In the Bible, three common and important figures of speech of comparison are simile, metaphor, and hypocatastasis. A simile (pronounced sĭm-ĭ-lee) is a comparison by “resemblance,” usually using words such as “like” or “as.” If a person is noisy and sloppy when he eats, a person might look at him and say, “You eat like a pig.” The sloppy eater is said to “resemble” a pig, and that kind of comparison is a “simile.” Psalm 1:3 uses a simile when it says a righteous person is like a tree planted by the water.

A metaphor is a comparison by “representation.” In a metaphor, one noun represents another, usually by using the verbs “is” or “are.” If the pig example above is made into a metaphor, instead of saying, “You eat like a pig,” the person would compare the man to a pig by representing him as one and saying “You are a pig.” Jesus used a metaphor when he said to his disciples, “I am the vine; you are the branches…” (John 15:5 NIV).

A hypocatastasis (pronounced: hī-poe-cā-tās-ĕ-sis) is a comparison by “implication.” The comparison is not directly stated, but it is implied. If we turn the pig example into a hypocatastasis, someone in the dinner party would simply look at the sloppy man and say, “Pig!” Just saying “Pig,” effectively communicates the implied comparison between the man and a pig. The flexibility in language and figures allows for hypocatastasis to import meaning in more ways than just factually stating the implied image. For example, at a dinner party of family members who were used to poking fun at one another, instead of saying “Pig,” one person might just look at the other and say, “Oink, oink.” Doing that would effectively communicate the implied meaning of “pig.” A linguist might point out that what seems to be going on in that example is that the sound the pig makes is put for metonymy for the pig itself, which is then being imported by hypocatastasis. However, linguistic expressions are often unique and fluid enough they cannot be easily put into tightly defined boxes, and hypocatastasis seems to handle the “oink, oink,” example well on its own.

The figures metaphor and hypocatastasis can be confusing because the figure can be missed and people think that the figure of speech is literal. An example of this happening with metaphor is when Christ took the bread at the Last Supper and said, “This is my body.”
He meant, “This bread represents my body.” An example of hypocatastasis being missed is Genesis 3:1, when the Devil is called the “serpent” by hypocatastasis. The comparison should be clear because literal snakes cannot talk, the Devil is referred to as the serpent in other verses of Scripture (Rev. 20:2 is very clear!), and when 2 Corinthians 11:3 (KJV) says that “the serpent” beguiled Eve, the context is Satan and his ministers (v. 14). Nevertheless, many people miss the hypocatastasis and think that the “serpent” in Genesis was some kind of actual snake, and artists do not help much when they paint pictures of a snake with Eve in the Garden of Eden. The artists would have been more helpful to our understanding of the Bible if they had painted Eve with the Devil, appearing as a shining spiritual being.

As well as the figures of speech of comparison mentioned above, we also need to understand the figure of speech “personification.” “Personification” occurs when something that is not a person is described as a person. We humans relate so well to other humans that referring to something as a person often makes it easy to understand. There are many examples of personification in the Bible. Wisdom is portrayed as a woman calling out for people to listen to her (Prov. 8:1). Ethiopia is portrayed as a woman stretching out her hands to God (Ps. 68:31; KJV; ESV; NASB. Ethiopia is “Cush” in some versions), and, of course, the nation of Israel is portrayed as a woman many times, which is the subject of this study.

The figures of comparison and personification do a good job of communicating information and emotion. For example, saying the people of Israel broke their covenant with God gives us information but does not communicate much emotion. In contrast, referring to Israel as a woman and saying she committed adultery with her pagan lovers brings up a host of emotions. In the Bible, Israel is personified as a woman, and then that personification is intertwined with the figures of comparison we have been studying, when “she” is called a virgin, daughter, wife, etc.

Although Bible teachers know Israel is not a woman, they are confused about the words “bride” or “wife” and invest more literal meaning into those terms than they are meant to communicate. Furthermore, because they do not understand that “bride” is simply a comparison, they try to figure out who is the bride and when the marriage occurs. We do not get confused when Israel or Judah is called a lioness (Ezek. 19:2), a horse (Jer. 5:8), a vine (Jer. 2:21), a camel (Jer. 2:23), or a wild donkey (Jer. 2:24). In a similar way, we should not get confused when God calls His people a “daughter,” “virgin,” “bride,” or “wife.” There are so many spoken and unspoken emotions, expectations, and commitments between a man and a woman that it is more succinct and powerful for God to occasionally refer to His people as a “daughter,” “virgin,” or “wife” than to try to describe the relationship in paragraph form.

The female figurative terms that God uses to describe His people include “daughter” (Micah 4:8), “virgin daughter” (Jer. 14:17), “virgin” (Jer. 18:13; 31:4, 21; Amos 5:2), “sister” (Ezek. 16:45, 52; 23:11), “espoused” or “bride” (Jer. 2:2), “wife” (Ezek. 16:8, 32; 23:4, Isa. 54:6; cp. Jer. 3:1-14; Hosea 2:7), and “mother” (Ezek. 16:20, 36; 23:4; Hos. 2:2).
These terms do not just refer to the women of Israel, but to both men and women collectively. It is misunderstanding the figures of comparison for a man to think that when God’s people are called a “virgin daughter,” the meaning God is importing into the text does not apply to him because he is a man. Similarly, women should realize they are included when God’s people are called “sons.” When God calls His people a “vine,” we know the term applies to both men and women, and similarly when God uses hypocatastasis and refers to Israel as a “bride,” the term includes both men and women. Reading Jeremiah 2:2 in different versions shows that some versions use the word “bride” and some do not. The problem is in part caused by the original languages, because the word for a newly married woman in Hebrew and Greek also had other meanings. The Hebrew word kallah (Strong’s #3618, כַּלָּה) meant a daughter-in-law, a bride, or a wife (recently married or married long before). The Greek word numphe (Strong’s #3565, νύμφη) referred to an engaged woman, a recently married woman, a young wife, and a daughter-in-law. Thus, whether or not the verse in question should be translated “bride,” “wife,” or “daughter-in-law” had to be determined by context.

There are many ways we can tell that the female terms God uses to describe His people are figures of speech. One of them is by comparing the terms themselves. It is not possible for Israel to literally be a virgin daughter and also God’s wife at the same time. Furthermore, in the Old Testament God married Israel and Judah, and although He divorced Israel, He is going to be married to her again in the future under the New Covenant (Hos. 2:16-25). But in the Four Gospels and the book of Revelation, Jesus Christ is the bridegroom (Matt. 9:15; John 3:29; Rev. 21:9). This should catch our attention, because in the Law of Moses a person could not have sexual relations with his father’s wife, so legally Jesus cannot marry his Father’s wife and be the “bridegroom” (Lev. 18:8, 15; 20:11, 12). These “marriages” are figurative, and describe in a figurative way the intimate relationship that both God and Christ will have with the people. Also, Israel and Judah are called “sisters,” but God marries them both and even has children by them both (Ezek. 23:4). Yet the Law of Moses forbids a man from marrying two sisters (Lev. 18:18). Furthermore, the Law says a person could not marry his daughter or granddaughter (Lev. 18:6, 10). However, Israel is called God’s virgin daughter and yet He married her, which again would be breaking His own law.

Still more evidence that the female terms that God uses to describe Israel are figurative comes from the fact that there is no orderly chronological progression in the use of these terms in the Old Testament. If they were meant literally in some way, Israel would start as a daughter, a virgin, and then become espoused (engaged), then get married, then be a mother. Instead, there is no flowing chronology to the use of the terms. Note the following chronology as Israel goes from being a wife to a virgin to a daughter back to a wife, and note how especially confusing things would be in books such as Jeremiah if the terms were literal.
• **1450 BC.** Israel becomes God’s wife after she leaves Egypt. (Ezekiel 16:8 portrays the covenant made between God and Israel at Mt. Sinai as a marriage covenant).

• **Late 700’s BC.** Israel is a virgin (Amos 5:2).

• **About 700 BC.** “Jerusalem” (also called “Zion”) is a daughter (Micah 4:8).

• **About 700 BC.** The prophet Hosea shows Israel as acknowledging having once been God’s wife (Hos. 2:7). There is a future time coming when Israel will again be a faithful wife—this is prophesied for the future (Hos. 2:16). Hosea also portrays Israel as a mother (Hos. 2:2).

• **About 700 BC.** Israel is a wife (Isa. 54:6).

• **About 600 BC.** Jeremiah shows God’s people as engaged or “espoused” to Him (Jer. 2:2); a wife (Jer. 3:14), a “virgin daughter” (Jer. 14:17), and a “virgin” (Jer. 18:13; 31:4; 21).

• **About 595-570 BC.** Ezekiel portrays Israel through her history from Sinai as an adulterous wife (Ezek. 16:32; 23:4).

More evidence that the female terms used of Israel are figurative comes from the fact that Israel is sometimes not called a woman at all, but a man. Israel is called God’s “son” (Jer. 31:9; Hos. 11:1; 13:13). Hosea 7:9 refers to Israel as a man with gray hair, and 12:7 and 8 refers to Israel as a merchant man who has become rich by dishonesty. In Malachi 2:11 Judah is portrayed as a husband who has married the daughter of a foreign god. Isaiah 61:10 uses the figure simile to compare Israel to both a bride and bridegroom in the same verse! Obviously, Israel is not both a man and a woman, or a bride and bridegroom, in any literal way.

The key to recognizing the seemingly confusing references to Israel as a man or woman is realizing that each reference is a figure of speech and each reference stands on its own. In each case God is using a specific illustration to make a point, just as He does when He calls His people a “vine,” “wild donkey,” “sheep,” or “camel.” When God compares Israel to an animal or plant, we do not try to build a chronology, as if Israel could evolve from one thing to another. Similarly, we should not try to build a chronology when God calls Israel a virgin or wife. Each term imports into the text a picture and a meaning that is important to the point that God is trying to make in that specific context, and each term stands on its own.

When God calls Israel a “virgin,” or “daughter” He is placing the emphasis on attitudes and behaviors that were important to young women in that culture, such as purity, chastity, modesty, and obedience. When He calls Israel a “wife,” He is emphasizing things such as fidelity, commitment, love, and respect. When God calls Israel a “son,” He is emphasizing the intimacy of the relationship, family love and pride, and obligations and
privileges of the family. When God portrays Israel as a man with gray hair, He is pointing out that through bad decisions Israel has become old and weak. When God portrays His people as a husband who has married a foreign woman, He is lamenting the covenants that His people have made with idols.

When God calls Himself a husband, He is emphasizing His love for Israel, His commitment to her, His expectations, and His disappointments at her behavior. When the Bible refers to Jesus as the “bridegroom,” it is highlighting the intimate relationship between Jesus and his people, their obligations to each other, and what they can expect from each other. The Bible says that both God and Christ marry Israel, not as a contradiction, but because both God and Christ have a relationship with Israel and want and deserve the love and devotion from the people that a husband should have from his wife.

The most dominant comparison in the Old Testament that is used of God’s people is the figurative portrayal of Israel as God’s wife. This figurative imagery is very deeply embedded in the text and it is expressed in many different ways: sometimes by calling God a “husband” and Israel a “wife,” sometimes referring to the “marriage,” sometimes calling Israel a “whore” for her unfaithfulness and referring to it as “adultery,” sometimes noting that the couple got a divorce, and so forth. In fact, there are so many verses that in some way make reference to the marriage that it would be difficult to catalogue them all.

God’s “marriage” to Israel occurred on Mount Sinai after God gave some of the Law to Israel and the people made a covenant to obey Him. Ezekiel describes this in figurative terms.

**Ezekiel 16:8**

“‘Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine.”

The context of Ezekiel 16:8 is important to the subject. Verse three refers to the pagan ancestry of Israel, which is accurate because Abraham was from Ur of the Chaldeans in Mesopotamia. Verses four and five say that when Israel was born she was despised. Exactly when God considered Israel to be “born” is not stated, likely because her “birth” is not literal but is part of the personification of Israel as a woman. Interestingly, although God refers to Israel as His daughter in other places, He does not do so here because He certainly did not despise her on the day of her birth. We know from history and the Bible that as Abraham’s descendants multiplied, they were in fact despised while they were in Haran, Canaan, and Egypt. Nevertheless, God pitied Israel and made her to grow and flourish (verses 6 and 7).
When God brought Israel out of Egypt, He made a blood covenant with her (Exod. 24:3-8). Bulls were sacrificed, and half their blood was sprinkled on the altar (representing God), and half on the people. We commonly refer to that blood covenant as “the Old Covenant” (or “Old Testament”), but God figuratively refers to it in Ezekiel 16:8 as His marriage covenant with Israel. After that covenant, when the Israelites sinned against God, He often referred to their behavior as “adultery.” When God uses words like “adultery” (Jer. 3:6, 8, 9; Ezek. 16:32; 23:37; Hosea 1:2; 4:15), or accuses Israel of “whoredom” or calls her a “whore” or “harlot” (KJV: Isa. 1:21; Jer. 2:20; 3:9; 13:27; Ezek. 16:15, 33; 20:30; Hos. 2:2-5; 5:3), He is clearly indicating that He had married her and she was His wife. When versions such as the NIV say “prostitution,” usually the Hebrew word can refer to prostitution or adultery. Since God was married to Israel, “adultery,” is usually a better description than “prostitution.”

God tolerated Israel’s spiritual adultery only so long, and then He “divorced” her, abandoning her to her enemies (Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8). Nevertheless, God promised to remarry Israel in the last days and never be separated from her again (Hos. 2:16-23; esp. 19, 20). For her part, Israel will repent of her wickedness and return to God, her husband, saying, “I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now” (Hos. 2:7). God will be glad, saying, “In that day...you will call me ‘my husband’” (Hos. 2:16). This “marriage” is still future, and represents the time, after the Second Coming of Christ, when God’s people will be faithful to Him. Just as the first “marriage” was a covenant (the Old Covenant), this new marriage will be associated with the New Covenant, and it will last forever (Jer. 31:31-33).

The figurative use of the bride not only fits Israel, it fits the Christian Church. This makes sense because what God and Christ want from people does not change over time and is typified well by a wife: love, devotion, and fidelity. Thus, the Church is clearly compared to a bride or wife twice in Scripture. One of them is in 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 11:2 (NASB)

For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.

In this verse the husband is Christ and the engaged virgin is the Church. The point of the verse is that the Church is to be a “pure virgin” for “one husband,” who is Christ. In the Old Testament, Israel was to give herself only to God, and when the people worshipped other gods it angered Him and He called her actions “adultery.” In the New Testament the figure of the virgin bride is again used to effectively communicate how Christians are to be devoted to Christ and not be led astray to another lord or another Gospel.
The personification of the Church as a wife helps us relate to what Jesus did for “her” and what we are to do for him, as well as instructing Christian husbands and wives on how to relate to each other in a godly way.

**Ephesians 5:25-27**

25) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her
26) to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,
27) and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

The figure personification helps us understand how Christ gave himself for the Church, and effectively communicates the actions, commitments, and expectations of Christ with minimum words but maximum impact.

In Revelation 21:9-11, the bride of Christ is specifically identified as the New Jerusalem. The verse refers to the New Jerusalem as both the “bride” and “wife” of Christ. Of course, the wife of Christ is not the city, but the city figuratively represents all the people who live there. Thus, in the book of Revelation we see that the wife of Christ is neither Israel nor the Christian Church, but rather is every saved person who has ever lived, all of whom will live eternally in the New Jerusalem.

Portraying all the saved people as the wife of Christ shows us the love and devotion that will exist into eternity between Christ and the people he died for. Also, we must recall that the Old Testament prophecies foretold that God would also be married to these saved people, and as God’s wife they would also give Him the love and devotion that He deserves forever and ever.

Comparisons such as “son,” “virgin,” “bride,” and “wife” import a host of meaning into the text. We are rightly thinking about the comparison when we focus on the meaning it is importing into the text and ask ourselves why God is using the illustration and what lesson He wants us to learn from it. God wants and deserves love and devotion from His people, and the human terms God uses to describe us illustrate that well. As God’s sons, let us take our family pride and our responsibility to love, provide for, and protect our own fellow family members seriously. As husbands, let us keep our covenants pure and not develop relationships with God’s rivals and enemies. As virgins, let us diligently keep ourselves pure and unspotted from things that ruin our, or our Father’s, reputation. As daughters let us be diligent in our work to better ourselves and our family. As brides and wives, let us be loving and devoted to God and Christ, and show them true fidelity, making sure they are the most important things in our lives. These concluding illustrations of sons, husbands, virgins, daughters, and brides/wives, should be understood in terms of the biblical
culture. Gender role models are often significantly different today, but it is important for us to understand the meaning of figures as God intended them to be understood.

Let us not be “goats,” ignoring the things of God, or “wolves” tearing his flock, but be “sheep” willingly following the Shepherd, and “lions” fighting for God’s kingdom.
Appendix 14. Names of the Slanderer

(Names of the Devil)

The Bible never gives a proper name for the Devil, although it seems clear that at one time he had one. It is fitting that God does not glorify the Devil by telling us what his original name was. It likely contained inherent honor and blessing that he now no longer has or deserves. Originally the Slanderer was the “morning star” of God; His most brilliant creation. He was the “model of perfection” (Ezek. 28:12). But he became prideful and rebelled against God, managing to convince one third of the angels to follow him (Rev. 12:4). The cause of the Devil’s sin was a freewill choice. The occasion of his sin was pride. The result of his sin was the corruption of his character and the perversion of his power. His end will be in the Lake of Fire.

The Slanderer (the Devil) is God’s archenemy. He was created as an angel and heads up and rules an army of fallen angels (demons) as well as demonically controlled or influenced people. He is the chief architect of the world’s evil and is responsible for the pattern of evil that exists in cultures and the world in general. Two important sections of Scripture that refer to the Devil are Isaiah 14:12-17 and Ezekiel 28:11-19. Further evidence that the Devil was the top of all of God’s creation before he fell is that Jesus Christ has now been exalted above God’s creation, taking the Devil’s place, and instead of being the morning star, he is the Bright and Morning Star (Rev. 22:16).

Terms used of the Devil in Scripture: As was mentioned above, there is no proper name given for the Devil in Scripture. Instead, there is a list of appellations and comparisons that, when taken together, build a picture of who he is and what he is like.

1. **Accuser.** The Greek word is *kategorō* (κατηγόρω), and it means to accuse, and often to officially accuse before a judge. “For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down” (Rev. 12:10). The Devil relentlessly accuses people.

2. **Adversary.** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (Σατανᾶς). The term means “Adversary,” and it was borrowed from the Aramaic, *Satana* (ἡσατάνα) which originally referred to one who laid in ambush [as an adversary], and then became used as a proper name meaning “Adversary” (see *Vocabulary of the Greek NT*, by Moulton & Milligan). The word “satan” means “adversary” in all the biblical languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, although sometimes
it is used just as “an adversary,” and sometimes, especially with the article, it is used as an appellative, a name, for the Devil.

Being an adversary to God and the things of God is a major part of the Devil’s character and strategy. “Satan” can refer to the direct work of the Devil as in Job 1, or it can refer to indirect work as in Matthew 4:10 when Jesus called Peter “Satan.” Usually the word “Satan” places the emphasis on the indirect work of the Devil. As the great adversary of the true God, the Adversary is the indirect cause of people’s problems by way of situations or circumstances or other people, which he arranges and controls. He is the influence of these situations, circumstances, and people. It has been generally unhelpful that satanas has been transliterated as “Satan” rather than translated as “Adversary.” Anyone reading Hebrew or Greek knew what the word meant, but almost no Christian knows that “Satan” is not just a name; it is a word that became used as a name, and its meaning, Adversary, is important.

3. Azazel. “Azazel” is found in Leviticus 16:8, 10, and 26, and it is a name for the Slanderer (Devil), which gets mistranslated “scapegoat” in the KJV. The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia says, “In 1 Enoch, Azazel appears at the head of the rebel angels.” The text note in the NET (First Edition) on Leviticus 16 reads: “The most common view among scholars today is that it is the proper name of a particular demon (perhaps even the Devil himself) associated with the wilderness desert regions. Levine has proposed that it may perhaps derive from a reduplication of the ז (zayin) in the combined with ע (el, "mighty"), meaning ‘mighty goat.’” This assessment seems correct. The appellation “mighty goat” would be very fitting for the Devil, because goats were independent, rebellious and destructive. In Islam, Azazil (spelled slightly differently) is said to be the original name of Satan. Modern occultists recognize Azazel as a demon, but not the Devil himself. However, given the way that he is mentioned in Leviticus and the goat sent to him, it seems clear that Azazel is another name for the Devil himself. [For more information on Azazel, see Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary on the OT; Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible, the appendix on Azazel].


Among the ignominious names given to idols by religious Jews both before, during, and after the time of Christ (in the Talmudic period), the general and common one was “dung.” They also used the name Baal-Zebul (Lord of dung)
to describe the chief demon (Lightfoot, *Commentary from Talmud*). The use of “dung” as a name for idols and demons appears many times in the Talmudic writings but not in the Hebrew text itself.

Because the Hebrew word *zebul* also means “height” or “dwelling,” a few commentators say that “Beelzebul” means something such as “lord of the heavenly dwelling.” However, this is not likely. We can envision the Jews trying to associate Jesus with the “lord of the dunghill,” especially given the common Jewish practice of degrading idols (and Jesus) whenever possible, and the frequent use of “dung” to refer to idols and the chief demon. It is easy to imagine the Pharisees saying that Jesus was possessed with the “lord of dunghills” and was casting out demons by it. It is less likely that they actually called “the prince of demons” the “lord of the heavenly dwelling.” That would have been uncharacteristic of the way they thought and spoke of idols and demons.

The Jews certainly had the right idea about how to name the chief demon, whom we know as the Slanderer (the Devil). He was certainly “lord of dung.” He is smelly and worthless, and the demons and people who follow him are smelly and worthless, and will eventually come to an end in the Lake of Fire.

The Latin and Aramaic texts read “Beelzebub” (Lord of the flies) instead of Beelzebul in the New Testament, apparently adapting the text from the OT god of Ekron (2 Kings 1:6). This apparently led to some Greek texts being changed from “Beelzeboul” to “Beelzebub,” (we can imagine a scribe who knew Latin well, simply copying “Beelzebub” from memory into the Greek text), and from there “Beelzebub” came into some English versions such as the King James. However, modern textual research has shown that “Beelzebul” is the original reading in the Greek text. “Beelzebub” places an emphasis on the Devil’s ability to bother and pester (cp. *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*).

5. Belial. From the New Testament we learn that “Belial” is a name for the Devil (2 Cor. 6:15). The Hebrew word “Belial” means “worthlessness,” and the phrase son or daughter of Belial is used many times in the Old Testament (cp. Deut. 13:13; Judg. 19:22; 20:13; 1 Sam. 1:16; 2:12; 10:27; 25:17; 30:22; etc.). Unfortunately, most modern versions of the Bible translate the meaning of “Belial,” which is “worthless” into the text, so what is clearly in the Hebrew text as “son of Belial” becomes something like, “a worthless person.” While it is true that people who have such an intimate relation with the Devil that they are called “sons of Belial” are indeed worthless, much of the meaning of the Hebrew text is lost when the phrase “son of Belial” is not translated that way. When we study the people who are referred to as “sons of Belial” in the Old
Testament, they are similar in character to the people who are associated with the Slanderer as a “father” (see “Father” below). They seem to be wholly evil.

6. Devil. Although there are certainly many English Bibles that have the word “Devil,” it is a transliteration, not a translation, and the Greek word means “Slanderer,” so see this appellation under “Slanderer.”

7. Dragon. The Greek word drakōn (#1404 δράκων) means “dragon.” One of the New Testament names for the Devil is “the Dragon.” Since the Devil is not literally a dragon, this is the figure of speech hypocatastasis comparing the Devil with a dragon [For more on hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2]. The name “Dragon” emphasizes his fierce, ferocious qualities. Like a dragon, the Slanderer (Devil) is powerful, ferocious, pitiless, merciless, dangerous, and deadly. It is part of the Devil’s general and ongoing plot to either hide himself or change himself into something harmless or beneficial, and much recent literature, movies, etc., portray dragons as friendly and helpful beasts who are more misunderstood than actually dangerous. We must make no mistake, when God calls the Slanderer the “Dragon,” we are dealing with an evil, powerful, and dangerous adversary. The Slanderer is referred to as the Dragon in Revelation 12:3-17; etc.

8. Father. This New Testament designation of the Devil emphasizes his relationship to those he has “fathered.” It is not clear exactly what the Devil does to people so that he becomes their “father.” However, it seems that in the places where “father” is used in reference to the Devil it is more than just the standard Semitic idiom where it means mentor. There is good reason to believe that a person who has the Devil as his actual “father” has committed the unforgiveable sin (cp. Matt. 12:32; Mark 3:29). Jesus said to some of the religious people who opposed him that “You are of your father, the Devil” (John 8:44). A study of these religious people (and also of the sorcerer who opposed Paul who was referred to as a “son of the Devil”; Acts 13:10) shows that they did indeed have the characteristics of their father: they were godless, evil, murderers, and so totally spiritually blind that no amount of truth or evidence could convince them they were wrong. For example, when told by the guards who watched the tomb of Jesus what happened at the tomb, rather than repent and admit they were wrong about Jesus, they bribed the guards to say Jesus’ body had been stolen (Matt. 28:11-13). The wise Christian is aware that there are still people who are that blind and evil on earth today, and they cannot be reasoned with or convinced. Like the sorcerer in Acts 13:10, they have to be removed from power so they cannot accomplish their destructive evil desires.

9. god of this age. This phrase emphasizes the Slanderer’s rulership over this age and the worship associated with it. It is used only one time (2 Cor. 4:4),
and frankly, the general Christian teaching that “God is in control,” and “The Devil can only do what God allows him to do,” has obscured the powerful meaning of this phrase.

The Bible does not use the word “god,” lightly or haphazardly. By using the word “god” for the Devil, our God is giving us a glimpse into the tremendous power and control he exercises over the world—a control that is obvious when we stop and think about it. Famines, floods, hurricanes, tsunamis, tornadoes, epidemics, hatred and wars, envy and murder—these are all engineered by the “god of this age.” And that is just one part of his power. From behind the scenes he manipulates people to do his will, and is so powerful that it is safe to say that almost no one has a truly care-free life. Evil, hatred, jealousy, envy, and the use and abuse of people are everywhere, all promoted by the “god of this age.”

Another thing the phrase “god of this age” brings into focus is his insatiable desire for worship. The word “age” (sometimes mistranslated as “world”) is aion. While it is true that aion refers to an age, a period of time, the meaning is actually much deeper. It refers to the spiritual and moral climate of a time, the characteristics that mark the age. In restaurant terms, it means “atmosphere.” The Devil is the god in control of the “atmosphere” of our world, its spiritual and moral climate and its physical activities. [For more information on “the god of this age”, see the commentary on 2 Cor. 4:4].

10. Lucifer. This comes from the Latin. See under “Shining One.”

11. Opposer (or the “Opposing One”). The Devil always opposes God, so the reference to him as the “Opposer” is appropriate (1 Tim. 5:14). Sadly, although the Greek text of 1 Timothy 5:14 does not say “adversary,” using the word “satan,” many English versions read “adversary” instead of the more accurate, “opposer.”

12. Ruler of the demons. This is not so much a “name” for the Slanderer (Devil) as a descriptive phrase that emphasizes the Slanderer’s rule over demons. The phrase occurs in Mark 3:22. The Greek word translated “ruler” is archon (#758 ἀρχόν), which is from archē, “first,” and it means the one who is first, thus the “ruler, commander, chief,” etc. There are three designations of the Slanderer which refer to him specifically as “ruler.” Ruler of the demons, ruler of the world, and ruler of the kingdom of the air. These, combined with “god of this age,” show how complete the control of the Slanderer really is when it comes to the age and world we live in. The Slanderer rules, and thus controls to a large extent, the demons under him, the world, and even what goes on in the air.
13. **Ruler of this world.** This phrase emphasizes his rulership of the world (John 12:31).

14. **Ruler of the kingdom of the air.** This phrase, which is found in Ephesians 2:2, emphasizes the Slanderer’s rulership of the evil spiritual powers which move about in the air. The word “air” is aer and refers to the atmosphere immediately above the earth’s surface. We would want to call it the lower atmosphere, but the Greeks thought that it extended to the moon (Zodhiates). Above the aer was the lighter, purer air the Greeks called aither (“either”). Both the Jews and the Greeks believed that the air was inhabited by supernatural powers, which it is. As the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the Slanderer (Devil) exercises power both in the spiritual realm over demons, and in the physical realm over the air itself. We see his influence over the physical atmosphere in many ways, including hurricanes, tornados, and “freak weather patterns.” He also has the power and authority over the air to influence electromagnetic energy and thus disrupt communication, radio, radar, etc. It is quite possible that some, if not many, of the UFO sightings are actually demonic manifestations. In the same way that a demon can come into concretion as a ghost or apparition on earth, if one comes into concretion in the sky it would be seen as a UFO. These UFO sightings do the same basic thing in the air that ghost sightings do on earth: they distract and confuse people, and often cause them not to believe what is clearly written in the Word of God.

15. **Satan.** The word “Satan” is a transliteration from the Hebrew, and later the Greek. See under “Adversary.”

16. **Serpent.** One of the names of the Slanderer is “the serpent.” The Slanderer is not a literal serpent, so his being called that is the figure of speech hypocatastasis (a comparison by implication; for more on hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2). Calling the Slanderer a “serpent” compares him with a serpent, and imports the characteristics of a serpent onto the Slanderer. Thus we can see that, among other things, the Slanderer is hard to see and recognize (he is very good at hiding), crafty, and deadly.

Another thing about the serpent that is worth noting is that, in nature, when a snake goes after its prey, it almost always eats it head first. Similarly, “the Serpent” goes after the minds of people. He lies to them, threatens them, lures them, and even controls them by the fear of death (Heb. 2:15). For the Christian, putting on “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16) and “the helmet of salvation” (Eph. 6:17), are essential to being able to live a godly life.

It is important for us to notice that the very first time the Slanderer appears in the Bible is Genesis 3:1, and he is called “the serpent.” Sadly, this has confused Christians, who have all manner of discussions about this “snake,”
including if it could somehow walk and talk. There should have never been any
doubt about the fact that it was not a “snake” in the Garden at all, but rather the
Slanderer himself, who likely came as a shining celestial being, something that
would have gotten Eve’s complete attention and been able to convince her that
what God said was not correct. We should have known this because 2
Corinthians 11:3 says it was the “serpent” who deceived Eve in the Garden, and
in that record this “serpent” can be seen to be “the Adversary,” who is
specifically identified in verse 14. Furthermore, Revelation 12:2 calls the
serpent, “that ancient serpent,” which is very appropriate since the serpent is the
very first mention of the Adversary in the Bible.

The places the Slanderer is referred to as a serpent are Genesis 3:1, 2, 4, 13,
14; 2 Corinthians 11:3; and Revelation 12:9, 14, 15; and 20:2.

17. Shining One. One of the names the Devil is commonly known by is
“Lucifer,” which comes from Isaiah 14:12. The Hebrew word is heylel (#1966
הֵילֵל), and it literally means “shining one.” In the Hebrew language, heylel was
used as a name for the planet Venus, while in Latin, “Lucifer” (literally, “Light
Bringer”) was a word commonly used for the planet Venus. Thus, for the Latin
Vulgate to translate heylel as “Lucifer” made perfect sense, because both heylel
and “Lucifer” were used of the planet Venus.

Some theologians think that in Isaiah 14:12, heylel is not a proper name, but
rather just a description of the Devil. However, the context seems to demand
that the word heylel is being used as a name. Actually, heylel seems to be the
figure of speech hypocatastasis, using the planet Venus as a comparison to the
Devil, thus showing his brilliance and beauty [For an explanation of
hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2, “dragon”].

If we want to use a proper name in Isaiah, we could use the literal, “Shining
One,” and explain how and why it, as a name of Venus, would have used there
in Isaiah. Or, we could use the name “Venus,” and then explain how and why
the Devil was referred to as Venus, which was because he was the dominant
light among the stars of God (angels are sometimes called “stars,” cp. Job
38:7). Either translation, “Shining One” or “Venus,” would be better in our
English versions than “Lucifer,” which does not mean anything in English.

Further evidence that “Shining One” is a reference to the planet Venus,
which was being used as a hypocatastasis for the Devil, is the fact that the
Hebrew text reads, “Shining One, son of dawn.” In Hebrew, the word translated
“dawn” is shachar (#7837 שַׁחַר), and, as it appeared in cognate languages such
as Ugaritic, it was used as a divine name. In Greek mythology, Venus was the
“son of Eōs,” (“son of Dawn”). Eōs was the female Titan who was the
personification of the dawn (the Titans were the first generation of gods, before
the Olympian gods that we are more familiar with, who were ruled by Zeus). Of course we know that the Devil was not the son of a Greek Titan, but the reference to “son of the Dawn” in Isaiah emphasizes the fact that the Devil, and the angels who supported his rebellion, should have known that he was not the Creator God, but was himself a created being who owed allegiance to his Creator.

Modern versions do not use “Lucifer” in Isaiah 14:12, but because “Lucifer” appeared in the Vulgate and KJV, and thus was the dominant translation of Isaiah 14:12 for around 1600 years, “Lucifer” has become one of the most well-known names for the Devil.

18. Slanderer. The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διάβολος), which means “slanderer,” “the one who slanders others,” and slander (and the lying that always accompanies it) is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. Unfortunately, diabolos has traditionally been transliterated as “Devil” rather than translated as “Slanderer.” This has caused Christianity to lose a significant amount of understanding about him. The meaning of diabolos is important, because God uses the meaning of names to describe the character of the one who has the name. Actually, we would learn a lot more about most of the Bible characters if their names were translated rather than transliterated.

When it is used without the definite article “the,” diabolos usually does not refer to the Devil, but to a person who is a slanderer (cp. 1 Tim. 3:11; Titus 2:3). The Devil is “the Slanderer,” and slander is one of his major characteristics. He is spoken of in many places in the NT (Cp. Matt. 4:1; 13:39; John 8:44; Acts 13:10; Heb. 2:14; Rev. 12:9).

In English, the word “Devil” only has meaning because we have all called God’s archenemy “the Devil” for so long, but the name “Devil” has no actual meaning in English. God specifically gave His arch-enemy the name “Slanderer” to teach us about one of his most prominent characteristics, and when “Devil” is substituted for “Slanderer,” we lose that great meaning.

19. Tempter. The Greek is peirazō (#3985 πειράζω; pronounced, pay-rah'-zō), which means to tempt, to put through an ordeal. It can also be used in a good sense, to test with the idea of the one tested being successful, but that is not its meaning when it is used of the Slanderer. The Tempter is an apt name for the Slanderer, because he is constantly at work to set traps and temptations up so that people will fall. The Adversary comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), and often he sets the stage with a temptation so that we end up destroying ourselves. “The Tempter” is used in Matthew 4:3.
20. Wicked One (or Evil One). The Greek is *poneros* (#4190 πονηρός), which the BDAG Greek-English Lexicon describes as, “pertaining to being morally or socially worthless; therefore, ‘wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, and degenerate.’” *Poneros* is an adjective, but it is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun; for more on substantives, see the commentary on Matthew 5:37).

The Slanderer is the fount and foundation of wickedness. It was in him that wickedness was first found when he was lifted up with pride and decided to rebel against God. Ever since that time he has been true to his name, “the Wicked One,” and has been aggressively and destructively doing and causing wickedness wherever he can. The places where he is called “the Wicked One” are Matthew 5:37; 6:13; 13:19, 38; John 17:15; Ephesians 6:16; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 John 2:13, 14; 3:12; 5:18, and 19.

Part of the “wickedness” of the “Wicked One” is his constant attack on the meaning of words. He knows that God communicated to mankind in words, and if he can lessen their impact, or cause people to not understand them, that is a major victory. “Wicked” is one of the words that has almost lost its meaning today. The Adversary has worked in our “pop culture” to turn the meaning of “wicked” upside down, and today in many social circles it is usually used to refer to something that is very good. Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (11th edition) defines “wicked” as “morally very bad,” and Webster’s 1828 Dictionary says it is “deviating from the divine law; addicted to vice; sinful; immoral. This is a word of comprehensive signification, extending to everything that is contrary to moral law.” That sums up the Greek meaning of *poneros*, and describes both “wicked,” and the activities of the Slanderer.
Appendix 15. Can We Pray to Jesus?

There is a debate among some Christian groups as to whether or not people can pray to Jesus. As we will see from the evidence below, Scripture testifies that it is permissible to pray to Jesus. Before we explore the issue of prayer to Jesus, it is important to understand that the basic meaning of “pray” is “ask.” While any given prayer may have some praise in it, or some general communication of our thoughts and feelings, the word “prayer” fundamentally refers to asking for something. In contrast, “praise” is fundamentally related to thanksgiving. Saying we can pray to Jesus is simply saying we can ask him for things.

The bulk of what we understand about prayer to Jesus comes from the Last Supper and the New Testament from Acts to Revelation. Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper marked a tidal shift in his relationship with his disciples, and so it makes sense that some of the pieces of evidence below come from Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper. All four Gospels record the Last Supper, but only the Gospel of John records Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper. While Matthew, Mark, and Luke spend less than half a chapter on the Last Supper, the Gospel of John spends 5 chapters on it (chapters 13-17—almost one-quarter of the Gospel). At the Last Supper, Jesus spent much time telling his disciples about the new relationship he would have with them after his resurrection and ascension (cp. John 14:1-4, 18, 28; 16:5-7, 16). For example, he told them they could ask him for things, that he would not leave them as orphans, and he would now call them “friends,” not servants. These points are covered below.

1. Ask me. One of the clearest points of Scripture that supports prayer to Jesus is John 14:14, which occurs at the Last Supper. Since a major part of Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper was about his relationship with the disciples after his resurrection and then ascension, it fits with that general theme that John 14:14 is about asking Jesus for things after he ascends into heaven. Jesus said, “If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” After Jesus was given all authority and ascended into heaven, believers can pray to both him and God.

The manuscript evidence supports the word “me” being in the original text. Modern textual scholars have concluded that some of the scribes copying the Greek text either thought that the wording, “ask me anything in my name” seemed strange, or they wanted to avoid what they thought was a contradiction with John 16:23, so they omitted the word “me” from the
manuscripts they were copying (or, in a couple of manuscripts scribes changed “me” to “the Father”). This explains why “me” is not in the King James Version—the manuscripts used in making the King James did not have the “me.” However, the weight of the manuscript evidence supports the word “me” being original, which is why almost all modern versions include it.

The “me” occurs in the earliest manuscripts such as p66, a wide representation of Greek manuscripts, Syriac (Aramaic), Latin, and Gothic manuscripts, and a number of lectionaries. (Cp. Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* and *The Greek New Testament*, United Bible Society, 3rd edition). Further textual evidence that the “me” is original is that often, scribes took what they considered difficult passages and changed them to be simpler and more easily understood. Omitting the word “me,” would certainly do that, especially in light of John 16:23, but there is no good reason why any scribe would add the word “me” if it was not in the original text because that would create a more difficult reading and the very apparent contradiction some scribes were apparently trying to avoid.

Also, since it was the tendency of the scribes to simplify the text to avoid apparent contradictions, it makes more sense that they would change “me” to “the Father” in a few manuscripts to avoid a contradiction, than that many scribes would add the word “me” while a few others added the phrase “the Father.”

Jesus telling his disciples that they could ask him for anything after his resurrection certainly fits with the scope of Scripture, since Jesus knew that he was about to be given great authority as the Son of God. That Jesus told his disciples that they could ask him for things after his resurrection and ascension is no doubt the reason that the early Church did indeed ask Jesus for things, as evidenced by both Acts and the Epistles, and also from early historical evidence about Christianity.

Acts and the Epistles show that the early Christians did indeed ask Jesus for things, which is what the phrase “call upon the name of the Lord Jesus” refers to (1 Cor. 1:2; see point # 5 below; calling on the name of Jesus).

[For more information on John 14:14 not contradicting John 16:23 see commentary on John 16:23. For more information on John 14:14, see commentary on that verse].

2. *Jesus is “Lord.”* Another point of Scripture and logic that supports us praying to Jesus is that he is Lord of all (Acts 10:36; Rom. 10:12), and the very essence of “lordship” is being in charge and running things. That is
why the Greek word for “Lord” was used of rulers, landowners, and heads of households. Jesus is Lord because he is God’s “right hand man” and is directly in charge of the Church. To be able to do that job, God gave him all authority in heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18). In order for Jesus to be our “Lord” in any meaningful sense of the word, we have to be able to communicate with him and ask him for help. Hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of people asked Jesus for things when he was on earth, and if Jesus is truly functioning as “Lord,” then we must be able to ask him for things.

Someone might say, “Well, when Jesus was physically present on earth people could ask him for things, but now that he is not physically present we cannot ask him for things.” We would respond that the Lord said, “I am with you always, even to the end of the Age” (Matt. 28:20), and we trust that his being with us now is every bit as real and vital as his being with people when he physically lived on earth. Jesus may not be with us physically, but he is still “with” us.

3. Fellowship with Jesus. Another reason we believe Scripture supports prayer to Jesus is that it says we are to have “fellowship” with him. 1 John 1:3 says, “…and indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” The word “fellowship” in the Greek is koinōnia (κοινωνία), and it is used in several different ways in the New Testament. Fundamentally, it refers to a close association involving mutual interests and sharing; a close relationship characterized by involvement and sharing (Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:3). From that fundamental definition, it developed a second definition and also came to refer to the love or good will that comes with a close relationship; thus “generosity, sharing, participation” (2 Cor. 9:13). Koinōnia also came to have a third definition, referring to the result of close association, which is “a gift, a contribution” (Rom. 15:26).

When it comes to the fellowship that people have with one another, koinōnia has sometimes been defined as “full sharing,” which has been more fully explained as “intimate joint participation.” In the Scriptures where people “fellowship” with each other, we can sometimes clearly see that there is intimate joint participation. For example, in Acts 2:42, the people were meeting together, eating together, praying together, giving their possessions to one another, and following the Apostles’ teaching. In a similar vein, Galatians 2:9 says that James, Peter, and John extended the “right hand of fellowship” to Barnabas and Paul, meaning they jointly and fully shared things among themselves. Also, 1 John 1:3 shows that John
told the disciples all about Jesus so they could have “fellowship,” intimate joint participation, with John and the other apostles who had seen the Lord. In contrast, light has no “fellowship” with darkness because there is no intimate joint participation (2 Cor. 6:14).

The uses of “fellowship” in 1 John clarifies what our fellowship with Jesus is supposed to be. 1 John 1:3 uses “fellowship” to refer to the fellowship we have with other believers, with God, and with Christ. Logic would dictate that the meaning of “fellowship” is the same for all three: believers, God, and Christ. Our fellowship with God is an intimate joint participation: we expect Him to hear us and to hear from Him. The same is true of our “fellowship” with other believers. It would be unusual if, in that same context, our “fellowship” with Jesus was fundamentally different. That we have fellowship with God and Jesus fits with what Jesus said at the Last Supper about revealing himself to those who love him and keep his commandments. Jesus promised: “Whoever has my commandments, and is keeping them, that is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and will reveal myself to him” (John 14:21).

If we obey Christ and follow his ways, we will have fellowship with him and he will reveal himself to us, just as he promised. Our asking Jesus for things (praying to him) is just a natural part of that fellowship. [For more information on “fellowship” with Jesus, see commentary on 1 John 1:3].

4. **Head of the Body.** Another reason we believe Scripture supports prayer to Jesus is that he is the “Head” of the “Body of Christ” (Eph. 1:22, 23; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:19). The Greeks, indeed, most cultures, used the word “head” in many ways, for example, the literal head of the body; a leader or someone of superior rank in a group; the top, start, or extremity of something (we speak of the “head” of a line and a “head” of foam on top of the beer), and more. The Bible follows the cultural use of “head” and uses it in different ways too. For example, it calls the “cornerstone,” the stone that sets fundamental lines and levels of the building (1 Peter 2:7), “the head of the corner.” Given the different uses of “head,” we must discover its meaning in any given verse by the context and way it is used. When it uses “head” in the context of Jesus being “the head of the body of Christ,” then we know that God is making a comparison between the way Christ works with his body and the way the human head works with the human body.

The “Body of Christ” is a spiritual reality, and every individual Christian is an individual part of the Body. Just as the human head is in
intimate and immediate contact with every part of the human body, and the body in contact with the head, so too Jesus is in contact and communication with his Body, the Church, and the members of the Church are in contact with him. As the Head of the Body, the Lord Jesus is actively involved in guiding and sustaining each Christian, and each Christian should be in contact with Jesus, requesting his help and guidance. It would be at least confusing, and perhaps even disingenuous, to say Jesus is the “Head” of the Body of Christ but not in direct communication with the Body.

5. Call upon Jesus. Another solid piece of evidence that people can pray to Jesus is the phrase, “call upon the name of the Lord.” Christians are to call on the name of the Lord Jesus, that is, ask him for things they need. The phrase “call upon the name of” is a formula of petition, of prayer.

The record in 1 Kings 18:24-38 of Elijah standing against the prophets of Baal is a clear example of the phrase “call on” being used as a prayer formula. When Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal, he said, “you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of Yahweh. The god who answers by fire—he is God” (1 Kings 18:24). What ensued after that was a “prayer contest.” The prophets of Baal “called on the name of Baal from morning till noon,” but no one answered their prayers, and they continued through the afternoon with still no result. Then Elijah stepped forward and said, “O Yahweh…let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command…then the fire of Yahweh fell” from the sky. So Elijah’s prayer—calling on the name of Yahweh—was answered while the prayers of the false prophets were not.

Throughout the Old Testament, when people “called upon the name of Yahweh,” it was to pray to, appeal to, or ask for help from God (cp. Gen. 12:8, 1 Sam. 12:17; 1 Kings 18:24; 2 Kings 5:11; Ps. 99:6; Zech. 13:9). The New Testament continues the use of the phrase “call upon the name of the Lord,” but it often makes clear that the “Lord” being called upon is now Jesus. For example, 1 Corinthians 1:2 says, “all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours.”

About the phrase “call upon the name of” the Lord, Vincent’s Word Studies says: “It is used of worship, and here implies prayer to Christ” (see his entry on 1 Cor. 1:2). Similarly, R. C. H. Lenski writes in The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians, “‘To call on him’ means to praise, bless, thank, worship him, and to ask of him all that we need for body and for soul.” James Dunn writes:
In common Greek, too, *epikaleisthai* is regularly used of calling upon a deity. So it is not surprising that the Septuagint uses the phrase frequently, *epikaleisthai to onoma kyriou* (“to call upon the name of the Lord”), that is in prayer. The same usage naturally reappears in the New Testament, where invocation of God is in view. More striking, however, is the fact that it is the Lord Jesus who is “called upon” on several occasions. And even more striking is the fact that believers can be denoted simply as “those who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:2). The defining feature of these early Christians (“those who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” is almost a definition, equivalent to “Christians”) marked them out from others who “called upon (the name of)” some other deity or heavenly being” (*Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?* ebook 1.2, “Other Vocabulary”).

Dunn’s point in contrasting the Christians who “called upon Jesus” from the pagans who would have called upon another deity is an important one. Biblical culture, whether Christian, Jewish, or pagan, was very religious. The gods were everywhere. Temples abounded, and the gods were honored and their help invoked at every public event, play, or the public games, and even for such things as a ship taking sale out of harbor or a person being installed in office (hence our English word “inaugurate,” i.e., to install upon the approval of the “augur,” the priest). The gods were represented as statues and base-reliefs, and depicted on mosaics, paintings, and pottery. One Roman satirist claimed that it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens. Given that almost every person called upon one god or another for assistance, it an easy and clear way to distinguish Christians from the rest of religious society was to call them “those who called upon Jesus Christ,” a designation that worked because Christians were in fact calling upon Jesus for assistance and not asking help from the gods.

Verses showing that the early Christians called upon the name of the Lord Jesus include: Acts 7:59; 9:14, 21; Romans 10:12, 13; and 1 Corinthians 1:2. The scriptures in Acts are especially pertinent, because they show that the first century Christians did indeed pray to Christ. [For more on calling on the name of the Lord, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:2].
6. **Know Jesus.** Another piece of evidence that supports our praying to Jesus is that we are to “know” Jesus (Phil. 3:8 and 10). In Philippians, Paul wrote about knowing Jesus, and there is a huge difference between “knowing about” Jesus and actually knowing him. Paul did not just want to “know about” Jesus. In fact, he said he counted any position he could claim in the world to be just dung compared to knowing Christ. Really knowing someone involves personally interacting with the person. In fact, it is difficult to imagine how we could really “know” Christ without personal interaction with him. Christians can personally interact with Jesus, which is often via the gift of holy spirit, and part of that interaction certainly includes feeling free to ask him for help when we need it. [For more on knowing Jesus, see commentary on Philippians 3:8].

7. **Chief Shepherd.** Another reason we know we can personally communicate with Jesus Christ is that he is the “Chief Shepherd” (1 Pet. 5:4) and is “the good shepherd” (John 10:11, 14). In fact, the Bible prophesied that Jesus would shepherd the people (Micah 5:4, quoted in Matt. 2:6), and refers to Jesus as the shepherd in a number of places (cp. Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25; Rev. 7:17). Every good shepherd works hard to have a personal relationship with his sheep so that they know and trust him. This fact is well known by anyone who works with sheep, and is clearly set forth in Scripture. A good shepherd knows each sheep by name (John 10:3). He leads them and they willingly follow because they know his voice (John 10:4). In fact, they will not follow a stranger because they do not know the stranger’s voice (John 10:5).

Referring to Jesus as a “shepherd” and we humans as sheep is metaphorical language, and metaphorical language only really works if the metaphor accurately represents many of the facts of the situation. In the biblical culture, the shepherd and sheep had a very close relationship; the shepherd communicated with the sheep and the sheep were able to make their needs known to the shepherd. Jesus could not legitimately be called “the good shepherd” if we could not communicate with him and expect help from him. Jesus promised: “I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20), and he is. No sheep would expect to tackle life without the shepherd’s personal attention and help, and similarly we should not tackle life on our own without Jesus’ guidance and help. Let us regularly and diligently look to Jesus for help and guidance. [For more on Jesus being the Chief Shepherd, see commentary on 1 Peter 5:4].

8. **Friend.** Another piece of evidence that we can pray to Jesus is that he calls us “friends.” At the Last Supper, Jesus told his followers that they are
his “friends” (philos) if they do what he commands (John 15:13-15). In fact, he shows his apostles what he means, and proves to them that they are indeed his friends, by telling them that he has told them what he heard from his Father—an intimate communication that he would only tell to his friends. He emphasizes his point by saying that slaves/servants do not know what the Lord does, but friends do. What Jesus said has huge implications for Christians, because Jesus is opening the door for us to be “friends” with him. And nothing could be of greater worth. No wonder Paul said that he counted all his worldly credentials as dung in comparison to “knowing” Jesus, that is, having a firsthand, experiential relationship, or “friendship,” with Christ (Phil. 3:8-10).

Actually, the concept of having a genuine friendship relationship with Jesus Christ is part of the very fabric of Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper. It is vital to understand Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper because for much of it he was telling his disciples things that would define their roles and relationship after his resurrection and ascension. Jesus knew what his disciples did not know: that in a few hours he would be arrested, then crucified, and after his resurrection his relationship with them would be on a different level. Even with Jesus gone, his disciples had to be confident that he would continue to be in close contact with them even though he would be in heaven and they would be on earth. Jesus built their confidence and calmed their fears by saying in a number of different ways that he would be with them. These different ways included: he said that he and the disciples would be “friends” (John 15:14, 15), they would “see” him (cp. John 14:19), they would be in union with Jesus and the Father (John 14:20), he would show himself to them (John 14:21), he and the Father would make their home in them (John 14:23; monē means “home,” “residence,” “dwelling place”), and they could ask him for what they needed (John 14:14).

One of the hallmarks of genuine friendship is that we can ask friends for things. It is quite inconceivable that Jesus would say that those disciples who followed him would be his “friends,” but could not be in touch with him. Regular and intimate communication is part of friendship. [For more information on our friendship with Jesus, see the commentary on John 15:14, “friends”].

9. Not orphans. A very graphic way that Jesus, at the Last Supper, told his disciples he would still guide and direct them after his resurrection and ascension was when he said, “I will not leave you as orphans” (John 14:18). The Greek word translated “orphans” is orphanos (#3737 ὀρφανός), and it
was an important word referring to what could happen in the teacher-disciple relationship. In the biblical culture, a person who was a father figure, mentor, and guide, was called a “father.” Thus, Joseph said he had become a “father” to Pharaoh (Gen. 45:8), the prophet Elisha referred to the elder prophet Elijah as his “father” (2 Kings 2:12), and the king of Israel referred to the prophet Elisha as his “father,” his spiritual mentor and guide (2 Kings 6:21).

In turn, just as a mentor was called a “father,” a disciple was called a “son” (huios, #5207 υἱός), or a “child” (teknon, #5043 τέκνον). Although huios means “son,” it is sometimes translated as the gender neutral “child,” and although the Greek word teknon is gender neutral and means “child,” if the context is clearly about males or females, it may legitimately be translated as “son” or “daughter.” A clear example of the word “son” being used for disciples occurs in the Old Testament when the disciples of the prophets were called “the sons of the prophets” (1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1, etc.). When the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebul, he said, “If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? (Matt. 12:27). The “sons” of the Pharisees were the disciples of the Pharisees. The Apostle Paul referred to Timothy as his “child” (1 Tim. 1:2), and also Titus (Titus 1:4), and Onesimus (Philemon 1:10). At the last supper, Jesus referred to the apostles as his “little children” (John 13:33; teknon, #5040 τεκνίον, the diminutive of teknon.)

Because the word “father” was used of a teacher/mentor, the Rabbis taught that if a great teacher died or left, his followers were “fatherless,” thus “orphans.” From John 13:33-14:6 Jesus very clearly told the disciples that he was going away. No doubt they were alarmed and concerned. They would be orphans, without their “father.” What would they do? Jesus calmed their fears by saying, “I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you” (John 14:18). In telling his disciples that he would not leave them as orphans, Jesus promised to continue to teach, guide, and direct them. He would do this personally, by coming to them and making a home in them (John 14:23), and also by sending an Advocate, the holy spirit.

Orphans were often taken advantage of in society, and so they needed an “advocate,” which is one of the primary meanings of the Greek word, paraklētos (#3875 παράκλητος). This advocate (paraklētos), the holy spirit, is known as the “Helper” (ESV, REV); “Comforter” (ASV, KJV); “Counselor” (HCSB, NIV84); and “Advocate” (NET, NIV2011). It is noteworthy that the only time the holy spirit is called an Advocate is at the
Last Supper, when Jesus was trying to comfort the disciples by telling them they would not be left as orphans and by explaining to them how things would work after he was gone. [For more on Jesus’ use of “orphans,” see commentary on John 14:18].

**People praying to Jesus.** Besides the general examples of Christians calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus, the Bible also contains examples of people who spoke to or prayed to Jesus, asking him for things. One such person was the first martyr of the Church, Stephen. The Bible says, “And as they were stoning Stephen, he was calling upon the Lord and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit’” (Acts 7:59). The phrase “calling upon” is very specific, and is a prayer formula, as we saw above. Stephen asked Jesus to do something for him, which is a prayer. He asked, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And he kneeled down, and cried out another request with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” It is important that although Stephen saw both Jesus and God in his vision of heaven (Acts 7:56), he called upon Jesus to fulfill his request.

Paul also prayed to Jesus, and pleaded with him about his “thorn in the flesh.” 2 Corinthians 12:8 says, “Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it might depart from me.” It is clear that the “Lord” Paul prayed to is Jesus, because Jesus said, “my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9), so Paul stated that he would “boast all the more in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

Ananias was another disciple who spoke with the Lord, and when he spoke with Jesus the conversation was normal, casual, and comfortable, not strained or filled with surprise and anxiety. It seems clear from the record in Acts 9 that Ananias did not think that talking to Jesus was unusual. [For more information on Ananias and Jesus, see commentary on Acts 9:10].

It also seems clear that in Acts 1:24 the Apostles prayed to Jesus to see whom he had chosen to replace Judas. Jesus chose the original Apostles (Luke 6:13; and this is confirmed in Acts 1:2), and he places Apostles in the Body (Eph. 4:11), so it seems most natural that the Apostles would ask Jesus whom he had chosen to replace Judas [For more on the prayer in Acts 1, see commentary on Acts 1:24].

In summary, the New Testament tells us of Jesus’ personal interaction with Stephen (Acts 7:56); Saul/Paul (Acts 9:1-9; 16:7; 23:11; Gal. 1:12; 2 Cor. 12:9); Ananias (Acts 9:10-16); Peter (Acts 10:9-22; 2 Pet. 1:14); and John (Rev. 1:9-18). Some say “the Lord” Peter addressed in Acts 10 was God, but there are good reasons to believe it was Jesus. First, Peter was in the habit of calling Jesus “Lord.” Second, he had a history of arguing
with Jesus, but never with God. Third, the voice came from “the Spirit” (verse 19) and in direct address after Pentecost, Jesus is called “the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17; Rev. 2:7; etc.)

**Jesus’ involvement with the Church.** As the Lord with all authority and Head of the Body of Christ, Jesus is actively involved with each member of his Body. In his role as Lord, what he does includes that he:

- Pours out the gift of holy spirit to believers (John 15:26; Acts 2:33).
- Gives us grace (Rom. 1:5; 16:20; 1 Cor. 16:23; 2 Cor. 8:9; 13:14; Gal. 1:6; 6:18; Eph. 4:7; Phil 4:23; 1 Thess. 5:8; 2 Thess. 1:12; 3:18).
- Gives us peace (2 Thess. 3:16).
- Gives us mercy (1 Cor. 7:25).
- Blesses us (Rom. 10:12; 15:29).
- Empowers us (Phil. 4:13).
- Nurtures and cares for the Church, holds it together and causes it to grow (Eph. 5:29; Phil 1:19; Col. 1:17; 2:19).
- Directs us (1 Cor. 16:7; 2 Thess. 3:5).
- Interceding for us (Rom. 8:35).
- Gives the equipping ministries to the Church (Eph. 1:1; 4:8, 11).
- Gives revelation (2 Cor. 12:1; Gal 1:12. Cp. the number of times he appeared to people and gave revelation to them, e.g., Acts 9:10ff; 18:9; Rev. 1:11, 17ff).
- Will transform our bodies at his appearing (Phil 3:21).
- Judge, reward, and punish people, according to what they deserve (John 5:21, 22; 2 Cor. 5:10; Eph. 6:8; Col. 3:23-25; 1 Thess. 4:6; 2 Thess. 1:8).

It makes perfect sense that we can ask our Lord, Head, Shepherd, and Friend, for whatever we need.

**Honoring God.** Something we should keep in mind when it comes to prayer to Jesus is that it does not dishonor God, it honors Him. God is the one who elevated Christ to His own right hand, made him Lord, gave him a name above every name, made him Head of the Body of Christ, entrusted all judgment to him (John 5:22), allowed him to be the one to give the ministries to the Church (Eph. 4:8, 11), and more. John 5:23 says, “that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.” If we are going to follow these verses and honor the Son just as we honor the Father, we must ask ourselves, “How do we honor the Father?” Surely one way we honor Him is
by our praise and thanksgiving to him, and by our prayers to Him. According to Scripture, we are to honor the Son in the same way.

**Not forbidden.** Another thing that is important to remember is that there is nothing in the Scripture that forbids us from praying to Jesus. We have to use this argument carefully, because there are thousands of things we should not do that the Scripture does not forbid. On the other hand, we should be aware that the Scripture specifically forbids many things, for example, eight of the Ten Commandments are specific prohibitions; “Thou shalt not…!”

Generally, God specifically forbids something when “logic” or emotion might lead us to do it. Thus, for example, “do not steal” and “do not commit adultery,” which one could argue God did not need to forbid, He did specifically forbid because of human weakness. Since Jesus said we could ask him for things, is our Lord, our friend, one we fellowship with, the Head of the Body, the Chief Shepherd, and “with us always, even to the end of the age,” logic would lead us—indeed, some would say compel us—to the conclusion that we should talk to him and ask him for things. Given that, it would be reasonable that if God did not want the Body speaking to the Head, or the sheep being in communication with the Shepherd, He would have forbidden it. However, no verse prohibits us from asking Jesus for what we need, a good indication that we can indeed be in intimate communication with him.

**Jesus’ power and authority.** A common objection that Biblical Unitarians give for prayer to Jesus is that since Jesus is still a man, he cannot possibly be in communication with everyone in the Body of Christ. The answer to that objection is that just because we cannot understand how Jesus could communicate with each member of his Body does not mean it does not happen. Jesus has many powers we do not understand, such as how he gives holy spirit to each person who gets born again (Acts 2:33), or how he will change our bodies to be like his body (Phil. 3:21), but Scripture testifies he does those things. God has given Jesus “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18), so we should not be quick to say what he cannot do.

**When do we pray to Jesus?** Once we realize we can pray to God and also to Jesus, the question arises, when do we pray to God and when to Jesus? The Bible never answers that question. God, Jesus, and Christians are a family, and just as each member of an earthly family has an individual relationship with the other members of the family, sharing differently with the different members, so it is with us and God and Jesus. Each Christian
will develop his own individual relationship with God and with Jesus, and the specific communication between them will come naturally out of that relationship.

[For information on singing to Jesus, see commentary on Ephesians 5:19. For information on worshipping Jesus, see commentary on Matthew 2:2].
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