

THE GOD OF OUR LIVES

***A STUDY OF THE CHARACTER AND WORKS OF GOD
USING A SELECTION OF HIS HEBREW NAMES***

MARTIN PURYEAR

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*AND THOSE WHO KNOW YOUR NAME WILL PUT THEIR TRUST IN YOU,
FOR YOU, O LORD, HAVE NOT FORSAKEN THOSE WHO SEEK YOU.*

– PSALM 9:10

*“WHAT COMES INTO OUR MINDS WHEN WE THINK ABOUT GOD
IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT US.”*

– A. W. TOZER

THE GOD OF OUR LIVES**A SNAPSHOT OF THE COURSE***Our Objectives*

For each of us to gain perspective on the character of the God of the Bible

For each of us to grow in our willingness to trust our God

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YAHWEH (PART 1)**GOD IS SELF-EXISTENT**

FOR JUST AS THE FATHER HAS LIFE IN HIMSELF, EVEN SO HE GAVE TO THE SON ALSO TO HAVE LIFE IN HIMSELF. (JOHN 5:26)

Something Greater than the Polish of Man

Have you ever been on a committee whose task was to find a new pastor for your church? I would like to invite you to join us on our pulpit search committee for about five minutes. We are looking over the resumes of two candidates and watching the videos of their preaching.

According to the resume of the first man, we read that he won a medal at the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona. He served in the United States Army as a Green Beret from 1993 – 1996. He later attended seminary where he earned his doctorate in Old Testament languages in 2004. He is married with two grown children and three grandchildren. He has written three books on church growth. And he would be coming to us from a church with 1,200 members where he served as senior pastor.

As we watch this first candidate's video, we notice that his grammar and articulation are perfect. His delivery is flawless.

According to the resume of the second man, we read that he was born with a birth defect and, as a result, has lived his life confined to a wheelchair. He attended Bible College where he received a bachelor's degree in Bible in 2004. Since then, he has served as an assistant pastor in four churches, mostly smaller churches in the Midwest. He had been married; but his wife died suddenly when they were both in their early thirties. They had no children.

As we watch this second man's video, we notice that he has a slight stutter. His Biblical understanding is exceptionally good. But there is something else in this second man's preaching that was not present in the first man's preaching ... and *that* is what catches our attention.

The first man obviously believed what he was saying. We could tell from the tone of his voice. But something more than mere emotion was behind the second man's preaching. Although he was not an energetic speaker, there was something that *permeated* his words, something that drew us in to listen with absorbing interest.

The first man had credentials ... and zeal. But the second man had something more than credentials, something more than zeal. *Saturating* his words was power, a power generated by the Spirit of God.

How could a crippled man ... with only a little Bible training ... with limited exposure to large crowds ... and who spoke with a stutter ... how could this man radiate more power than an Olympic medalist, a Green Beret, a Doctor of Theology, and a published author?

Perhaps the power behind his words has something to do with *not having* healthy legs, with *not having* the continued companionship of a beloved wife he greatly misses, with *not having* experience before large crowds, with *not having* clear speech. Perhaps weakness itself has prepared the second man to be and do what we as a church are about to ask our future pastor to be and do. Extended pain has cultivated within the heart of this broken man a deep and abiding dependence on almighty God. Crushing sorrows have prepared him well for the responsibilities of a caring shepherd.

We, as members of the pulpit search committee, choose the second man. Why? Because we decided that the one to whom we extend our invitation is going to need a lot more than the credentials of man to understand what we need for him to understand ... and be what we need for him to be ... and do what we need for him to do. We decided that

THE POWER OF GOD IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE POLISH OF MAN

We are about to watch this truth unfold through the life of Moses, an extraordinary life with three very distinct phases:

the *exalted* life of Moses between the ages of early childhood and 40 years

the *broken* life of Moses between the ages of 40 and 80

and the *fruitful* life of Moses between the ages of 80 and 120

An Education in the School of Brokenness

The first 40 years of Moses' life could not have been more blessed:

- Physically, Moses is described as

BEAUTIFUL (Exodus 2:2)

- Socially and politically, his profile in Egypt could not have been higher.

HE WAS A MAN OF POWER IN WORDS AND DEEDS (Acts 7:22)

PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER NURTURED HIM AS HER OWN SON (Acts 7:21)

- Intellectually, he earned at least one “PhD” from the best university in the world of his day.

MOSES WAS EDUCATED IN ALL THE LEARNING OF THE EGYPTIANS (ACTS 7:22)

- And spiritually, Moses is described as

LOVELY IN THE SIGHT OF GOD (ACTS 7:20)

From early childhood to the age of forty, Moses’ life flourished in the areas of physical strength, leadership expertise, legal knowledge, and writing skills ... disciplines his future work would demand of him. But there was something else he would need in the future that all these advantages could not provide.

*HE WAS GOING TO NEED A DEPENDENCE ON ALMIGHTY GOD
THAT ONLY THE PAIN OF BROKENNESS CAN PRODUCE.*

When Moses was 40 years old, his favored position was yanked out from under him by one impulsive act. While defending a fellow Hebrew, he murdered an Egyptian citizen. And in doing so, this alien prince – accustomed to the courts of Egyptian royalty – was forced to abandon his privileged status and flee the country as a wanted man. Few have collapsed so far and as fast as this man Moses. In one day, he went from hero to zero ... from glory to obscurity. And although he did not know it, the second half of his education had just begun.

From the age of 40 to the age of 80, this adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter herded sheep for his father-in-law. Forty years! Imagine what it must have been like to sit on a rock ... in the middle of a sweltering wilderness ... making sure these “stupid, dirty, stinkin’ sheep” did not wander off ... while in his mind, he was back in Egypt, strolling through the splendid halls of Pharaoh’s courts. And this went on day after day after day ... for 40 years! How often he must have replayed that murder in his mind! How often he must have reached into his memory, trying to stop himself! How often waves of failure and regret must have flooded the heart of the one who had held such promise in the palm of his hand! A bright future, forfeited by one rash decision.

The second 40 years of Moses’ life were as humble as the first 40 years had been exalted. But all of that was about to change. Moses was about to learn that not one minute of those last 40 years as a shepherd in the wilderness had been wasted but, instead, had prepared him for one of the most illustrious careers in Biblical history.

As he was out in the field one day, he noticed a bush that was burning but that was not being consumed. Having approached this extraordinary scene, he heard the voice of God coming from the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-5). And when Moses asked Him for His Name, the LORD answered, “My Name is ‘I AM.’ ”

BEHOLD, I AM GOING TO THE SONS OF ISRAEL, AND I WILL SAY TO THEM, "THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS HAS SENT ME TO YOU." NOW THEY MAY SAY TO ME, "WHAT IS HIS NAME?" WHAT SHALL I SAY TO THEM? GOD SAID TO MOSES, "I AM WHO I AM"; AND HE SAID, "THUS YOU SHALL SAY TO THE SONS OF ISRAEL, 'I AM HAS SENT ME TO YOU ... THIS IS MY NAME FOREVER, AND THIS IS MY MEMORIAL-NAME TO ALL GENERATIONS.'" (EXODUS 3:13-15)

We will return to Moses a little later. But before we can fully appreciate this extraordinary encounter with God, we must first understand the significance of this extraordinary Name, "I AM."

The Significance of the Name "I AM"

"I AM" is the English translation of the Hebrew verb "hayah" meaning "to exist," "to be," "to become." It is from this verb that the Name Yahweh (or Jehovah) ¹ comes. Occurring 6,823 times in the Old Testament, this Name highlights the perfection of God's self-existence.

But what does that mean, that Yahweh is self-existent?

To be self-existent means that God was not created. No one or no thing brought "I AM" into existence. Yahweh was not dependent on anyone or anything else outside Himself for His being.

But how can anything exist without the aid of something else? With this kind of question, it is best to just be honest. The fact is, some of God's perfections are easier to grasp than others. Although none of us have been perfect in keeping our word, we can at least comprehend what it is like for someone to be "faithful." But how does one get his mind around the attribute of self-existence! To comprehend this Divine perfection is like trying to wrap a 2" piece of string around the planet Jupiter!

6-year-old child: "Daddy, who made God?"

Daddy: "No one made God. He has always been in existence."

6-year-old child: (A confused look appears on his face.)

Daddy: (A confused look appears on his face, too.)

26-year-old doctoral student of theology: "Professor, who made God?"

Professor of theology: "No one made God. He has always been in existence."

26-year-old doctoral student of theology: (A confused look appears on his face.)

Professor of theology: (A confused look appears on his face, too.)

No one made God. This means that God did not create Himself either. God made you and me. And He made the trees and the stars. But God did not make God. He is not self-created; He is self-existent. Nothing can create itself.

We are indebted to R. C. Sproul for the following help:

“To create itself, something ... would have to *be* before it *is*. It would have to exist and not exist at the same time. To create itself, it would have to pull itself into existence before it had anything to pull with. The very concept of self-creation is irrational. God could not have ‘made Himself.’ ”

“In a word, God is not a creature. He is not dependent ... Rather, God is the Creator. He is independent ... God, and God alone, has the power of ‘being’ within Himself.”²

Perhaps this attribute is unsettling because we cannot relate to it. We can define it; and we can describe it. But we cannot “connect” with it as we can with some of God’s other attributes such as faithfulness.

Self-existence is a Biblical truth our finite minds will simply have to accept. But is that so bad ... not being able to fully grasp the magnitude of our God! Let’s be careful not to miss something here. If we could fully understand everything about God, He would not be much of a God. He would be just as finite as are our minds. Should we not want a God that is so far beyond our comprehension that we are willing to feel “small” when we stand next to Him?

Why LORD? Why Did You Do This to Me?

This is all well and good. “I AM” is self-existent. But what does that have to do with us? We cannot even relate to it. What can we possibly take away from this lesson that will do us any good?

Because God is self-existent, He is in quite a unique position. The One Who was not brought into existence brought everything else into existence. He spoke and everything came into being. That is, the self-existent One is the Creator of all things. He did not need us to exist; but we needed Him to exist.

And because God is the One Who “stitched us together,” He is in the best possible position to be a wise Provider. He knows exactly what each individual believer needs to be all that he can be. And dear friends, He also knows what each individual believer does *not* need to be *all* that he can be.

TO BE ALL THAT YOU CAN BE SOMETIMES MEANS THE LORD WITHHOLDING FROM YOU
SOMETHING HE GIVES TO EVERYONE ELSE.

Have you ever been dissatisfied over what God has *not* given you? What you lack is not your fault. It was beyond your control. But here you are, not having something that most everyone else seems to have.

Why can't I have the *looks* that others seem to have?
I'm not as attractive as they are.

Why can't I have the *health* others seem to have?
I'm not as strong as they are.

Why can't I have the *IQ* others seem to have?
I'm not as smart as they are.

Why can't I have the *personality* others seem to have?
I'm not as likeable as they are.

Why can't I have a certain *ability* that others seem to have?
I'm not as gifted as they are.

Why couldn't I have had the *opportunities* others had?
I feel deprived.

Have you ever *felt* slighted by God? I have.

Does He have the right to do that ... to withhold from us something He has given to most everybody else? Yes, He does. Why? Because His Name is "I AM," the self-existent One. Yahweh is the Creator of all things – including you and me. And as Creator He has the right to make us have and be and do whatever *He* wants us to have and be and do.

OR DOES NOT THE POTTER HAVE A RIGHT OVER THE CLAY, TO MAKE FROM THE SAME LUMP ONE VESSEL FOR HONORABLE USE AND ANOTHER FOR COMMON USE? (ROMANS 9:21)

Our self-existent Creator has the right to sculpture our lives anyway He wants to. He has the right to be in charge. And He does not have to get our permission to do so. Nor does He owe us an explanation as to *why* He did what He did. But we can be certain of this very thing:

Not only does Yahweh have the right to do with us as He pleases, but He also has a good *reason* for doing what He does. In fact, He has *two* good reasons:

First, He makes us weak for *our sake*:

*BECAUSE OF THE SURPASSING GREATNESS OF THE REVELATIONS, FOR THIS REASON, **TO KEEP ME** (THE APOSTLE PAUL) **FROM EXALTING MYSELF**, THERE WAS GIVEN ME A THORN IN THE FLESH, A MESSENGER OF SATAN TO TORMENT ME – **TO KEEP ME FROM EXALTING MYSELF!** CONCERNING THIS I IMPILORED THE LORD THREE TIMES THAT IT MIGHT LEAVE ME. AND HE HAS SAID TO ME, “MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU, FOR **POWER IS PERFECTED IN WEAKNESS.**” MOST GLADLY, THEREFORE, I WILL RATHER BOAST ABOUT MY WEAKNESSES, SO THAT **THE POWER OF CHRIST MAY DWELL IN ME.**” (2ND CORINTHIANS 12:7-9, PARENTHESIS ADDED)*

But more importantly, He makes us weak for *His Own sake*:

*AS (JESUS) PASSED BY, HE SAW A MAN BLIND FROM BIRTH. AND HIS DISCIPLES ASKED HIM, “RABBI, WHO SINNED, THIS MAN OR HIS PARENTS, THAT HE WOULD BE BORN BLIND?” JESUS ANSWERED, “IT WAS NEITHER THAT THIS MAN SINNED, NOR HIS PARENTS; BUT IT WAS **SO THAT THE WORKS OF GOD MIGHT BE DISPLAYED IN HIM.**” (JOHN 9:1-3, PARENTHESIS ADDED)*

Yahweh, the self-existent Creator, has every right to intervene in the lives of His creatures anyway He chooses. And when He decides to crumble the self-assurance of an individual,

the one made weak is made more dependent on the power of God ...

so that, by that power, his life would conform more to the image of Christ ...

in order to represent the Savior more accurately and more consistently to a world groping for hope ...

and to share more fully in the radiant glory of the Son of God throughout eternity ...

and to glorify the Father, both now and throughout eternity.

We are not weak because God failed in His responsibility to keep us happy. We are weak for the sake of glory ... the eternal glory that God deserves and that, by His grace, we will share with Him.

There was a reason Yahweh chose Moses to lead over two million slaves out of Egypt. But it was

not because Moses “*WAS BEAUTIFUL*” (EXODUS 2:2) ...

not because “*PHARAOH’S DAUGHTER NURTURED HIM AS HER OWN SON*” (ACTS 7:21) ...

not because “HE WAS A MAN OF POWER IN WORDS AND DEEDS” (ACTS 7:22) ...

not because “MOSES WAS EDUCATED IN ALL THE LEARNING OF THE EGYPTIANS” (ACTS 7:22) ...

and not because “HE WAS LOVELY IN THE SIGHT OF GOD” (ACTS 7:20) ...

because when he was all of this, Moses

SUPPOSED THAT HIS BRETHREN UNDERSTOOD THAT GOD WAS GRANTING THEM DELIVERANCE THROUGH HIM. (ACTS 7:25)

Before he had been broken, Moses *assumed* that his status in Pharaoh’s court qualified him to deliver Israel from bondage. He also supposed that the people of Israel would listen to him because of his political influence. It was because of this self-assured attitude that he failed. He was not fit to be used by God. There was too much of Moses in the way for God’s power to be manifested.

Yahweh had to invest the second 40 years of Moses’ life humbling this man from thinking he was really something to thinking he was really nothing. For this man to be qualified for effective *spiritual* leadership, God had to get him out of the way. It was only after Moses had come to this conclusion about himself that he was ready to be used:

WHO AM I, THAT I SHOULD GO TO PHARAOH, AND THAT I SHOULD BRING THE SONS OF ISRAEL OUT OF EGYPT? (EXODUS 3:11)

and

PLEASE, LORD, I HAVE NEVER BEEN ELOQUENT, NEITHER RECENTLY NOR IN TIME PAST, NOR SINCE YOU HAVE SPOKEN TO YOUR SERVANT; FOR I AM SLOW OF SPEECH AND SLOW OF TONGUE. (EXODUS 4:10)

Forty years later, Moses no longer assumed that he was the man for the job. Indeed, he had come to believe that he was in no way qualified for the task. Ironically, he did not realize it but, by using these excuses, Moses was giving the LORD reasons why he *should* be used to lead His people to the Promised Land, not reasons why He should not. Moses went from being a *self-assured*

“MAN OF POWER IN WORDS AND DEEDS”

to being a man who has, in his own estimation,

“NEVER BEEN ELOQUENT ... SLOW OF SPEECH AND SLOW OF TONGUE.”

Why would this broken man now be qualified for effective spiritual leadership? Because *now* dependence upon the “polish of man” is gone, and dependence upon the power of God has taken its place.

WHO HAS MADE MAN'S MOUTH? OR WHO MAKES HIM MUTE OR DEAF, OR SEEING OR BLIND? IS IT NOT I, THE LORD? NOW THEN GO, AND I, EVEN I, WILL BE WITH YOUR MOUTH, AND TEACH YOU WHAT YOU ARE TO SAY. (EXODUS 4:11-12)

The Priceless Gift of Weakness

It is one of the paradoxes of the spiritual life. When we think we are strong, we are, in fact, quite weak. And when we think we are weak, we are in a position to be quite strong ... in the Lord. Contrary to the world's value system,

THE LORD WILL NOT USE US *BECAUSE* WE ARE MIGHTY IN ABILITY.

There is just too much of us that will get in His way.

NOR WILL THE LORD USE US *IN SPITE OF* OUR WEAKNESSES.

That sounds good; but it is not completely true. There is a more accurate reason.

THE LORD WILL USE US *BECAUSE OF* OUR WEAKNESSES.

*FOR CONSIDER YOUR CALLING, BRETHREN, THAT THERE WERE NOT MANY WISE ACCORDING TO THE FLESH, NOT MANY MIGHTY, NOT MANY NOBLE; BUT GOD HAS CHOSEN **THE FOOLISH THINGS** OF THE WORLD TO SHAME THE WISE, AND GOD HAS CHOSEN **THE WEAK THINGS** OF THE WORLD TO SHAME THE THINGS WHICH ARE STRONG, AND **THE BASE THINGS** OF THE WORLD AND **THE DESPISED** GOD HAS CHOSEN, THE THINGS THAT ARE NOT, SO THAT HE MAY NULLIFY THE THINGS THAT ARE, SO THAT NO MAN MAY BOAST BEFORE GOD. BUT BY HIS DOING YOU ARE IN CHRIST JESUS, WHO BECAME TO US WISDOM FROM GOD, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS AND SANCTIFICATION, AND REDEMPTION, SO THAT, JUST AS IT IS WRITTEN, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.” (1ST CORINTHIANS 1:26-31)*

So, do you ever feel that God has slighted you ... that He did not give you a strength He seems to have given everyone else (or perhaps took from you a strength you once had)? That is by Divine design. Why? Because

THE POWER OF GOD IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE POLISH OF MAN

It does not feel very good; but the fact is, our weaknesses are a priceless gift, meant to force us to our knees so that the power of almighty God might be displayed through us.

DO YOU NOT KNOW? HAVE YOU NOT HEARD? THE EVERLASTING GOD, YAHWEH, THE CREATOR OF THE ENDS OF THE EARTH DOES NOT BECOME WEARY OR TIRED. HIS UNDERSTANDING IS INSCRUTABLE.

HE GIVES STRENGTH TO THE WEARY, AND TO HIM WHO LACKS MIGHT HE INCREASES POWER. THOUGH YOUTHS GROW WEARY AND TIRED, AND VIGOROUS YOUNG MEN STUMBLE BADLY,

YET THOSE WHO WAIT FOR YAHWEH WILL GAIN NEW STRENGTH; THEY WILL MOUNT UP WITH WINGS LIKE EAGLES, THEY WILL RUN AND NOT GET TIRED, THEY WILL WALK AND NOT BECOME WEARY. (ISAIAH 40:28-31)

Yahweh took the exalted man Moses – who thought highly of himself – and humbled him. Then when he was eighty, He took the broken man Moses – who thought little of himself – and used him mightily to change history. God had every *right* to do this to Moses. And He has every right to do this to us. He is our self-existent Creator. He “stitched us together” in our mother’s womb (and therefore, intimately knows our frame). Yahweh knows exactly what to give us to be all that we can be for His glory ... and He knows exactly what to *withhold* from us to be *all* that we can be for *His* glory.

If we respond properly (in faith) to these gaps in our lives, we will find ourselves more dependent upon Him to fill each gap with more of Himself.

And when He does, *then* we will begin to understand the priceless value of weakness as we observe His resurrection power in our lives.

And *then* we will rejoice for being given the privilege of participating in the service and exaltation of our God.

And *then* we will rest, with deep satisfaction, in knowing that we will share in that glory – His glory – throughout eternity.

And *then* we will wonder why we ever considered our weakness to have been a problem to begin with.

And *then* we will marvel at the wisdom of God.

THEREFORE, I AM WELL CONTENT WITH WEAKNESSES, WITH INSULTS, WITH DISTRESSES, WITH PERSECUTIONS, WITH DIFFICULTIES, FOR CHRIST’S SAKE; FOR WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN I AM STRONG. (2ND CORINTHIANS 12:10)

His Name is Yahweh. He is our self-existent Creator.

GOD, FURTHERMORE, SAID TO MOSES, "THUS YOU SHALL SAY TO THE SONS OF ISRAEL, 'YAHWEH — THE GOD WHO IS NOT DEPENDENT ON ANYONE OR ANYTHING ELSE OUTSIDE HIMSELF FOR HIS EXISTENCE — HAS SENT ME TO YOU. THIS IS MY NAME FOREVER, AND THIS IS MY MEMORIAL-NAME TO ALL GENERATIONS.'" (EXODUS 3:15)

¹ Translated "LORD" [all capital letters] in the New American Standard Version (NASV), the King James Version (KJV), and the New International Version (NIV). Translated "Jehovah" in the American Standard Bible (ASB) and the Living Bible (LB).

² Sproul, R. C., *One Holy Passion*, Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987, page 19.

YAHWEH (PART 2)

GOD IS FAITHFUL

GOD IS NOT A MAN THAT HE SHOULD LIE, NOR A SON OF MAN THAT HE SHOULD REPENT. HAS HE SAID, AND WILL HE NOT DO IT? OR HAS HE SPOKEN, AND WILL HE NOT MAKE IT GOOD? (NUMBERS 23:19)

“Catch Me Pa”

On October 3rd, 1960, CBS television network aired the first episode of a series that has since been ranked by “TV Guide” magazine as the ninth best show in American television history. *The Andy Griffith Show* is about a small rural town, populated by a host of loveable citizens whose comical mishaps are kept in check by the watchful eye of a homespun, but wise, sheriff.

If you have ever watched this show, you are aware of the special relationship Sheriff Andy Taylor has with his young son Opie. This father has invested a lot of time in his son’s life to the point that Opie trusts his “Pa” almost without question.

In one episode there is a scene that demonstrates this trust. Opie is in Sheriff Taylor’s jailhouse office. He has just finished lunch and is about to return to school. But before he leaves, he looks up at his father and says, “Catch me, Pa?” And Andy says, “Well, OK; but just once.” So, Opie climbs up on his father’s desk ... Andy backs away from the desk about three feet ... he holds out his arms ... and Opie jumps.

It is such a simple scene that, if we are not paying attention, we will miss a wonderful illustration of faith:

First, when Opie positions himself on the edge of the desk, he does not look down at the floor and hesitate. No, as soon as he climbs onto the desk, he immediately jumps.

Nor does he ask his father, “You *are* going to catch me, right Pa?” Opie knew that his father would keep his promise to catch him.

We have not seen the many times this young boy had jumped into the arms of his father standing three feet away; but we can assume that this “jump and catch” routine has been repeated often. (Andy must set a limit on the number of times he will play this game just to get his son back to school on time.) And every time Opie jumped, Andy caught him. This father had proved his faithfulness to his son over and over and over.

The Bible reveals another Father's faithfulness. With perfect consistency, God the Father remains true to His Word over and over and over. He is a Person Who keeps His promises. But before God can *keep* His promises, He must first *promise to do something* ... which brings us to the single most important event in the history of national Israel, the "cutting" of the Abrahamic Covenant.

God's Covenant-Promises to Israel

Today when two parties want an agreement to be legally binding, they sign a contract. But according to ancient Middle Eastern culture, when two parties entered into a binding agreement, it was common for them to "cut a covenant." This would involve the two parties killing one or more animals, cutting them in half, positioning the halves on the ground (forming an "aisle" between the pieces), joining hands, and – as they walk between the halves – reciting the terms of their agreement.

The tone of this ceremony was serious. Each party was saying, "If I do not live up to my terms of this agreement, may I become like these animals."

We see an example of two parties cutting a covenant in Genesis 15. Those involved were the LORD and Abram; and the covenant they cut is known as the Abrahamic Covenant.

SO (THE LORD) SAID TO (ABRAM), "BRING ME A THREE-YEAR-OLD HEIFER, AND A THREE-YEAR-OLD FEMALE GOAT, AND A THREE-YEAR-OLD RAM, AND A TURTLEDOVE, AND A YOUNG PIGEON." THEN HE BROUGHT ALL THESE TO HIM AND CUT THEM IN TWO AND LAID EACH HALF OPPOSITE THE OTHER; BUT HE DID NOT CUT THE BIRDS. (GENESIS 15:9-10, PARENTHESES ADDED)

The terms of this covenant were the LORD's promises to give to Abram:

- a vast land mass with defined geographical (earthly) borders

AND HE SAID TO HIM, "I AM THE LORD WHO BROUGHT YOU OUT OF UR OF THE CHALDEANS, TO GIVE YOU THIS LAND TO POSSESS IT ... FROM THE RIVER OF EGYPT AS FAR AS THE GREAT RIVER, THE RIVER EUPHRATES." (GENESIS 15:7, 18; SEE ALSO 12:1)

- innumerable physical descendants

AND HE TOOK HIM OUTSIDE AND SAID, "NOW LOOK TOWARD THE HEAVENS, AND COUNT THE STARS, IF YOU ARE ABLE TO COUNT THEM." AND HE SAID TO HIM, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE." (GENESIS 15:5; SEE ALSO 12:2)

- and abundant material and spiritual blessings

AFTER THESE THINGS THE WORD OF THE LORD CAME TO ABRAM IN A VISION, SAYING, "DO NOT FEAR, ABRAM, I AM A SHIELD TO YOU; YOUR REWARD SHALL BE VERY GREAT." (GENESIS 15:1; SEE ALSO 12:2)

So according to procedure, the animals were killed, halved, and positioned on the ground. But then something quite significant took place. Abram was put to sleep.

NOW WHEN THE SUN WAS GOING DOWN, A DEEP SLEEP FELL UPON ABRAM; AND BEHOLD, TERROR AND GREAT DARKNESS FELL UPON HIM. (GENESIS 15:12)

Passing through the pieces *by Himself*, the LORD recited the terms of the covenant:

IT CAME ABOUT WHEN THE SUN HAD SET, THAT IT WAS VERY DARK, AND BEHOLD, THERE APPEARED A SMOKING OVEN AND A FLAMING TORCH WHICH PASSED BETWEEN THESE PIECES. ON THAT DAY THE LORD MADE A COVENANT WITH ABRAM, SAYING, "TO YOUR DESCENDANTS I HAVE GIVEN THIS LAND, FROM THE RIVER OF EGYPT AS FAR AS THE GREAT RIVER, THE RIVER EUPHRATES." (GENESIS 15:17-18)

Abram and his descendants were now united to the LORD in a covenant-relationship. Whether or not Israel would *experience* the blessings of this covenant would depend on their faith in God. (Then, as now, God's people were to live by faith.) This chosen family was expected to trust the LORD to fulfill the promises of His covenant with them.

If they inwardly trusted Him to keep His Word, it would outwardly show. Their faith in Him would be evident by how they conducted their lives. (Then, as now, their living faith would produce an obedient life.)

So, the question before Abram and his descendants was this:

WILL WE, GOD'S COVENANT-PEOPLE, TRUST AND OBEY THE GOD OF THAT COVENANT?

The answer would not be long in coming.

Israel's Responsibilities / Israel's Failures

During the infant years of the Jewish race, God gave its patriarchs certain commandments He expected them to obey:

1) Abram was commanded to *go* to the land he was promised ...

NOW THE LORD SAID TO ABRAM, "GO FORTH FROM YOUR COUNTRY ... TO THE LAND WHICH I WILL SHOW YOU." (GENESIS 12:1)

But he was never told to *leave* this land of promise. He and his family were to remain in Canaan. Even during times of famine, they were to trust God to sustain them. However, without asking God for direction, Abram moved his family to Egypt (Genesis 12:10-20). And the results? The *truth* was compromised. The *health of Pharaoh and his household* was compromised. The *integrity of Abram's reputation* was compromised. The *reputation of the God he represented, Yahweh*, was compromised. And the *purity of his wife* came close to being compromised.

Isaac too, when tempted by famine, was in the process of leaving his land of promise for Egypt but was stopped from doing so by divine intervention. (Genesis 26:1-3, see also 24:5-8)³

- 2) The patriarchs of Israel were commanded to separate themselves from the immoral practices of the surrounding heathen nations.

NOW WHEN ABRAM WAS NINETY-NINE YEARS OLD, THE LORD APPEARED TO ABRAM AND SAID TO HIM, "I AM GOD ALMIGHTY. WALK BEFORE ME AND BE BLAMELESS." (GENESIS 17:1)

But *they failed* to do so. The early generations of this chosen family

pursued binding relationships with the idolatrous people-groups that surrounded them (Genesis 16:1-4, 26:34-35 & 27:46, 34:1)

practiced deceit (Genesis 12:11-13, 20:1-2, 26:7, 27:1-29, 31:26-31, 31:34-35, 37:31-33)

indulged in sexual immorality (Genesis 35:22, 38:15-18)

committed murder (Genesis 34:30)

and permitted jealousy / resentment to govern their actions (Genesis 37:20)

- 3) Furthermore, these early generations of Israel were commanded to observe the God-ordained ritual of circumcision (the sign of their faith in the Abrahamic Covenant).

THIS IS MY COVENANT, WHICH YOU SHALL KEEP, BETWEEN ME AND YOU AND YOUR DESCENDANTS AFTER YOU: EVERY MALE AMONG YOU SHALL BE CIRCUMCISED. AND YOU SHALL BE CIRCUMCISED IN THE FLESH OF YOUR FORESKIN, AND IT SHALL BE THE SIGN OF THE COVENANT BETWEEN ME AND YOU. (GENESIS 17:10-11)

But *they failed* to do so. Moses himself had failed to circumcise his own son (Exodus 4:24-26); and those who followed him out of Egypt failed to circumcise their sons during their wilderness wanderings (Joshua 5:2-7). This blatant indifference toward

the value of this ritual revealed Israel's lack of faith in the covenant they had with Yahweh.

Israel's early ancestors had been promised tremendous blessings from the LORD. To benefit from these blessings, this chosen family was expected to conduct themselves as those who were in a covenant-relationship with the God of holiness. Yet, this privileged nation often failed in fulfilling these terms of conduct.

So, would the LORD "tear up His contract" with the people of this covenant? Would He divorce those who had been so unfaithful to Him? Let's fast-forward six hundred years to see if Israel's disobedience changed God's commitment to the descendants of Abram.

Some Things Just Never Change

The Faithfulness of God

We have already been introduced to Moses. Having fled from Egypt as a man wanted for murder, he spent the next 40 years of his life herding sheep for his father-in-law. One day he observed a bush that was burning but not being consumed; and from the burning bush, he heard the voice of God (Exodus 3:1-5).

I HAVE SURELY SEEN THE AFFLICTION OF MY PEOPLE (THE SONS OF ISRAEL) WHO ARE IN EGYPT AND HAVE GIVEN HEED TO THEIR CRY BECAUSE OF THEIR TASKMASTERS, FOR I AM AWARE OF THEIR SUFFERINGS.

SO, I HAVE COME DOWN TO DELIVER THEM FROM THE POWER OF THE EGYPTIANS, AND TO BRING THEM UP FROM THAT LAND TO A GOOD AND SPACIOUS LAND, TO A LAND FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY, TO THE PLACE OF THE CANAANITE AND THE HITTITE AND THE AMORITE AND THE PERIZZITE AND THE HIVITE AND THE JEBUSITE. (EXODUS 3:7-8, PARENTHESIS ADDED)

This story is so familiar to many of us that we tend to read right over some of the most significant details in all of Scripture. After centuries of disobedience, notice how the LORD responds:

He continues to call Israel "*MY PEOPLE*" (that is, "His" by covenant).

He continues to promise them the *same land* He had promised Abram: "*THE PLACE OF THE CANAANITE AND THE HITTITE AND THE AMORITE AND THE PERIZZITE AND THE HIVITE AND THE JEBUSITE.*"

He continues to promise them *great blessings*: "*A GOOD AND SPACIOUS LAND ... FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY.*"

And according to Exodus 1:7, He had blessed them with a *population explosion*:
“THE SONS OF ISRAEL WERE FRUITFUL AND INCREASED GREATLY, AND MULTIPLIED, AND BECAME EXCEEDINGLY MIGHTY, SO THAT THE LAND WAS FILLED WITH THEM.”

So, although the character of His chosen people was that of unbelief and disobedience, God’s covenant with them was still intact ...

... which brings us to a question that begs to be answered: Why would the LORD remain so faithful to a disobedient people? (This question should be of great interest to the New Testament believer as well!) They did not deserve His continued favor. In fact, Moses himself had a low opinion of his own generation.

YOU HAVE BEEN REBELLIOUS AGAINST THE LORD FROM THE DAY I KNEW YOU. (DEUTERONOMY 9:24)

Why didn’t God just “ditch” them and start all over with another group of people? He has at least two good reasons.

Why the LORD Remains Faithful to His Disobedient People

First, the permanence of the Abrahamic Covenant depends on only one of its participants, not both. Only the LORD passed through the split pieces of animals. The second party, Abram, did not. He had been put to sleep. Thus, the continuation of this covenant does not depend upon the faithfulness of Israel. It depends only upon the faithfulness of God. The LORD alone keeps its terms intact. And, as we have seen, Yahweh is One Who keeps His promises. If He says He is going to do something, He will do it.

GOD REMAINS FAITHFUL TO HIS PEOPLE BECAUSE HE IS BOUND BY COVENANT TO DO SO

The second reason can be seen in a prayer Moses made on behalf of this nation who had just been delivered from Egyptian slavery. Let’s listen to his appeal for these rebels as they continue in stubborn defiance of God’s authority:

REMEMBER YOUR SERVANTS, ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB; DO NOT LOOK AT THE STUBBORNNESS OF THIS PEOPLE OR AT THEIR WICKEDNESS OR THEIR SIN. OTHERWISE, THE LAND FROM WHICH YOU BROUGHT US (THAT IS, THE PEOPLE OF EGYPT) MAY SAY, “BECAUSE THE LORD WAS NOT ABLE TO BRING THEM INTO THE LAND WHICH HE HAD PROMISED THEM AND BECAUSE HE HATED THEM, HE HAS BROUGHT THEM OUT TO SLAY THEM IN THE WILDERNESS.” (DEUTERONOMY 9:27-28, PARENTHESIS ADDED)

The LORD is faithful to His covenant-people *for the sake of His reputation*. He wants the idolatrous nations of the world to believe that He is strong enough to keep the promises He makes.

So, why does the LORD continue to call unfaithful Israel “My people” ... and continue to promise them great blessings ... and continue to promise them a vast homeland ... and continue to promise them a national population that would rival the stars in the heavens?

GOD REMAINS FAITHFUL TO HIS PEOPLE TO PROTECT HIS NAME

What is the Name of this One Who remains so faithful to those who are so unfaithful to Him?

Yahweh, the Personal Name of God

In our last lesson we listened in on an extraordinary conversation between a shepherd and a “burning Bush.” When Moses first encountered the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he asked for His Name:

BEHOLD, I AM GOING TO THE SONS OF ISRAEL, AND I WILL SAY TO THEM, “THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS HAS SENT ME TO YOU.” NOW THEY MAY SAY TO ME, “WHAT IS HIS NAME?” WHAT SHALL I SAY TO THEM? GOD SAID TO MOSES, “I AM WHO I AM”; AND HE SAID, “THUS YOU SHALL SAY TO THE SONS OF ISRAEL, ‘I AM HAS SENT ME TO YOU ... THIS IS MY NAME FOREVER, AND THIS IS MY MEMORIAL-NAME TO ALL GENERATIONS.’” (EXODUS 3:13-15)

We learned from that study that this Name “I AM” (Hebrew, Yahweh), ⁴ highlights the self-existence of God. That is, our LORD needed no one or no thing for His Own existence ... but we all needed Him for ours. He is our Creator. And as Creator, He is in a position to sculpture our lives according to His wise counsel. He knows exactly what we need – and what we do *not* need – to be *all* that we can be to the glory of *His* Name.

But there is another perfection of God that radiates from this Name. The Name Yahweh is the personal Name of God. It is a Name that emphasizes God’s binding relationship to His covenant-people. What He said He would do (according to the terms of this ancient covenant with Abram) ... He *will* do. Yahweh is faithful to His people. He is a God that keeps His promises.

But what does this Name have to do with the New Testament Church?

New Testament Promises

The Old Testament God Who “cut a covenant” with Abram is the same God of the New Testament Church. And He has not changed. He still keeps His promises.

THE NAME YAHWEH HIGHLIGHTS THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD TOWARD ALL HIS PEOPLE.

The problem is that many of us have grown wary in our willingness to trust the word of others. We know (all too well) what a broken promise feels like: wedding vows, work contracts, appointments, confidentiality of friends. In fact, it has come to the point that when someone actually does what he says he will do, we are surprised.

Perhaps we have become so accustomed to being disappointed by others (including other believers) that we assume that *no can* be trusted (including our heavenly Father). But that is a lie. Satan, the father of lies, wants us to believe that if we “jump toward the open arms” of God, He will drop us just like most everyone else has.

But Yahweh is the one Person we *can* trust. In fact, we are going to spend our entire Christian lives learning this one truth: that with each situation we face, our God is faithful. However, unlike Sheriff Andy Taylor’s “jump and catch” routine with Opie, He “backs away from us” just a little farther each time. And each time comes the promise,

“I WILL CATCH YOU IF YOU JUST COMMIT YOURSELF TO THE JUMP.”

Let’s consider a few of these “catches” God has promised us.

The Promise of an Eternal Rescue

This promise begins with a problem we all share. And out of all the problems we have ever had – or ever will have – *this one* is the most serious.

You and I are sinners. What makes this so serious is that we have offended a just God. In His sight sin is a capital offense that calls for the death penalty. That is, you and I deserve to be executed because of our moral crimes against a holy God. But God in His mercy has provided a solution. Let’s listen carefully to God’s answer to our problem:

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. (JOHN 3:16)

According to this verse, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to be executed in our place. He placed our sins on Him; and, when He did, Christ became guilty for us. The sinless Son of God was punished in our place ... as our Substitute. This is the purpose of Christ’s Death. The One Who did not deserve to die, died for all of us who did. He died so we would not have to. Consider, then, the promise of John 3:16:

The one who *depends upon* Christ’s Death to serve as the Payment for his sins will be rescued from eternal death. (“*WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT PERISH.*”) All his sins will be forever pardoned; and all his guilt will be forever removed. This is Yahweh’s promise to you: *His rescue from eternal death.*

But there is another promise found in this verse. God's Word also tells us that on the third day after His Death, God raised His Son from the dead. And because Christ was raised from the dead, those who believe in Him will also be raised from the dead. (*"WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM ... SHALL HAVE ETERNAL LIFE."*) This, too, is Yahweh's promise to you: *His gift of eternal life.*

These two promises are not for those who are good enough to deserve these priceless gifts (because no one is). It is for those who depend upon Christ (and Christ alone) for salvation.

Have you trusted God to rescue you from eternal death and give you eternal life through the Death and Resurrection of His Son? If so, that is your first "jump." But if not, you should.

YAHWEH KEEPS HIS PROMISES

The Promise of Boundless Forgiveness

Or have you, as a believer, ever been weighed down by a sin – or sins – from your past that you believe to be so horrendous that the blood of Christ cannot wash them away? If so, listen to the promise of God:

... WHERE SIN INCREASED, GRACE ABOUNDED ALL THE MORE. (ROMANS 5:20)

This, of course, does not give us a license to sin. But for those whose *past* sins flood them with feelings of guilt, God's Word assures us, "No matter what you have done, you have not out sinned the fullness of My grace." Do you believe that? We should.

YAHWEH KEEPS HIS PROMISES

The Promise of Divine Wisdom

Or have you ever faced a difficult situation, and you wanted to respond in a way that pleases the Lord but were uncertain as to what to do? If so, listen to the promise of God:

CONSIDER IT ALL JOY, MY BRETHREN, WHEN YOU ENCOUNTER VARIOUS TRIALS, KNOWING THAT THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH PRODUCES ENDURANCE ... BUT IF ANY OF YOU LACKS WISDOM, LET HIM ASK OF GOD, WHO GIVES TO ALL GENEROUSLY AND WITHOUT REPROACH, AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO HIM. (JAMES 1:2-3, 5)

Do you believe that God will *pour forth* His wisdom to help you respond to any trial – no matter how difficult – if only you would ask? We should.

YAHWEH KEEPS HIS PROMISES

The Promise of a Glorious Home

The biggest “jump” any of us will face is our step into eternity. Does the thought of “What will happen to me once I die” ever cause you to become fearful of “the great *unknown*”? If so, listen to the promise of God:

THEREFORE, BEING ALWAYS OF GOOD COURAGE, AND KNOWING THAT WHILE WE ARE AT HOME IN THE BODY, WE ARE ABSENT FROM THE LORD – FOR WE WALK BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT – WE ARE OF GOOD COURAGE, I SAY, AND PREFER RATHER TO BE ABSENT FROM THE BODY AND TO BE AT HOME WITH THE LORD. (2ND CORINTHIANS 5:6-8)

This promise of arriving “home” to forever be with the Lord turns a *believer’s* fear of “the *unknown*” into a joyful anticipation of the *known*. Do you believe that? We should.

YAHWEH KEEPS HIS PROMISES

Each time we jump, He catches us. And with each jump, the fabric of our faith is strengthened just a little bit more. But next time, the jump He places before us will be just a little farther. And in doing so He is stretching us to live by faith in the One Who can be trusted to fulfill His Word in what sometimes appears to be a hopeless situation.

His Name is Yahweh, the faithful One. If He says He is going to do something, He will do it. Each promise is “as good as done.”

GOD, FURTHERMORE, SAID TO MOSES, “THUS YOU SHALL SAY TO THE SONS OF ISRAEL, ‘YAHWEH – THE GOD WHO IS FAITHFUL TO THE COVENANT HE HAS WITH HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE – HAS SENT ME TO YOU. THIS IS MY NAME FOREVER, AND THIS IS MY MEMORIAL-NAME TO ALL GENERATIONS.’” (EXODUS 3:15)

³ Although Jacob was commanded to leave the land twice, in both cases it was to preserve the spiritual purity of the chosen family from the surrounding idolatrous nations (Genesis 28:1-2; 46:2-4).

⁴ Translated “LORD” [all capital letters] in the New American Standard Version (NASV), the King James Version (KJV), and the New International Version (NIV). Translated “Jehovah” in the American Standard Bible (ASB) and the Living Bible (LB).

YAHWEH MEQADDISHKEM**GOD IS HOLY**

BOTH YOUNG MEN AND VIRGINS, OLD MEN AND CHILDREN, LET THEM PRAISE THE NAME OF THE LORD; FOR HIS NAME ALONE IS EXALTED, HIS GLORY IS ABOVE EARTH AND HEAVEN. (PSALM 148:12-13)

The Day I Made Three Mistakes

Who taught you how to drive?

My father taught me how to drive. And I learned on a country road (which was a considerable improvement over where my sister had to learn ... in our pasture). Our father had the opinion that, if she and I could drive a straight shift, then we could drive an automatic. So, we both learned how to drive using our family Volkswagen.

Over the course of time, I learned how to coordinate the use of the accelerator and brake pedal with my right foot, the clutch with my left foot, the gear shift with my right hand, and the steering wheel with my left hand.

“This is a piece of cake,” the 15-year-old said to his father as I slipped on my sunglasses, turned on the radio, hung my left arm out the window, and settled back in the bucket seat to get comfortable. As my father turned off the radio, told me to sit up, and motioned for me to put both hands on the wheel, I realized I had made my first mistake of the day.

Next, Dad decided that it was time for me to learn how to slow the car down using the gears, instead of the brake, to do so. I was coming up to a stop sign, and he wanted me to shift from 4th gear to 3rd gear, and then from 3rd gear to 2nd gear. For some really dumb reason, I did not feel like learning how to downshift that day; so, I told him, “Not today.” That was my second mistake.

He said to me, “Yes, today,” and I said back, “I don’t want to learn how to downshift today.” (As I write this, I cannot believe I said that.) He looked over at me and said with all the gentleness and tender care of a Marine Corp drill instructor (you know what I mean), “YES, TODAY!”

Well, in the heat of the moment, Dad failed to tell me that when you are going thirty miles per hour, and you shift from 4th gear to 3rd gear, you are supposed to easssse the clutch out slowly. So, I shifted from 4th gear to 3rd gear ... and then I “popped the clutch.” That was my third mistake.

As the VW’s *four*-cylinder engine shrieked with a shrill-like scream, the driver and his passenger lunged forward.

My father was one of those people that loved to drink coffee. Every time you saw him, he would have a piping hot cup of coffee in his hand ... which is what he had in his hand when he said to me, “YES, TODAY!” He was already hot (i.e., red in the face) *before* I popped the clutch. *After* I popped the clutch, he was hotter. And wet.

Well, thanks to my father I got my driver’s license. And thanks to me, my father got gray hair. But that is what it took for him to ensure that his son could drive a straight shift.

On the day I got my license and was about to get in the car for my first solo spin, he said to me, “Son, if I ever hear from someone around town ...” (and he had *a lot of friends* around our small town) ... “If I ever hear that you are driving recklessly, you can wave ‘Good-bye’ to that license for about a month.” And *that* is what it took for him to ensure that his son would become a safe driver. My wellbeing, as well as that of other motorists, was at stake.

But that was not the only reason he told me that. His *name* was at stake. My father’s name was important to him, and he did not want me messing up the honor associated with it.

There is another Father Whose Name is important to Him. And He does not want His children messing up the honor associated with that Name either. We are now going to consider the Name Yahweh Meqaddishkem. And like His other Names, it is one He intends to protect.

God’s Greatest Hatred: Idolatry

When Yahweh led Israel out of Egypt, His destination for them was the land He had promised Abram over six hundred years earlier. However, at the time they were to enter their covenant-land, it was inhabited by several exceedingly wicked people-groups:

I HAVE COME DOWN TO DELIVER THEM FROM THE POWER OF THE EGYPTIANS, AND TO BRING THEM UP FROM THAT LAND TO A GOOD AND SPACIOUS LAND, TO A LAND FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY, TO THE PLACE OF THE CANAANITE AND THE HITTITE AND THE AMORITE AND THE PERIZZITE AND THE HIVITE AND THE JEBUSITE. (EXODUS 3:6-8)

Therefore, right before crossing the Jordan River to take possession of their land, this chosen nation – redeemed by the blood of Passover lambs – was commanded to annihilate every single one of its wicked inhabitants: men, women, and children.

... IN THE CITIES OF THESE PEOPLES THAT THE LORD YOUR GOD IS GIVING YOU AS AN INHERITANCE, YOU SHALL NOT LEAVE ALIVE ANYTHING THAT BREATHES. BUT YOU SHALL UTTERLY DESTROY THEM,

THE HITTITE AND THE AMORITE, THE CANAANITE AND THE PERIZZITE, THE HIVITE AND THE JEBUSITE, AS THE LORD YOUR GOD HAS COMMANDED YOU. (DEUTERONOMY 20:16-17)

... AND WHEN THE LORD YOUR GOD DELIVERS THEM BEFORE YOU AND YOU DEFEAT THEM ... YOU SHALL TEAR DOWN THEIR ALTARS, AND SMASH THEIR SACRED PILLARS, AND HEW DOWN THEIR ASHERIM, AND BURN THEIR GRAVEN IMAGES WITH FIRE. (DEUTERONOMY 7:2, 5)

These people were not innocent victims who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. This was a just judgment executed upon idolatrous nations who, *for centuries*, had refused to repent of their flagrant immoralities. Having rejected God's long-enduring mercy, they were now condemned to receive His long-deserved justice. Divine *justice* was one reason for this command to annihilate.

Divine *protection* was another. As long as Israel lived in Egypt, they were in no real danger of blending in with the locals. The Egyptians refused to have social contact with the Hebrews.

THE EGYPTIANS COULD NOT EAT BREAD WITH THE HEBREWS, FOR THAT IS LOATHSOME TO THE EGYPTIANS. (GENESIS 43:32)

The pagan nations living in the land of Canaan, however, were a different matter. With them, intermarriage was only a matter of time ... which would then open the door to idolatry ... which, in turn, would lead to immorality. (Idolatry always leads to immorality.)

BUT HAMOR (THE HIVITE) SPOKE WITH THEM (JACOB AND HIS SONS), SAYING, "THE SOUL OF MY SON SHECHEM LONGS FOR YOUR DAUGHTER; PLEASE GIVE HER TO HIM IN MARRIAGE. INTERMARRY WITH US; GIVE YOUR DAUGHTERS TO US AND TAKE OUR DAUGHTERS FOR YOURSELVES. THUS, YOU SHALL LIVE WITH US, AND THE LAND SHALL BE OPEN BEFORE YOU; LIVE AND TRADE IN IT AND ACQUIRE PROPERTY IN IT." (GENESIS 34:8-10, PARENTHESES MINE)

God's command to completely destroy these wicked nations was to *protect* His people from being led astray into the false religions and wickedness of their neighbors.

BUT YOU SHALL UTTERLY DESTROY THEM ... SO THAT THEY MAY NOT TEACH YOU TO DO ACCORDING TO ALL THEIR DETESTABLE THINGS WHICH THEY HAVE DONE FOR THEIR GODS, SO THAT YOU WOULD SIN AGAINST THE LORD YOUR GOD. (DEUTERONOMY 20:17-18)

To be sure, the justice of God must be executed. And the spiritual health of His people must be preserved "*FOR HE WHO TOUCHES YOU (ISRAEL) TOUCHES THE APPLE OF HIS EYE*" (Zechariah 2:8). But judging the evil of idolaters and protecting the purity of His people were not the LORD's only concerns; nor were they His greatest. What is of supreme importance to God is His Name.

God's Highest Priority: His Holy Reputation

God is serious about protecting His reputation. This can be seen in the way He wants His children to live their lives. Because God is holy, He expects His people to be holy. His Name is at stake. He knows that if the purity of His representatives (in this case, Israel) is stained, His reputation will be compromised.

SPEAK TO ALL THE CONGREGATION OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL AND SAY TO THEM, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I THE LORD YOUR GOD AM HOLY." (LEVITICUS 19:2)

Holy

To be holy means "to be set apart." When we say that God is holy, we are acknowledging the vast distance between Him and His creation.

First, God is completely set apart from what is *common*. He is distinct from everything He made. He is not limited by time as we are. He is eternal. He is not limited in strength as we are. He is all-powerful. He is not limited by space. He is everywhere at the same time. He was not created from the earth as we were. In fact, He was not even created. He is exalted above all that is common.

Furthermore, God is completely set apart from what is *sinful*. He is distinct from everything immoral. He is not impure as we are. He is 100% pure.

For the LORD to be "set apart" does not mean that He is "somewhere up there (aloof from us) but not down here (with us)." The holiness of God has to do with His *nature*, not His presence. God is *in* the world ... and He is *involved* with His world ... but He is not *of* the world. He is present with us; but He is not "one of us." He is removed from our "worldliness."

This explains why God wanted Israel to be *separated* from the wicked influences of her pagan neighbors. To represent His Name accurately, they needed to be "sanctified."

Sanctified

To be sanctified means "to be *made* holy." God wants His children to be set apart from a sinful lifestyle (holy) in order to live a righteous lifestyle (sanctified).

FOR YOU ARE A HOLY PEOPLE TO THE LORD YOUR GOD; THE LORD YOUR GOD HAS CHOSEN YOU TO BE A PEOPLE FOR HIS OWN POSSESSION OUT OF ALL THE PEOPLES WHO ARE ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH. (DEUTERONOMY 7:6)

So, what means would the LORD use to cultivate holiness in the day-to-day lives of Israel?

The Sanctification of Israel

By Separation from Idolatry

We have already seen one means God would use to protect the purity of His people and His Name. Israel was commanded to execute capital punishment on the unrepentant people-groups living in Canaan who, otherwise, would lead them astray into idolatry and wickedness. The temptation to follow their passions, their values, and their lifestyle was to be completely removed.

But it was not enough to prevent these pagan neighbors from having a destructive influence on Israel. A set of righteous laws to guide their lives was also needed. To separate His people from impurity, the LORD provided them with a written code of conduct *based upon His own character*.

By Revelation

For the Jewish nation to be holy, God provided them with a written body of legislation known as the Mosaic Law. This was Israel's "Constitution." At Mount Sinai the LORD, through Moses, instructed His chosen representatives in the righteous lifestyle by which He wanted them to live. Every part of life was to be brought into alignment with these commandments:

their ceremonies of worship
the construction of their tabernacle
the way they were to trim their beards
the days of the year they were to rest
how they were to harvest their crops
the foods they were to eat
the fabric of their clothes

Everything!

It is within this context, the giving of the Mosaic Law, that the LORD identifies Himself by the Name Yahweh Meqaddishkem, "the LORD Who sanctifies you."

*YOU SHALL CONSECRATE YOURSELVES THEREFORE AND BE HOLY, FOR I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD.
YOU SHALL KEEP MY STATUTES AND PRACTICE THEM; I AM THE LORD WHO SANCTIFIES YOU
(YAHWEH MEQADDISHKEM). (LEVITICUS 20:7-8, PARENTHESIS ADDED)*

*[We need to be careful here. The Mosaic Law was intended to separate Israel from idolatry and sinfulness. But it was never intended to **save** Israel. Moses and Joshua and David and Elijah and Isaiah are in Paradise right now. But they are not there because they obeyed a system of rules. Their salvation was a gift from God through faith ... and faith alone ... in a system of animal sacrifices that was meant to prepare the nation of Israel for the Cross of Christ. Indeed, since Adam, it is the Blood of Christ – not the works of man – that saves sinners.]*

Separation and revelation were the means Yahweh Meqaddishkem sought to sanctify Israel. But how does the LORD purify His New Testament Church?

The Sanctification of the New Testament Church

By Trials

One means God uses to sanctify His Church is by trials. We might call this means of purification the “Live and Learn” approach.

CONSIDER IT ALL JOY, MY BRETHREN, WHEN YOU ENCOUNTER VARIOUS TRIALS, KNOWING THAT THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH PRODUCES ENDURANCE. AND LET ENDURANCE HAVE ITS PERFECT RESULT, SO THAT YOU MAY BE PERFECT AND COMPLETE, LACKING IN NOTHING. (JAMES 1:2-4)

WE EXULT IN OUR TRIBULATIONS, KNOWING THAT TRIBULATION BRINGS ABOUT PERSEVERANCE; AND PERSEVERANCE, PROVEN CHARACTER; AND PROVEN CHARACTER, HOPE. (ROMANS 5:3-4)

Understanding that trials are intended to purify God’s children will go far in answering the often-asked question, “Why has God allowed suffering to come into my life? I thought He loved me.” It will help explain why tragedies come into the lives of God’s beloved people.

The fact is, some truths cannot take root in our lives simply by reading about them. For holiness to become a reality in our lives sometimes requires suffering. Therefore, God allows His beloved children to go through distressing situations because that is the only way our faith and obedience can be tempered. Before the trial, what we know about God is lodged mainly in our heads. But after the trial, the character of Christ has been dyed into the fabric of our lives.

The pain we experience may sometimes feel like sandpaper. At other times it may feel like a jackhammer. Either way, it does not feel very good. But over time, as we watch the LORD sculpture our lives into the image of His Son, we should come to view each trial we encounter (painful though it is) as a priceless *gift*. It is for our good, not for our harm. The sovereign hand of our loving Father is willing to allow short-term pain to

invade our lives that we might radiate the glory of Christ for the long-term ... for an exceedingly long term.

FOR MOMENTARY, LIGHT AFFLICTION IS PRODUCING FOR US AN ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY FAR BEYOND ALL COMPARISON, WHILE WE LOOK NOT AT THE THINGS WHICH ARE SEEN, BUT AT THE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT SEEN; FOR THE THINGS WHICH ARE SEEN ARE TEMPORAL, BUT THE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT SEEN ARE ETERNAL. (2ND CORINTHIANS 4:17-18)

Let's be careful not to complain about these times of affliction. They come from the hand of One Who loves us enough to correct us. Yes, the pain is grievous, sometimes to the point of crushing our very souls. And yes, its duration "feels like forever." But we should not lose sight of what Yahweh Meqaddishkem is working to produce:

lives that can savor the peaceful fruit of righteousness, even in the midst of pain,
 lives that will exalt the reputation of our God before a watching world,
 and eventually, lives that will radiate the glory of Christ throughout eternity.

By faith let us look beyond our present distressing situation to these joys set before us. Let us lock our focus on the promises that are within the grasp of the faithful.

By the Word of God

... LIKE NEWBORN BABIES, LONG FOR THE PURE MILK OF THE WORD, SO THAT BY IT YOU MAY GROW IN RESPECT TO SALVATION. (1ST PETER 2:2)

There is another resource God uses to transform the lives of His saints into the image of His Son; and this method is, by far, more pleasant than a trial. Reading and applying the Word of God is, what we might call, the "Learn and Live" approach.

The more we are in God's Word, the more Truth we will know and understand.

The more Truth we understand, the more Truth we can apply to our lives as we depend upon the Spirit of God for His power.

And the more Truth we apply, the more we become like Christ.

This explains why we need to be in God's Word daily. Most certainly, books about the Bible are *useful as a supplement*; but they are *detrimental as a replacement*. If we have time to read only one book, then let it be the Bible. Let us be diligent to cultivate a craving for the Lord by making our time in prayer and the Scriptures the daily priority of our lives. Apart from this fellowship with Him, our lives will not – they cannot – be

conformed to the image of the Savior. It is our knowledge and application of God's Word that will – over time – transform us into a holy people.

SANCTIFY THEM IN THE TRUTH; YOUR WORD IS TRUTH. (JOHN 17:17)

By Separation from Worldliness

As it was with national Israel, the New Testament Church is commanded to be holy.

AS OBEDIENT CHILDREN, DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THE FORMER LUSTS WHICH WERE YOURS IN YOUR IGNORANCE, BUT LIKE THE HOLY ONE WHO CALLED YOU, BE HOLY YOURSELVES ALSO IN ALL YOUR BEHAVIOR; BECAUSE IT IS WRITTEN, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." (1ST PETER 1:14-16)

That seems straightforward enough. We are to be “set apart” from what is impure. Yet, this command has been a challenge for the Christian community. We do not seem to understand how to do this without losing our balance.

On one side of the tightrope are believers who want *grace* to characterize their lives (a noble desire). But within this camp are those who have acquired an inappropriate attitude toward the Law of Christ. Any attempt to bring one's life in alignment with New Testament commands is viewed as “legalistic.” Seeking to protect their (misunderstood) “freedom in Christ,” there is little difference between their speech and conduct and ambitions and that of the unbelieving community. Liberty in Christ has been perverted into a license to sin.

On the other side of the tightrope are those who want *righteousness* to characterize their lives (again, a noble desire). The tendency of some in this camp, however, is to view most everything – including man-made traditions – as black and white. This, in turn, causes them to stand aloof from the rest of the Body of Christ: “Our church is more spiritually mature (as reflected in our lifestyles) than all the others.” Entire denominations have absorbed an “us against everybody else” mentality. Separation has been perverted into spiritual arrogance.

And so, even the sincerest Christians struggle to have a proper balance regarding this issue of “separation from the world.” Nevertheless, the Church needs to have a clear grasp of this issue. There is just too much at stake for this means of sanctification to be ignored. The reputation of God and the eternal rewards of the believer are in the balance.

Let us first consider what “separation from the world” does *not* mean.

- It does not mean that we are to remove ourselves from *associating with unbelievers*.

I WROTE YOU IN MY LETTER NOT TO ASSOCIATE WITH IMMORAL PEOPLE; I DID NOT AT ALL MEAN WITH THE IMMORAL PEOPLE OF THIS WORLD, OR WITH THE COVETOUS AND SWINDLERS, OR WITH IDOLATERS, FOR THEN YOU WOULD HAVE TO GO OUT OF THE WORLD. (1ST CORINTHIANS 5:9-10)

- Nor does it mean that we are to separate ourselves from other *believers* who hold certain “gray area” views we do not. Let’s say, for example, that one believes it is OK to do business in retail stores on Sunday, and another does not.

It is OK to do business on Sunday: “I want to take my overworked wife out to a restaurant after church for a well-deserved lunch. She needs a break.”

*It is **not** OK to do business on Sunday:* “I want to protect our brothers’ and sisters’ ability to worship with their church by discouraging their employers from staying open on Sunday.”

Did you notice that the motive behind both actions is love for others? These two should not withdraw from each other. This is a matter of personal conviction calling for mutual acceptance.

NOW ACCEPT THE ONE WHO IS WEAK IN FAITH, BUT NOT FOR THE PURPOSE OF PASSING JUDGMENT ON HIS OPINIONS. ONE PERSON HAS FAITH THAT HE MAY EAT ALL THINGS, BUT HE WHO IS WEAK EATS VEGETABLES ONLY. THE ONE WHO EATS IS NOT TO REGARD WITH CONTEMPT THE ONE WHO DOES NOT EAT, AND THE ONE WHO DOES NOT EAT IS NOT TO JUDGE THE ONE WHO EATS, FOR GOD HAS ACCEPTED HIM. (ROMANS 14:1-3)

So, from what and from whom are we to set ourselves apart?

- We are to separate ourselves from “the *ways* of the world.” That is, we should not allow our hearts to be carried away by those passions that characterize the cravings of unbelievers: lusts, materialism, and pride. Those who have placed their faith in Christ for salvation are expected to live as a people “set apart” from false objects of devotion that so enamor the idolatrous world.

DO NOT LOVE THE WORLD NOR THE THINGS IN THE WORLD. IF ANYONE LOVES THE WORLD, THE LOVE OF THE FATHER IS NOT IN HIM. FOR ALL THAT IS IN THE WORLD, THE LUST OF THE FLESH AND THE LUST OF THE EYES AND THE BOASTFUL PRIDE OF LIFE, IS NOT FROM THE FATHER, BUT IS FROM THE WORLD. (1ST JOHN 2:15-16)

Jesus tells us what we can do to keep from caving in to the lusts of our flesh.

IF YOUR RIGHT EYE MAKES YOU STUMBLE, TEAR IT OUT AND THROW IT FROM YOU; FOR IT IS BETTER FOR YOU TO LOSE ONE OF THE PARTS OF YOUR BODY, THAN FOR YOUR WHOLE BODY TO BE THROWN INTO HELL. IF YOUR RIGHT HAND MAKES YOU STUMBLE, CUT IT OFF AND THROW IT FROM YOU; FOR

IT IS BETTER FOR YOU TO LOSE ONE OF THE PARTS OF YOUR BODY, THAN FOR YOUR WHOLE BODY TO GO INTO HELL. (MATTHEW 5:29-30)

Our Lord, of course, is not promoting self-mutilation. The idea here is to *take as drastic an action as necessary to avoid the temptation itself*.

For example, you go to the grocery store to buy a gallon of milk. The dairy aisle is to the right of the front door; but you must walk past the magazine rack to get to the milk. And the last thing you need to see are the pictures on the front covers of some of the magazines. So, you turn left, walk all the way around the store until you arrive at the refrigerated section, pick up the milk, then retrace your steps all the way around the store to the cash register, pay, and leave. This example of “tearing out one’s eye” may seem ridiculous to some; but it will do wonders in cultivating the “spiritual grit” one needs to say “No” to sin and “Yes” to righteousness.

- This caution to avoid worldliness should also play itself out in the relationships into which we might be tempted to enter. Believers are commanded to not make *binding alliances* with unbelievers.

DO NOT BE BOUND TOGETHER WITH UNBELIEVERS ... FOR WE ARE THE TEMPLE OF THE LIVING GOD; JUST AS GOD SAID, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. THEREFORE, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," SAYS THE LORD. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN." (2ND CORINTHIANS 6:14, 16-17)

Christians are to avoid entering marriage and business *partnerships* with non-Christians. Why? Because the children of light and the children of darkness are operating off two vastly different value systems. Ignoring this command often results in a life of either constant conflict or compromise.

DO NOT BE BOUND TOGETHER WITH UNBELIEVERS; FOR WHAT PARTNERSHIP HAVE RIGHTEOUSNESS AND LAWLESSNESS, OR WHAT FELLOWSHIP HAS LIGHT WITH DARKNESS? OR WHAT HARMONY HAS CHRIST WITH BELIAL, OR WHAT HAS A BELIEVER IN COMMON WITH AN UNBELIEVER? (2ND CORINTHIANS 6:14-15)

This does not mean we should avoid using unbelievers to serve as our car mechanics or dentists (those from whom we *can* walk away). It means we are to avoid entering *binding* arrangements with unbelievers (those from whom we *cannot* walk away).

- The Church is also expected to separate from Her midst (through church discipline) professing believers who refuse to repent of their blatant immorality.

IF ANYONE DOES NOT OBEY OUR INSTRUCTION IN THIS LETTER, TAKE SPECIAL NOTE OF THAT PERSON AND DO NOT ASSOCIATE WITH HIM, SO THAT HE WILL BE PUT TO SHAME. (2ND THESSALONIANS 3:14; SEE ALSO MATTHEW 18:15-17; 1ST CORINTHIANS 5:1-2, 11; 2ND THESSALONIANS 3:6; TITUS 3:10-11)

- Regarding doctrine itself, there is a time for the believer to separate himself from a heretic.

NOW I URGE YOU, BRETHREN, KEEP YOUR EYE ON THOSE WHO CAUSE DISSENSIONS AND HINDRANCES CONTRARY TO THE TEACHING WHICH YOU LEARNED, AND TURN AWAY FROM THEM. (ROMANS 16:17; SEE ALSO 2ND JOHN 1:9-11)

It is the responsibility of each believer to distinguish between his or her own “majors” and “minors.”⁵

Called to Be Conformed to the Image of Christ

So, what have *all* believers been called to do (without exception)? We have all been called to *become holy*. This is the will of God for our lives: our sanctification.

FOR THOSE WHOM HE FOREKNEW, HE ALSO PREDESTINED TO BECOME CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON. (ROMANS 8:29)

As gently as possible, but as firmly as necessary, God will do what it takes to set apart His people from a sinful lifestyle so that we might more accurately represent His holy character. Why? Because the honor of His Name and the eternal wellbeing of His children are at stake.

His Name is Yahweh Meqaddishkem. He is “the LORD Who sanctifies you.”

YOU SHALL CONSECRATE YOURSELVES THEREFORE AND BE HOLY, FOR I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD. YOU SHALL KEEP MY STATUTES AND PRACTICE THEM; I AM THE FAITHFUL ONE WHO SETS YOU APART FROM A SINFUL LIFESTYLE TO BE HOLY. (LEVITICUS 20:7-8)

⁵ For example, this student would withdraw from professing believers who do not believe: (1) that Scripture’s original manuscripts were without error, (2) in the deity of Jesus Christ, (3) in His virgin birth, (4) in His Death as the only acceptable Payment for the sins of man, (5) in His bodily resurrection, and (6) in His visible Return to earth. These are not “minor issues.”

An example of a “minor” doctrinal issue would be the type of government a local church observes. Some hold to a Congregational form, others to a Presbyterian form, and still others to an Episcopal form. This student would *not* separate from those who hold a form of church government different from that practiced by his own local church.

YAHWEH NISSI**GOD IS TRUTH**

I WILL GIVE THANKS TO YOU, O LORD, AMONG THE PEOPLES, AND I WILL SING PRAISES TO YOU AMONG THE NATIONS. FOR YOUR LOVINGKINDNESS IS GREAT ABOVE THE HEAVENS, AND YOUR TRUTH REACHES TO THE SKIES. (PSALM 108:3-4)

A Most Formidable Foe

The Japanese soldier of World War Two was a formidable enemy. He had been taught from childhood that it was an honor and, if necessary, his duty to die for the emperor, Hirohito. If surrounded by his enemy, the Japanese soldier would fix his bayonet and come out charging or he would commit suicide. But he would not surrender. Even when defeated, he fought on.

[General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Southwest Pacific Theater, was aware of this. At the end of the war, he had been given the responsibility to oversee the Empire of Japan's formal surrender to the Allies. This ceremony was to be conducted on the open deck of the USS Missouri anchored in Tokyo Bay. As a precaution, General MacArthur had planes flying over the area to shoot down any Japanese Kamikazes (suicide pilots) that might try to stop their representatives from signing the surrender treaty. Such was the resolve of this defeated enemy.]

Toward the end of the fighting, as the Americans drew closer and closer to the home islands of Japan, resistance became increasingly fierce. One problem the Americans faced was a small island that lay southeast of Japan, Iwo Jima. This island was used by the Japanese Air Force as a base from which to harass American bombing missions headed for the mainland. So, it was an island that had to be taken.

By the time the battle for Iwo Jima was over (March 26th, 1945), 5,931 Marines had been killed and 17,773 had been wounded. As it turned out, this battle was one of the bloodiest campaigns in the Pacific during World War Two.

One of the Marines wounded during the battle for Iwo Jima was Charles W. Lindberg of North Dakota.⁶ (This was not the Charles A. Lindbergh who was the first to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean in 1927.) During the initial stages of this campaign, Lindberg was part of a patrol that climbed Mount Suribachi on the island. He states, "We were the first combat patrol to hike up the mountain. So, we carried the *[first]* flag to the highest point and raised it. It was really a proud moment. The next day I was shot and shipped off the island."

The sight of this banner was significant. More than 71,000 Marines were on the island at the time this flag was raised, joined by thousands of sailors watching from offshore. When these warriors saw it flying on top of the mountain, it boosted their morale during this fierce battle. To be sure, they needed to be strengthened as they clashed with the Japanese army.

We are about to read of another “banner” raised during another battle; and this banner made all the difference between victory and defeat. In fact, it was so important to Israel that it was considered one of the symbols of God Himself. On that day of battle, the LORD came to be known as “Yahweh Nissi,” the LORD is my Banner.

Israel’s Banner in War

It had been only a few days since their departure from Egypt when Israel found itself facing the prospect of engaging the Amalekites in battle. Stepping out of the land of bondage into the wilderness, this loose band of civilians now needed to be marshaled into a disciplined band of soldiers ... and quick.

THEN AMALEK CAME AND FOUGHT AGAINST ISRAEL AT REPHIDIM. (EXODUS 17:8)

Although the men of Israel were untrained in military maneuvers, God – through Moses – ordered his military commander Joshua to take them into battle. Those who, only recently, had been slaves in Egypt were ordered into the fight as warriors.

SO, MOSES SAID TO JOSHUA, “CHOOSE MEN FOR US AND GO OUT, FIGHT AGAINST AMALEK. TOMORROW I WILL STATION MYSELF ON THE TOP OF THE HILL WITH THE STAFF OF GOD IN MY HAND.” (EXODUS 17:9)

Why would God want His untried people to do battle with this formidable foe?

Israel had a lot of battles in front of them. For this weak nation to conduct successful campaigns against these stronger nations, they were going to need the power of God. The sooner Israel learned that the better. So, one of the first lessons this nation of Yahweh-followers would need to learn would be a lesson on dependence. The raised staff of God – in the hands of Moses, positioned on the top of a hill – would be used to teach that lesson.

JOSHUA DID AS MOSES TOLD HIM, AND FOUGHT AGAINST AMALEK; AND MOSES, AARON, AND HUR WENT UP TO THE TOP OF THE HILL. SO, IT CAME ABOUT WHEN MOSES HELD HIS HAND UP, THAT ISRAEL PREVAILED, AND WHEN HE LET HIS HAND DOWN, AMALEK PREVAILED. BUT MOSES’ HANDS WERE HEAVY. THEN THEY TOOK A STONE AND PUT IT UNDER HIM, AND HE SAT ON IT; AND AARON AND HUR SUPPORTED HIS HANDS, ONE ON ONE SIDE AND ONE ON THE OTHER. THUS, HIS

HANDS WERE STEADY UNTIL THE SUN SET. SO, JOSHUA OVERWHELMED AMALEK AND HIS PEOPLE WITH THE EDGE OF THE SWORD. (EXODUS 17:10-13)

Notice that Israel did not simply win this battle “5 to 4.” The record tells us that “Joshua *overwhelmed* Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.” This victory was a rout. Israel trounced Amalek “500 to 4”! Yet, there could be no doubt as to Who brought about this crushing victory. As long as the staff of God was raised heavenward, Israel prevailed. But when the staff was lowered, Israel faltered.

To be sure, the Amalekite soldier was a formidable foe. It had taken the power of God (represented by the staff of God) to defeat this enemy. This raised staff was a visible sign to Israel that they, a weak people, must depend upon God to triumph over their adversaries.

After the victory

MOSES BUILT AN ALTAR AND NAMED IT “YAHWEH NISSI.” (EXODUS 17:15)

Yahweh Nissi means “the LORD is my Banner.” We should take note that the context in which this Name is found is that of *battle*.

The Significance of the Name Yahweh Nissi

According to Nathan Stone in his book, *Names of God*,

“(A) BANNER, IN ANCIENT TIME, WAS NOT NECESSARILY A FLAG SUCH AS WE USE NOWADAYS. OFTEN IT WAS A BARE POLE WITH A BRIGHT, SHINING ORNAMENT WHICH GLITTERED IN THE SUN.” ⁷

Carried by an army, it was used, among other purposes, as a rallying point. In the disarray of battle, soldiers would reassemble around their banner to gain new strength and hope. The purpose of the banner was to revive an army’s weakened condition to win the battle.

This Name, “the LORD is my Banner,” reminded Israel that, though they were weaker than their enemies, God was not. And it was around Him they were to rally (that is, depend upon). There they would find renewed strength to gain the victory.

Most surely, Israel would face a lot of battles in their future. As their “Banner,” the LORD would be

THE ONE WHO WOULD PROVIDE WHATEVER HIS PEOPLE NEEDED TO OVERCOME THEIR ENEMIES

To Have *This* Friend Is to Have These Enemies

Today, as it was with ancient Israel, the line drawn in the sand between the friends of God and the enemies of God is a line of commitment. It is a line that separates those who say “Yes” to the moral will of God from those who say “No.” As far as Jesus Christ is concerned, to say “Maybe” to Him is to say “No.” We are either on one side of the fence, or we are on the other side. But we cannot sit *on* the fence.

"HE WHO IS NOT WITH ME IS AGAINST ME. (MATTHEW 12:30)

There is a particularly good reason why each believer needs to be *firmly fixed* in his allegiance to Christ Jesus. The fact is, God has a lot of enemies. Indeed, He has more enemies than He has friends ... and He always will (at least on this side of glory).

It will not take the New Testament believer long to realize that those who are hostile toward God will be hostile toward him. (For Satan’s forces to attack God’s people is his way of attacking God.) Nor will it take him long to realize that his struggle with God’s enemies is not going to be a pillow fight. The foes of God are extraordinarily strong ... they are intelligent ... they are evil ... their targets are clearly marked ... their weapons are spiritual in nature ... and they know how to use them with expertise.

We would do well, therefore, to understand just who these enemies are and how we should fight them. We will use faith to do so. And as we use these fists of faith, we will learn that no matter how strong they are, the power of our God is stronger. His understanding is accurate and full. His righteousness is perfect. His protection is impenetrable. And His truth is a killer of lies.

The World

IF YOU WERE OF THE WORLD, THE WORLD WOULD LOVE ITS OWN; BUT BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT OF THE WORLD, BUT I CHOSE YOU OUT OF THE WORLD, BECAUSE OF THIS THE WORLD HATES YOU. (JOHN 15:19)

In the Bible the term “world” is used in several ways. Whenever this word is used in a negative sense, it refers to “*an evil value system,*” *guided and energized by Satan’s angelic forces and promoted by his human agents, those whose minds are rebellious and blind.* At the core of this demonic ideology is a wicked disposition that opposes the Truth of the living God, one that is anti-Bible, anti-God of the Bible, anti-Gospel, anti-Christ, anti-Jewish, and anti-Christian.

Those who have submitted themselves to this anti-Biblical way of thinking expect everyone else to conform to their belief system (including Christ’s disciples). And when they don’t, they will apply intense pressure upon them to do so. Attacks from the world often come in the form of *persecution*.

THE “WORLD” REFERS TO THOSE WHO LIVE BY AND PROMOTE AN EVIL VALUE SYSTEM

The Flesh

BELOVED, I URGE YOU AS ALIENS AND STRANGERS TO ABSTAIN FROM FLESHLY LUSTS WHICH WAGE WAR AGAINST THE SOUL. (1ST PETER 2:11)

The Bible also uses the term “flesh” in several ways. Whenever this word is used in a negative sense, it refers to “*an evil inward desire*,” our natural tendency to sin, our inclination to do evil, our “bent” toward wickedness. Attacks from the flesh often come in the form of *temptation* (sinful cravings).

When a person is born of the Holy Spirit, this bent toward evil is not removed from him nor does it fade away. Christians still have their old sin nature; and it will be just as evil when they are ninety-five as it was before they got saved. So, when we speak of spiritual maturity in the Christian life, our flesh is not getting any better. What *is* changing is our growing commitment to submit to the moral will of God, our *understanding* of how to do so, and our *dependence* on the Spirit of God to motivate and empower us to obey.

THE “FLESH” IS AN EVIL INWARD DESIRE

The Devil

BE OF SOBER SPIRIT, BE ON THE ALERT. YOUR ADVERSARY, THE DEVIL, PROWLs AROUND LIKE A ROARING LION, SEEKING SOMEONE TO DEVOUR. (1ST PETER 5:8)

The devil (also known by other names such as Satan, Lucifer, the Serpent, the Beast, the father of lies ... to name a few) is “*an evil angel*.” He is a “whispering liar,” a fallen spirit-being that seeks to destroy God’s order, God’s purposes, God’s plan, and God’s people. His attacks often come in the forms of *deception* and *oppression*. He is much stronger than we are; but he is much weaker than God.

THE “DEVIL” IS AN EVIL ANGEL

So, our three enemies are these:

- the world – those who live by and promote *an evil value system*
- the flesh – *an evil inward desire*
- the devil – *an evil angel*

The bad news is this: we cannot see these enemies. We can see the “flesh and blood” persons through whom they work; and we can see the results of their efforts. But we cannot see the forces that influence them. This evil system of values, these impure cravings, and this wicked horde of demons are all invisible and their weapons against us are spiritual in nature.

PUT ON THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD, SO THAT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO STAND FIRM AGAINST THE SCHEMES OF THE DEVIL. FOR OUR STRUGGLE IS NOT AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD, BUT AGAINST THE RULERS, AGAINST THE POWERS, AGAINST THE WORLD FORCES OF THIS DARKNESS, AGAINST THE SPIRITUAL FORCES OF WICKEDNESS IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES. (EPHESIANS 6:11-12)

The good news is this: each of these enemies has already been defeated at the Cross.

THESE THINGS I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU, SO THAT IN ME YOU MAY HAVE PEACE. IN THE WORLD YOU HAVE TRIBULATION. BUT TAKE COURAGE; I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD. (JOHN 16:33)

NOW IF WE HAVE DIED WITH CHRIST, WE BELIEVE THAT WE SHALL ALSO LIVE WITH HIM ... FOR THE DEATH THAT HE DIED, HE DIED TO SIN ONCE FOR ALL; BUT THE LIFE THAT HE LIVES, HE LIVES TO GOD. EVEN SO CONSIDER YOURSELVES TO BE DEAD TO SIN, BUT ALIVE TO GOD IN CHRIST JESUS. THEREFORE, DO NOT LET SIN REIGN IN YOUR MORTAL BODY SO THAT YOU OBEY ITS LUSTS. (ROMANS 6:8, 10-12)

THEREFORE, SINCE THE CHILDREN SHARE IN FLESH AND BLOOD, HE HIMSELF LIKEWISE ALSO PARTOOK OF THE SAME, THAT THROUGH DEATH HE MIGHT RENDER POWERLESS HIM WHO HAD THE POWER OF DEATH, THAT IS, THE DEVIL. (HEBREWS 2:14)

The world, the flesh, and the devil have all been overthrown, and their defeat was an overwhelming rout. On the Cross, when Christ appeared to have lost the fight, He was, in fact, crushing their *authority* and *power* over the believer. And by God’s grace, we who are reborn Christ-followers share in His victory because of our identification with Him. By His Death and Resurrection, the Conqueror has secured the triumph for us.

But these adversaries still have *the will to fight*. They have not given up. Their “bayonets” are still fixed, and their “war planes” continue to circle overhead. As these defeated foes try to stab their darts of lies into our minds and hearts, their goal is to discredit our witness and to discourage us with thoughts of failure and defeat.

How does one fight the onslaught of such a persistent spiritual enemy?

WHY DO I GO MOURNING BECAUSE OF THE OPPRESSION OF THE ENEMY? O SEND OUT YOUR LIGHT AND YOUR TRUTH. LET THEM LEAD ME; LET THEM BRING ME TO YOUR HOLY HILL AND TO YOUR DWELLING PLACES. THEN I WILL GO TO THE ALTAR OF GOD, TO GOD MY EXCEEDING JOY; AND UPON THE LYRE I SHALL PRAISE YOU, O GOD, MY GOD. (PSALM 43:2-4)

The only way to squelch the lies of these enemies is with God's Truth. (Unseen, spiritual enemies are overpowered with spiritual weapons, not physical ones.) Therefore, we need to understand *where to look* for His Truth and, once we find it, *how to use it*.

The Banner of God Is Truth

YOU WILL PULL ME OUT OF THE NET WHICH THEY HAVE SECRETLY LAID FOR ME, FOR YOU ARE MY STRENGTH. INTO YOUR HAND I COMMIT MY SPIRIT; YOU HAVE RANSOMED ME, O LORD, GOD OF TRUTH. (PSALM 31:4-5)

The character of an individual can be measured by the character of his words. If a person is reliable, his word will be reliable. If a person is corrupt, then his word will also be corrupt. The integrity of a person (or lack of) will play itself out in the soundness of his words.

This is certainly true of God. God is Truth. And because He is Truth, so is His Word.⁸

SANCTIFY THEM IN THE TRUTH; YOUR WORD IS TRUTH. (JOHN 17:17)

Dear friends, we can trust His Word to lead us from the wreckage of defeat to the restoration of triumph.

ALL SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED BY GOD AND PROFITABLE FOR TEACHING, FOR REPROOF, FOR CORRECTION, FOR TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS; SO THAT THE MAN OF GOD MAY BE ADEQUATE, EQUIPPED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK. (2ND TIMOTHY 3:16-17)

By the Word of God, we can experience Christ's triumph over *the world*:

AND DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD BUT BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND (WITH TRUTH) SO THAT YOU MAY PROVE WHAT THE WILL OF GOD IS, THAT WHICH IS GOOD AND ACCEPTABLE AND PERFECT. (ROMANS 12:2)

By the Word of God, we can experience Christ's triumph over *the flesh*:

IF YOU CONTINUE IN MY WORD, THEN YOU ARE TRULY DISCIPLES OF MINE; AND YOU WILL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH WILL MAKE YOU FREE (FROM SIN'S BONDAGE). (JOHN 8:31-32)

By the Word of God, we can experience Christ's triumph over *the devil*:

THEN JESUS WAS LED UP BY THE SPIRIT INTO THE WILDERNESS TO BE TEMPTED BY THE DEVIL ... AND THE TEMPTER CAME AND (TEMPTED) HIM ... BUT HE ANSWERED AND SAID, "IT IS WRITTEN" THEN THE DEVIL ... (TEMPTED) HIM ... JESUS SAID TO HIM ... "IT IS WRITTEN" AGAIN, THE DEVIL

... (TEMPTED) HIM ... THEN JESUS SAID TO HIM, "GO, SATAN! FOR IT IS WRITTEN" THEN THE DEVIL LEFT HIM. (MATTHEW 4:1-10)

... I HAVE WRITTEN TO YOU, YOUNG MEN, BECAUSE YOU ARE STRONG, AND THE WORD OF GOD ABIDES IN YOU, AND YOU HAVE OVERCOME THE EVIL ONE. (1ST JOHN 2:14B)

Yahweh Nissi is our Rallying Point. He is our "Banner on the mountain" that provides us with what we need to overcome our enemies. And what we need is His Truth. Truth is the weapon that overpowers the lies of our enemies. Therefore, it is with confidence that we say

OUR UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION OF GOD'S WORD
IS THE WAY TO EXPERIENCE VICTORY OVER OUR THREE FORMIDABLE FOES

Stationed on the Front Lines

Beloved friends, our three enemies are – in a way – like the Japanese soldier. Neither the world nor our flesh nor Satan will put down his weapons. In this life we will never witness any of these three wave a white flag. Their *authority* over the believer has been broken. (They have already lost the war.) But their *will to fight* remains intact. So, with "bayonets" fixed, they continue to attack. *Using lies* as their tactic, their goal is to make us believe that *we* are the ones who are defeated.

Perhaps there is someone at work or at school or at home that seems to look for ways to make you look foolish or feel like a failure. And the more you allow the Spirit of God to control your life, the worse this form of persecution seems to get. This is an assault from the world that hates God and delights in taking their hatred out on His representatives.

Or perhaps a sin has become entrenched in your life. This long-term habit is not like dirt that can be easily washed out of your lifestyle. No, it is like a black *dye* that saturates the fabric of your life. And because you are indwelled by the *Holy Spirit*, this entrenched habit vexes your soul. Yet, no matter how much you hate this sin, you still crave its alluring pleasures. This is an assault from your flesh.

It may be that you are being tormented by (often vague) thoughts of self-condemnation, doubts and confusion? Does a sense of oppression seem to hang over you, causing you to feel weighed down? This may be an assault from the demonic realm. (*Conviction* by the Holy Spirit is never vague. He addresses *specific* sins in our lives.)

Those whose lives reflect the character of Christ through the power of the Spirit of God should expect such assaults. Having invaded the turf of God's enemies, our witness is a threat they will not ignore. The wisdom and power of God that governs our lives is a menace to those who are vehemently opposed to Him. Therefore, these foes would like nothing better than to destroy those who represent Him.

Let's not miss that. Rather than feeling defeated, these attacks give us reason to rejoice. Why? Instead of doing something wrong (which is what Satan wants us to believe), we are apparently doing something right. Perhaps our service in the Name of Christ, for the kingdom of Christ, empowered by the Spirit of Christ is the reason these formidable foes are pushing back.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN PERSECUTED FOR THE SAKE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. BLESSED ARE YOU WHEN PEOPLE INSULT YOU AND PERSECUTE YOU, AND FALSELY SAY ALL KINDS OF EVIL AGAINST YOU BECAUSE OF ME. REJOICE AND BE GLAD, FOR YOUR REWARD IN HEAVEN IS GREAT; FOR IN THE SAME WAY THEY PERSECUTED THE PROPHETS WHO WERE BEFORE YOU. (MATTHEW 5:10-12)

IF YOU ARE REVILED FOR THE NAME OF CHRIST, YOU ARE BLESSED, BECAUSE THE SPIRIT OF GLORY AND OF GOD RESTS ON YOU. (1ST PETER 4:14)

The Battle Plan of Righteousness

Brothers and sisters, just because our antagonists are strong does not mean that we must live as beaten down people. We have an overpowering weapon in our arsenal, the Word of God. And His Word is Truth. The Bible is Truth because Its Author is God, and God is Truth.

To counter these spiritual acts of aggression, we need to go on the offensive. We need to *use the attack itself as a prompt toward righteous behavior*. Perhaps an illustration would help:

Lucy tends to criticize the way her cousin is raising his children. At every family gathering, she becomes irritated over what seems to her to be foolish parenting skills. She then spends the next three days spewing out words of contempt about her cousin to her close friends.

Being convicted by the Holy Spirit that this behavior needed to stop, she found a verse from the Bible that describes God's will regarding a critical spirit:

LET NO UNWHOLESOME WORD PROCEED FROM YOUR MOUTH, BUT ONLY SUCH A WORD AS IS GOOD FOR EDIFICATION ACCORDING TO THE NEED OF THE MOMENT, SO THAT IT WILL GIVE GRACE TO THOSE WHO HEAR. (EPHESIANS 4:29)

Lucy decided to *memorize this verse*.

She also decided that every time she thought of her cousin, she would use the temptation to criticize him as her “cue” to carefully *ponder the Truth* of the verse. That is, she turned this attack from her enemy into a “firing pin” that discharges her own weapon ... the Word of God.

She also decided to use this attack as a “cue” for *prayer*. Now, every time she is tempted to criticize her cousin, she instead prays for his salvation (if he is not a believer) or his spiritual growth (if he is).

This “battle plan of righteousness” is a powerful way to convert temptation (an arousal to sin) into an act of righteousness. Each time we apply this strategy, victory – rather than defeat – becomes more the norm of our lives. It is a way to use the Truth of God to counterattack all three of our enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

SUBMIT THEREFORE TO GOD (HUMBLY OBEY HIS WILL ... HIS TRUTH). RESIST THE DEVIL (SAY “NO” TO HIS LIES) AND HE WILL FLEE FROM YOU. (JAMES 4:4-7, PARENTHESES MINE)

His Name is Yahweh Nissi. He is our Banner, our Point of Rally. And He has placed in our hands an offensive weapon that can overcome the lies of His enemies. He has armed us with His Truth.

AND MOSES BUILT AN ALTAR AND NAMED IT “YAHWEH NISSI – THE GOD WHO PROVIDES WHAT HIS PEOPLE NEED TO OVERCOME THEIR ENEMIES.” (EXODUS 17:15)

⁶ Charles W. Lindberg (1920 – 2007), United States Marine Corps, was assigned as a flamethrower operator, 3rd Platoon, Company E, 2nd Battalion, 28th Marine Regiment, 5th Marine Division. On February 19, 1945, he landed with the fifth assault wave on the beach of Iwo Jima. He was part of a 40-man combat patrol that climbed up and captured the top of Mount Suribachi. There he helped raise the first American flag. He was later wounded in the arm by a Japanese sniper and was evacuated off the island. For gallantry in action on Iwo Jima, he received the Silver Star Medal.

⁷ Stone, Nathan J., *Names of God*, Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1987, page 87.

⁸ The Bible does not *contain* God’s Word. The Bible *is* God’s Word, from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21. The black letters are just as God-inspired as are the red letters!

YAHWEH YIREH

GOD IS A GRACIOUS PROVIDER

ONE THING I HAVE ASKED FROM THE LORD, THAT I SHALL SEEK: THAT I MAY DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE, TO BEHOLD THE BEAUTY OF THE LORD AND TO MEDITATE IN HIS TEMPLE ... AND I WILL OFFER IN HIS TENT SACRIFICES WITH SHOUTS OF JOY. I WILL SING, YES, I WILL SING PRAISES TO THE LORD ... WHEN YOU SAID, "SEEK MY FACE," MY HEART SAID TO YOU, "YOUR FACE, O LORD, I SHALL SEEK." (PSALMS 27:4, 6, 8)

A Passion for Shrimp

The movie *Forrest Gump* ⁹ focuses on a mentally challenged, but good-natured, individual who, unwittingly, plays an influential role in the many historical and cultural events of his day. As the story develops, we watch with amusement as Forrest (played by actor Tom Hanks) impacts the lives of a variety of characters (including three U. S. presidents).

One such person in Forrest's life was "Bubba," an Army buddy beside whom he would fight during his tour of duty in Vietnam. Bubba is an endearing friend with one, all-consuming goal in life. Once he gets out of the Army, he wants to go into business as a "shrimper."

[Scene: the company is learning how to assemble their field rifles]

"What ya' do is ya' just drag yow nets along the bottom. On a good day you kin catch over a hunerd pounds a shrimp. Everything goes aw right, two men shrimpin' ten hours, less what ya spend on gas" ...

[The drill instructor interrupts him at this point, then walks away]

... "Anyway, like ah was sayin', shrimp is the fruit-o-the-sea. You can Bah B Q it, bawl it, brawl it, bake it, sauté it, they's shrimp kabob, shrimp Creole" ...

[Scene change: Forrest and Bubba are now shining their boots]

... "shrimp gumbo, you kin pan fries it, deep fries it, stuh fries it, they's pineapple shrimp, lemon shrimp, coconut shrimp, peppa shrimp" ...

[Scene change: Forrest and Bubba are now polishing the barrack's floor with toothbrushes]

... “shrimp sooup, shrimp stew, shrimp saalad, shrimp’n potatas, shrimp burga, shrimp sanwich” ... *[long pause]* ... “that’s, that’s about it.” – Benjamin Buford “Bubba” Blue (played by actor Mykelti Williamson).

No doubt about it. Bubba’s passion lay in the shrimping business.

What about you? What is your one, all-consuming goal in life? The answer to this question may not be as hard to discover as you might think. But maybe that should not be the first question we ask ourselves. Perhaps the first question ought to be, “What difference does it make that a passion – any passion – grips our heart?” I would submit to you that

THE OBJECT OF OUR DEVOTION WILL DETERMINE THE COURSE OF OUR CHOICES
(WHETHER WISE OR FOOLISH).

So, the thing that “rings our bell” may be more important than we realize.

With this lesson we will consider another of God’s Names, “Yahweh Yireh.” And once again, we will turn to the life of Abraham to guide us. We are about to discover what gripped the heart of this patriarch of Israel. And as we do, we will surface a wonderful promise attached to this passion he had. It is a promise that is offered throughout the ages to all of God’s people, including you and me.

Here, Abraham, Is Your Promised Son. Now ... Give Him Back to Me

We learned from our study of the Name Yahweh that God entered a covenant-relationship with Abram. And when He did, He promised him three things:

- a vast land mass with defined geographical (earthly) borders (Genesis 15:7, 18)
- innumerable physical descendants (Genesis 15:5)
- and abundant material and spiritual blessings (Genesis 15:1)

These promises, however, hinged on Abram having a male heir. Without a son, he could not become “a great nation” whose descendants would rival the number of stars in the night sky (15:5). And without these descendants, the land would cease being Abram’s “everlasting possession” (17:8) upon his death.

When Abram first received God’s covenant-promises, he was seventy-five years old, and Sarah was sixty-five. So, as this aging couple’s biological pendulum ticked back and forth, time was, most surely, *not* on their side. But they waited ... and waited ... and waited.

Have you ever had to “wait upon the Lord” for something? If so, do you remember what that felt like? Was there any confusion or doubt that crossed your mind? Were there any feelings of frustration or impatience? And how long did you have to wait? This couple, clinging to the promises of God, had to wait a quarter of a century. It was a time saturated with confusion, doubt, and impatience.

But finally, twenty-five years after the Abrahamic Covenant was ratified, Isaac, the son of promise, was born ... to 100-year-old Abraham and 90-year-old Sarah. (Can you picture in your mind a 90-year-old woman being “great with child”!) What do you suppose it was like for them to look down upon their miracle child, one who held such a special destiny? The wonder of it all! The pride they must have felt! The love and care they must have given him! The hopes and dreams they had for him!

Everything was now in place. The male heir had arrived. What could possibly interrupt their happiness?

NOW IT CAME ABOUT AFTER THESE THINGS, THAT GOD TESTED ABRAHAM, AND SAID TO HIM ... “TAKE NOW YOUR SON, YOUR ONLY SON, WHOM YOU LOVE, ISAAC, AND GO TO THE LAND OF MORIAH, AND OFFER HIM THERE AS A BURNT OFFERING ON ONE OF THE MOUNTAINS OF WHICH I WILL TELL YOU.” (GENESIS 22:1-2)

It was time for a test. Which was greater ... Abraham’s love for his son or his love for God? Did he love the gift more than the Giver ... or the Giver more than the gift? We can only imagine how this command made Abraham *feel*. But we are clearly told what he *did* with it.

THEN THEY CAME TO THE PLACE OF WHICH GOD HAD TOLD HIM; AND ABRAHAM BUILT THE ALTAR THERE AND ARRANGED THE WOOD AND BOUND HIS SON ISAAC AND LAID HIM ON THE ALTAR, ON TOP OF THE WOOD. ABRAHAM STRETCHED OUT HIS HAND AND TOOK THE KNIFE TO SLAY HIS SON ...

(AND) ABRAHAM CALLED THE NAME OF THAT PLACE “YAHWEH YIREH” AS IT IS SAID TO THIS DAY, “IN THE MOUNT OF THE LORD, IT WILL BE PROVIDED.” (GENESIS 22:9-10, 14)

The Significance of the Name Yahweh Yireh

The Hebrew word “yireh” means “to see to it” or “to provide.” When this word “yireh” is joined to the name “Yahweh,” the entire Name carries the idea that

THE LORD – WHO IS FAITHFUL – WILL PROVIDE

- But *what* will He provide?
- And to *what kind of person* will this provision be made?
- And in what *context* is this promise made?

Genesis 22 answers all three of these questions. And as we shall see, the Name itself offers a marvelous promise to every Yahweh-worshipper: past, present, and future.

In What Context Is This Promise Made?

This Name, Yahweh Yireh, is actually the designation of a place.

ABRAHAM CALLED THE NAME OF THAT PLACE "YAHWEH YIREH." (GENESIS 22:14)

Abraham had been commanded to make a spiritual pilgrimage to a certain mountain in the land of Moriah.¹⁰ And there, as an act of worship, he was to sacrifice his son as a burnt offering to God.

GO TO THE LAND OF MORIAH AND OFFER HIM (ISAAC) THERE AS A BURNT OFFERING ON ONE OF THE MOUNTAINS OF WHICH I WILL TELL YOU. (GENESIS 22:2)

So, we should first take note that

THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THE NAME "YAHWEH YIREH" APPEARS IS THAT OF WORSHIP.

To What Kind of Person Will Provision Be Made?

The second question has to do with *character*. What kind of person will receive God's provision? The answer is found in what it would *cost* Abraham to obey the command:

TAKE NOW YOUR SON, YOUR ONLY SON, WHOM YOU LOVE, ISAAC

And Abraham, let there be no mistake about it; I am not talking about Ishmael, the son of your Egyptian slave-maid. I am talking about the one you love, Isaac. I want you to

OFFER HIM ... AS A BURNT OFFERING. (GENESIS 22:2)

Let us carefully consider the weight of this command. Abraham is not being told to tithe 10% of his income here. He is being directed to execute and incinerate upon an altar the very person on which all of God's promises rested. This act of worship was, in fact, a test to reveal the all-consuming passion of this father. "Abraham, do I come first in your life? Or do you love Isaac more?" (For you with children, what thoughts are running through Abraham's mind and heart at this point?)

Whatever his thoughts and emotions were, notice Abraham's *actions*. He did not drag his feet, looking for a way out of this. No, the very next verse indicates that his obedience was immediate.

SO, ABRAHAM ROSE EARLY IN THE MORNING AND ... WENT TO THE PLACE OF WHICH GOD HAD TOLD HIM. (GENESIS 22:3)

Furthermore, it is evident that Abraham's resolve to obey God was set in stone. This mountain in Moriah was not just around the corner. It took these travelers three days just to get within sight of the place.

ON THE THIRD DAY ABRAHAM RAISED HIS EYES AND SAW THE PLACE FROM A DISTANCE. (GENESIS 22:4)

In other words, this faithful man had plenty of time to change his mind and turn around. But he did not.

And finally, we should observe that Abraham did all this God's way:

He was told to take Isaac, and so that is whom he took. He did not take a lamb or a goat. He took Isaac.

He was told to go to one of the mountains to which God would direct him. So that is where he went, "to the place of which God had told him."

And he was told to slay and cremate his son as an act of worship; and that is what he started to do.

BUT THE ANGEL OF THE LORD CALLED TO HIM FROM HEAVEN AND SAID, "ABRAHAM, ABRAHAM!" AND HE SAID, "HERE I AM." HE SAID, "DO NOT STRETCH OUT YOUR HAND AGAINST THE LAD, AND DO NOTHING TO HIM; FOR NOW I KNOW THAT YOU FEAR GOD, SINCE YOU HAVE NOT WITHHELD YOUR SON, YOUR ONLY SON, FROM ME." (GENESIS 22:11-12)

The character of Abraham, the worshipper, is that of total devotion. The sacrifice he was taking to the altar was his greatest earthly treasure. His obedience was immediate. His resolve was set in stone. And his method was God's way.

THE CHARACTER OF THE WORSHIPPER IS THAT OF TOTAL DEVOTION.

What Will God Provide?

Worship is the context associated with this Name; and total devotion is the character of the worshipper. But what exactly is being promised? We are told that the faithful One will provide. But what will He provide?

THEN ABRAHAM RAISED HIS EYES AND LOOKED, AND BEHOLD, BEHIND HIM A RAM CAUGHT IN THE THICKET BY HIS HORNS; AND ABRAHAM WENT AND TOOK THE RAM AND OFFERED HIM UP FOR A BURNT OFFERING IN THE PLACE OF HIS SON. ABRAHAM CALLED THE NAME OF THAT PLACE

*"YAHWEH YIREH" AS IT IS SAID TO THIS DAY, "IN THE MOUNT OF THE LORD, IT WILL BE PROVIDED."
(GENESIS 22:13-14)*

THE CONTENT OF THE PROMISE IS WHATEVER THE WORSHIPPER NEEDS TO FULFILL GOD'S WILL

What Abraham needed was a sacrifice that did not jeopardize the terms of his covenant with God. Therefore, the LORD spared Isaac from death and provided a ram as a substitute.

So, to appreciate this Name "Yahweh Yireh," we must understand that

THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THE NAME "YAHWEH YIREH" APPEARS IS THAT OF WORSHIP.

THE CHARACTER OF THE WORSHIPPER IS THAT OF TOTAL DEVOTION.

AND THE CONTENT OF THE PROMISE IS WHATEVER THE WORSHIPPER NEEDS TO FULFILL GOD'S WILL.

The Name Yahweh Yireh is a Name that offers a wonderful promise:

THE FAITHFUL ONE WILL PROVIDE THOSE WHOSE HEARTS ARE FULLY DEVOTED TO HIM
WITH EVERYTHING THEY NEED TO FULFILL HIS WILL FOR THEIR LIVES

According to Allen P. Ross, professor of Hebrew at Dallas Theological Seminary, "The main point of Genesis 22:9-14 is ... portraying an obedient servant worshipping God in faith at great cost and, in the end, receiving God's provision." ¹¹

We should not miss that: Biblical worship is "in faith at great cost."

The Cost of Devotion

In the West where many of us have known only financial prosperity and political freedom, there is a word we do not hear very often. Yet, it is a key ingredient to what the Bible calls "worship." Let us consider two passages from the New Testament regarding worship:

IN THESSALONICA YOU SENT A GIFT MORE THAN ONCE FOR MY NEEDS ... I (PAUL) HAVE RECEIVED EVERYTHING IN FULL AND HAVE AN ABUNDANCE; I AM AMPLY SUPPLIED, HAVING RECEIVED FROM EPAPHRODITUS WHAT YOU HAVE SENT, A FRAGRANT AROMA, AN ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE, WELL- PLEASING TO GOD. (PHILIPPIANS 4:16, 18, PARENTHESIS ADDED)

In this passage the Philippian saints are being commended for participating in the spread of the Gospel by sending monetary gifts to the missionary Paul. According to this passage, financial support of the Great Commission is described as "a fragrant aroma"

and “an acceptable sacrifice.” These two phrases are terms of worship, and they are “well-pleasing to God.” This passage explains why a local church should consider the offering plate or box as being more than a means to finance church business. To the contrary, giving is to be viewed as a vibrant part of our worship of Christ Jesus.

Of course, giving financial gifts to advance the Gospel is not the only expression of devotion. Committing one’s life to the interests and glory of Christ Jesus is also described as an act of worship.

*THEREFORE, I URGE YOU, BRETHREN, BY THE MERCIES OF GOD, TO PRESENT YOUR BODIES A LIVING AND HOLY SACRIFICE, ACCEPTABLE TO GOD, WHICH IS YOUR SPIRITUAL SERVICE OF WORSHIP.
(ROMANS 12:1)*

Present in both these passages is a word we usually do not associate with worship. And yet, apart from this act, true worship is watered-down. Did you notice from these verses the presence of the word “sacrifice”?

Financial giving to advance the cause of Christ is described as being

“AN ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE”

And the dedication of one’s life as an act of “spiritual service of worship” is called

“A LIVING AND HOLY SACRIFICE”

When we are devoted to someone (or something), we are going to give up something as an expression of that devotion. And we will be glad to do so. That holds true for one’s devotion to God. Devoting one’s life to Christ Jesus will involve some form of sacrifice:

- To invest *money* in the spread of the Gospel is to sacrifice money that could have been used for personal pursuits.
- To invest *time* in serving the Body of Christ is to sacrifice time away from home, from work, or from other interests.
- To be *identified with Christ* is to sacrifice social acceptance at work, at home, or at school.

TOTAL DEVOTION INVOLVES SACRIFICE

When God is the focus of one’s life, there is going to be a cost. But it is a price we are more than willing to pay. Instead of a sense of loss, there is a sense of joyful satisfaction.

TOTAL DEVOTION INVOLVES *JOYFUL* SACRIFICE

And with each sacrifice we are saying to God

“I CHERISH YOU MORE THAN WHAT I AM GIVING UP.”

This is what Abraham was saying when he picked up the knife to slay Isaac. “I love You, dear LORD, even more than I love my dear son. And I trust You.” What happened that day on a mountain in the land of Moriah was no small act of worship. It was an expression of supreme devotion coming from a man whose heart was fully given to God.

I Like to Fish. But I Love My Wife.

To what is *your* heart fully given? What is your *all-consuming* passion? There is a way to find out.

We are all willing to make at least some sacrifices to have or do what we enjoy. And when we do, we do not feel much of a sting because what we gain is more important to us than what we lose.

For example, I like to fish. I do not mind setting my alarm for 4:30 in the morning – on my day off – to be able to step into a cold stream of water by 6:00 AM. That is because fishing is more desirable to me than two or three more hours of comfort and sleep. (Well ... usually.)

All of us have things we enjoy doing. That is one thing. But our one, all-consuming devotion is something else. The question before us is,

WHAT AM I WILLING TO SACRIFICE *EVERYTHING ELSE* FOR?

If you would like to learn something interesting about yourself, make a list of everything that is important to you: your job ... your health ... your children ... your spouse ... the will of God. Now then, if you would like to be stretched a bit, put this list in order of priority. You will find that some of your most valuable gifts are hard to prioritize.

Nevertheless, what rose to the very top of your inventory? Be honest. What is the priority of all your priorities? It is a sobering question because whatever is at the very top ... whatever you would give up everything else on this list to have (even whatever came in second on your list) ... *that* is what you are living for. It is your all-consuming passion.

Isaac, the covenant son of promise, came in second on Abraham’s list.

The Promise

There is a wonderful promise given to New Testament believers that runs parallel to the promise we have seen in the name Yahweh Yireh. It is a promise that extends throughout the ages to all of God's people.

THE FAITHFUL ONE WILL PROVIDE THOSE WHOSE HEARTS ARE FULLY DEVOTED TO HIM
WITH EVERYTHING THEY NEED TO FULFILL HIS WILL FOR THEIR LIVES

We have seen this promise apply to the Old Testament saint, Abraham. He was given a much-needed ram to serve as Isaac's substitute. This same promise applies to all New Testament saints. In his description of the churches in Macedonia, Paul writes:

NOW, BRETHREN, WE WISH TO MAKE KNOWN TO YOU THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH HAS BEEN GIVEN IN THE CHURCHES OF MACEDONIA, THAT IN A GREAT ORDEAL OF AFFLICTION THEIR ABUNDANCE OF JOY AND THEIR DEEP POVERTY OVERFLOWED IN THE WEALTH OF THEIR LIBERALITY. FOR I TESTIFY THAT ACCORDING TO THEIR ABILITY, AND BEYOND THEIR ABILITY, THEY GAVE OF THEIR OWN ACCORD, BEGGING US WITH MUCH URGING FOR THE FAVOR OF PARTICIPATION IN THE SUPPORT OF THE SAINTS, AND THIS, NOT AS WE HAD EXPECTED, BUT THEY FIRST GAVE THEMSELVES TO THE LORD AND TO US BY THE WILL OF GOD. (2ND CORINTHIANS 8:1-5)

Beautifully portrayed in this passage are certain churches in Macedonia whose hearts were fully devoted to God. And to such churches (represented by the church at Philippi), the following promise is given:

AND MY GOD WILL SUPPLY ALL YOUR NEEDS ACCORDING TO HIS RICHES IN GLORY IN CHRIST JESUS. (PHILIPPIANS 4:18-19)

Furthermore, this same promise applies to believers who will live *during the future reign of Christ on earth following His Return*. Offering this kingdom to Israel upon their repentance from sin and faith in Him as Messiah, He made the following promise:

*BUT SEEK **FIRST** HIS KINGDOM AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ... AND ALL THESE THINGS (THE ESSENTIALS OF LIFE YOU WILL NEED TO SERVE ME IN MY KINGDOM) WILL BE ADDED TO YOU. (MATTHEW 6:33, PARENTHESIS MINE)*

The name Yahweh Yireh occurs only one time in the Old Testament; and yet the promise found in this Name is found throughout the entirety of Scripture:

THE FAITHFUL ONE WILL PROVIDE THOSE WHOSE HEARTS ARE FULLY DEVOTED TO HIM
WITH EVERYTHING THEY NEED TO FULFILL HIS WILL FOR THEIR LIVES

He does not promise to supply all the *wants* of those who worship Him. This is not a health and wealth lesson. But He does promise to provide *whatever the believer needs to fulfill His good will*. And He will do so "according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Dear friends, the believer has at his fingertips what the world desperately craves: peace, security, contentment, and purpose. And yet, apart from God's magnanimous grace, they will never find what they are blindly groping for. That is because they are looking in all the wrong places. It is only through faith in Christ Jesus that they can have what they wrongly think other passions (of both the heart and the body) will give them.

As we seek to make Christ the supreme Object of our devotion, we will watch – with wonder – as all our other passions gradually retreat to their proper places. And with satisfaction, we will discover that Jesus Christ was really the only passion worth living for after all.

His Name is Yahweh Yireh. It is a Name that promises to provide those whose hearts are fully devoted to God with everything they need to fulfill His will for their lives ... and to do so *“ACCORDING TO HIS RICHES IN GLORY IN CHRIST JESUS.”*

ABRAHAM CALLED THE NAME OF THAT PLACE “THE LORD WILL GRACIOUSLY PROVIDE EVERYTHING NEEDED TO FULFILL HIS WILL TO THOSE WHO WORSHIP HIM WITH HEARTS FULL OF DEVOTION,” AS IT IS SAID TO THIS DAY, “IN THE MOUNT OF THE LORD IT WILL BE PROVIDED.” (GENESIS 22:14)

⁹ *Forrest Gump*, directed by Robert Zemeckis; produced by Wendy Finerman, Steve Tisch, Steve Starkey, and Charles Newirth; screenplay by Eric Roth; based on the 1986 novel, *Forrest Gump*, by author Winston Groom; starring Tom Hanks, Robin Wright, Gary Sinise, Mykelti Williamson, and Sally Field; release date July 6, 1994.

¹⁰ According to Charles Ryrie, “Moriah was a general area that included the hills on which Solomon later built his Temple in Jerusalem.” (*Ryrie Study Bible*, New American Standard Bible, The Lockman Foundation, Ryrie, Charles Caldwell, footnote on Genesis 22:2, page 36)

Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where *the LORD* had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. (2nd Chronicles 3:1)

In other words, Abraham was to sacrifice his “only son” on or in the vicinity of a hill that would later be called Golgotha, the site of another Sacrifice of another “only Son.” But the Sacrifice of that Son would not be interrupted.

¹¹ *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Ross, Allen P., *Genesis*, Chariot Victor Publishing, Colorado Springs, CO, 1985, page 65.

YAHWEH SABAOTH

GOD IS A WATCHFUL DEFENDER

HE WHO DWELLS IN THE SHELTER OF THE MOST HIGH WILL ABIDE IN THE SHADOW OF THE ALMIGHTY. I WILL SAY TO THE LORD, "MY REFUGE AND MY FORTRESS, MY GOD, IN WHOM I TRUST!"

FOR IT IS HE WHO DELIVERS YOU FROM THE SNARE OF THE TRAPPER AND FROM THE DEADLY PESTILENCE. HE WILL COVER YOU WITH HIS PINIONS, AND UNDER HIS WINGS YOU MAY SEEK REFUGE; HIS FAITHFULNESS IS A SHIELD AND BULWARK.

YOU WILL NOT BE AFRAID OF THE TERROR BY NIGHT, OR OF THE ARROW THAT FLIES BY DAY; OF THE PESTILENCE THAT STALKS IN DARKNESS, OR OF THE DESTRUCTION THAT LAYS WASTE AT NOON. A THOUSAND MAY FALL AT YOUR SIDE AND TEN THOUSAND AT YOUR RIGHT HAND, BUT IT SHALL NOT APPROACH YOU. YOU WILL ONLY LOOK ON WITH YOUR EYES AND SEE THE RECOMPENSE OF THE WICKED.

FOR YOU HAVE MADE THE LORD, MY REFUGE, EVEN THE MOST HIGH, YOUR DWELLING PLACE. NO EVIL WILL BEFALL YOU, NOR WILL ANY PLAGUE COME NEAR YOUR TENT.

FOR HE WILL GIVE HIS ANGELS CHARGE CONCERNING YOU, TO GUARD YOU IN ALL YOUR WAYS. THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP IN THEIR HANDS THAT YOU DO NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.

YOU WILL TREAD UPON THE LION AND COBRA, THE YOUNG LION AND THE SERPENT YOU WILL TRAMPLE DOWN. BECAUSE HE HAS LOVED ME, THEREFORE I WILL DELIVER HIM; I WILL SET HIM SECURELY ON HIGH, BECAUSE HE HAS KNOWN MY NAME. (PSALM 91:1-14)

Hello. I'm Pleased We Can Finally Speak. I Was Your Guardian Angel.

Have you ever wondered what it will be like to meet someone for the first time ... in Heaven? Instead of our first question being "*Where* are you from?" perhaps one of our first questions will be "*When* did you live?"

Can you imagine someone telling you that she was Noah's wife? Or that he walked out of Egypt with Moses? Or that he was the little boy who handed Jesus the five loaves and two fish? Or that she came to the New World on board the Mayflower? Don't you imagine our next question would be, "What was that like?" We have some pretty incredible stories awaiting us, don't we? And we have an eternity to hear them all!

Now, try to imagine *their* response to the age during which *we* lived! At least we have the advantage of knowing about the technology and culture of their day from our history books. What will it be like for the early saints to hear that we lived during the 21st century ... AD? We will be describing our lives to those who lived under the

Pharaohs' enslavement and to early Christians who lived under Nero's persecution. When they hear that we lived over 2,000 years after the Resurrection, they will probably be quite fascinated with our testimonies as well. ("What do you mean, you 'flew across the Atlantic'?")

Yes, we have some pretty amazing first-time introductions in our future.

Most certainly, we await – with anticipation – our first meeting with Christ Jesus. I think we all want to know what He looks like. I have tried to picture what His countenance will be as I look into His face for the first time ... what His nail prints look like ... what His first words to me will be ... and what my first words will be to Him (once I am able to speak).

When I think of bowing before Christ Jesus for the first time, I feel joyfully excited and reverently fearful.

I have also tried to imagine myself conversing with (perhaps I should say listening to!) people about whom I have read: those great men and women of faith whose lives are recorded in the Old and New Testaments ... and others such as John Wycliffe and Jan Hus and Martin Luther and John Bunyan who made such an impact throughout the Church Age.

When I think of meeting these men and women of great faith, I have a sense of humble fascination.

Sometimes I imagine myself walking down a row of men and women, being introduced to them with the words, "This is your great grandfather," and "This is your great, great, great ... great grandmother who lived in France during the 11th century."

When I think of meeting my ancestors that shared – during their lives – the same faith in Jesus Christ that I was given, I have a sense of wonder and anticipation.

And there is someone else I am looking forward to meeting. I do not know his name; but he has known my name for quite some time now. I have no idea what he looks like; and I am not even sure what to expect. Nor do I know for sure when I will meet him. If I do not see the Lord Jesus first, he *may* be the first one I see once I awaken from the sleep of death (Luke 16:22).

When I think of meeting this angel who was assigned to watch over me many years ago: to protect me and minister to me ... this spirit-being so intimately acquainted with me, but whose name I do not even know ... when I think of meeting him, I am most definitely intrigued.

I want to thank him for his faithful service to me. Perhaps he will be my companion (and good friend) throughout eternity. Or maybe he will be re-assigned to watch over someone else, and I will see him only from time to time.

This chapter will include a discussion on the role of angels in our lives; but it is not primarily about them. It is primarily about the One Who sends them forth to minister to us. It is a lesson about Divine protection and watch care. Understandably, the Name of God associated with this ministry of the angels is Yahweh Sabaoth, “the LORD of hosts.”

Yahweh Sabaoth, the Commander of Warrior-Angels

The Hebrew word “saba” refers to “a mass of persons regularly organized for war.” The “assembly of an army” is the main idea. When “saba” is connected to “Yahweh,” the resulting Name, Yahweh Sabaoth, portrays God as

THE FAITHFUL COMMANDER OF A VAST ASSEMBLY OF SOLDIERS

The Name Yahweh Sabaoth occurs more than two hundred times in the Old Testament. It is found most frequently in passages that find Israel facing some national crisis, particularly, the threat of war. When they realize they will not be able to deliver themselves from the crisis, they cry out to “the LORD of hosts” for help. Because of their covenant-relationship with Him, Israel can trust this Commanding General to faithfully come to their aid.

There is great encouragement found in this Name. As we are about to see, this host of soldiers at God’s disposal is, in fact, a massive army of angelic warriors; and through them, God will protect and serve His chosen people.

The Angels of Yahweh Sabaoth

Who They Are and What They Do

When a child dies, he does not become an angel. Nor do Christians become angels when they die. According to the Bible, angels are spirit-beings whose entire population was brought into existence before Adam and Eve were created. In fact, while God was laying the foundations of the earth, we are told that they were singing.

WHERE WERE YOU WHEN I LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH? ... OR WHO LAID ITS CORNERSTONE, WHEN THE MORNING STARS SANG TOGETHER AND ALL THE SONS OF GOD SHOUTED FOR JOY? (JOB 38:4, 7)

These spirit-beings are not members of God's family. They are, instead, His servants. God sends them to fulfill His will in the affairs of men (most often behind the scenes, although on occasion some have revealed themselves to humans). Some angels have been given oversight of nations (Daniel 12:1; Jude 1:9); and some of them (perhaps all of them) serve as guardians of a specific group of human beings.

Have you ever wondered if *you* are the object of an angel's watch-care?

The Specific Audience Guarded by Angels

SEE THAT YOU DO NOT DESPISE ONE OF THESE LITTLE ONES, FOR I SAY TO YOU THAT THEIR ANGELS IN HEAVEN CONTINUALLY SEE THE FACE OF MY FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN. (MATTHEW 18:10)

Throughout the 18th chapter of Matthew, Jesus has a lot to say about the Father's attitude toward His children. He also makes it clear that the Father expects both believers – and unbelievers – to have this same attitude toward them. It is within this context that this warning is issued: *“DO NOT DESPISE ONE OF THESE LITTLE ONES.”* The reason given is because *“THEIR ANGELS”* have direct access to the throne of God. (These “little ones” do not need big brothers to defend them; they have their own angels to do that!) But just who are these “little ones”?

The disciples had just asked Jesus, *“WHO IS GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?”* (18:1). To answer their question, He sets a child in front of them. And then He begins to talk about “little ones.” Many have assumed that these “little ones” refer to literal children. But is that what Jesus is saying?

As He answers their question, Jesus points to the child before them and says, “The greatest citizens in My kingdom are ‘like children’ (18:3) ... they are ‘as this child’ (18:4) ... they are ‘such (as this) child’ (18:5) ... they are ‘little ones’ (18:6).”

Most certainly, we like to think that our children have guardian angels. And maybe they do. But that is not what this passage is teaching. Jesus is using a small child *to illustrate what a great citizen in His kingdom looks like*. He is *like* this “little one” (that is, he is trusting). Jesus is talking about those who are God's children by faith. It does not matter if they are five years old or ninety-five years old, those who “will inherit salvation” are the Father's “little ones” whose angels stand in the presence of God.

Yahweh Sabaoth sends forth His angels to serve His saved ones. In fact, the Bible teaches that *every believer* has at least one angel assigned to serve him.

ARE THEY (THE ANGELS) NOT ALL MINISTERING SPIRITS, SENT OUT TO RENDER SERVICE FOR THE SAKE OF THOSE WHO WILL INHERIT SALVATION? (HEBREWS 1:14)

According to Acts 12 the infant church certainly acknowledged this ministry of angels, believing that one had been assigned to watch over the Apostle Peter.

WHEN HE (PETER) KNOCKED AT THE DOOR OF THE GATE, A SERVANT-GIRL NAMED RHODA CAME TO ANSWER. WHEN SHE RECOGNIZED PETER'S VOICE, BECAUSE OF HER JOY SHE DID NOT OPEN THE GATE, BUT RAN IN AND ANNOUNCED THAT PETER WAS STANDING IN FRONT OF THE GATE. THEY SAID TO HER, "YOU ARE OUT OF YOUR MIND!" BUT SHE KEPT INSISTING THAT IT WAS SO. THEY KEPT SAYING, "IT IS HIS ANGEL." (ACTS 12:13-15)

Did you know that you are being watched over – day and night – by an unseen spirit-being, an angelic “bodyguard” whose purpose is to minister both protection and strength to you? The Bible does not tell us when each believer is given his guardian angel. Perhaps, it is when he is converted to Christ. Or perhaps it is at birth. We do not know.

Why Has Yahweh Sabaoth Assigned a Guardian Angel to Every Believer?

Why has at least one angel been assigned to watch over each of God’s “little ones”? Why does every believer need a guardian angel?

If we could step through the veil that separates our own dimension from the unseen spiritual realm, that question would be quickly answered.

I LIFTED MY EYES AND LOOKED, AND BEHOLD, THERE WAS A CERTAIN MAN DRESSED IN LINEN, WHOSE WAIST WAS GIRDED WITH A BELT OF PURE GOLD OF UPHAZ. HIS BODY ALSO WAS LIKE BERYL, HIS FACE HAD THE APPEARANCE OF LIGHTNING, HIS EYES WERE LIKE FLAMING TORCHES, HIS ARMS AND FEET LIKE THE GLEAM OF POLISHED BRONZE, AND THE SOUND OF HIS WORDS LIKE THE SOUND OF A TUMULT ... THEN HE SAID TO ME, "DO NOT BE AFRAID, DANIEL, FOR FROM THE FIRST DAY THAT YOU SET YOUR HEART ON UNDERSTANDING THIS (PROPHECY REGARDING ISRAEL) AND ON HUMBLING YOURSELF BEFORE YOUR GOD, YOUR WORDS WERE HEARD, AND I HAVE COME IN RESPONSE TO YOUR WORDS. BUT THE PRINCE OF THE KINGDOM OF PERSIA WAS WITHSTANDING ME FOR TWENTY-ONE DAYS; THEN BEHOLD, MICHAEL, ONE OF THE CHIEF PRINCES, CAME TO HELP ME, FOR I HAD BEEN LEFT THERE WITH THE KINGS OF PERSIA. (DANIEL 10:5-6, 12-13, PARENTHESIS MINE)

This messenger that came to Daniel was not a mere man. Nor was this a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son of God. A demon could not hinder the Second Person of the Trinity; nor would the Son of God need the help of Michael, His archangel, to be able to deliver this message. This “man” was an angel; and he spent three weeks doing battle within the spiritual realm to deliver God’s Truth to God’s prophet.

No doubt, a great battle is raging all around the community of believers.

FOR OUR STRUGGLE IS NOT AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD, BUT AGAINST THE RULERS, AGAINST THE POWERS, AGAINST THE WORLD FORCES OF THIS DARKNESS, AGAINST THE SPIRITUAL FORCES OF WICKEDNESS IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES. (EPHESIANS 6:12)

It is a spiritual war between the angelic warriors of God and the demonic hordes of Satan. And the spoils of this war are nothing less than the eternal souls of man.

AND YOU WERE DEAD IN YOUR TRESPASSES AND SINS, IN WHICH YOU FORMERLY WALKED ACCORDING TO THE COURSE OF THIS WORLD, ACCORDING TO THE PRINCE OF THE POWER OF THE AIR, OF THE SPIRIT THAT IS NOW WORKING IN THE SONS OF DISOBEDIENCE. (EPHESIANS 2:1-2)

Let the ransomed Church of Yahweh Sabaoth know with no uncertainty: their God has every intention of protecting His property, possessions bought by the priceless blood of His Son.

Yahweh Sabaoth Sends His Angelic Warriors to Protect the Ministries of His Servants

In 2nd Kings chapter 6, we read that the king of Syria was frustrated. It seems that, as he met with his war cabinet to draw up battle plans to attack Israel, the Spirit of God was present in the room with them. God's Spirit would then reveal their secret plans to the prophet Elisha ... and then Elisha would tell the king of Israel. So, the Syrian king's plans were being thwarted.

When he learned *how* his plans were being disclosed to Israel,

HE SENT HORSES AND CHARIOTS AND A GREAT ARMY THERE (WHERE THE PROPHET ELISHA WAS), AND THEY CAME BY NIGHT AND SURROUNDED THE CITY. (2ND KINGS 6:14)

The next morning Elisha and his servant awoke to find themselves surrounded by Syrian troops, cavalry, and armor. And his servant cried out, "What are we going to do?"

SO, HE (ELISHA) ANSWERED, "DO NOT FEAR, FOR THOSE WHO ARE WITH US ARE MORE THAN THOSE WHO ARE WITH THEM." THEN ELISHA PRAYED AND SAID, "O LORD, I PRAY, OPEN HIS EYES THAT HE MAY SEE." AND THE LORD OPENED THE SERVANT'S EYES AND HE SAW; AND BEHOLD, THE MOUNTAIN WAS FULL OF HORSES AND CHARIOTS OF FIRE ALL AROUND ELISHA. (2ND KINGS 6:16-17)

As the Biblical account goes, God struck the Syrian soldiers with blindness. Elisha then led them to the king of Israel where they were fed and sent back to Syria. As a result, Syria's raids against Israel stopped. Here, Yahweh Sabaoth used His massive host of angelic soldiers to protect His servant's life (and, therefore, his ministry) from being terminated before its appointed time.

Yahweh Sabaoth Sends His Angelic Warriors to Strengthen His Servants to Persevere in Their Calling

During the deep night right before His betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion, the Lord Jesus had taken His disciples with Him to the Garden of Gethsemane. Then began the most intense period of suffering any human has ever had to endure. When our Lord fell to the ground in this garden and began to pray, He was in excruciating pain.

AND BEING IN AGONY HE WAS PRAYING VERY FERVENTLY; AND HIS SWEAT BECAME LIKE DROPS OF BLOOD, FALLING DOWN UPON THE GROUND. (LUKE 22:44)

Jesus had lived His entire life in obedience to the will of the Father. And He was still resolved to do so, even unto death. But was there some other way to accomplish redemption without being nailed to a cross ... without the sins of the world being placed upon Him ... without being separated from His Father?

“FATHER, IS IT POSSIBLE FOR ME TO STILL DO YOUR WILL WITHOUT HAVING TO GO THROUGH THIS?”

“NO, MY SON, THERE IS NO OTHER WAY.”

“THEN FATHER, YOUR WILL BE DONE.”

We then read that “the LORD of hosts” sent one of His spirit-beings to the Garden of Gethsemane.

NOW AN ANGEL FROM HEAVEN APPEARED TO HIM, STRENGTHENING HIM. (LUKE 22:43)

We should take note that God’s hosts of angels stood ready to deliver Christ from being arrested and crucified. When the mob showed up to arrest Him, Peter drew his sword for a fight.

THEN JESUS SAID TO HIM, “PUT YOUR SWORD BACK INTO ITS PLACE ... OR DO YOU THINK THAT I CANNOT APPEAL TO MY FATHER, AND HE WILL AT ONCE PUT AT MY DISPOSAL MORE THAN TWELVE LEGIONS OF ANGELS?” (MATTHEW 26:52-53)

Just think where we would be if the Lord Jesus had summoned these angels to come to His defense rather than submitting His will to the will of the Father! Although God the Son was resolved to obey God the Father, the humanity of Christ Jesus needed to be strengthened to walk toward the Cross.

Yahweh Sabaoth uses His angels to fortify His servants to persevere in the calling God has placed on their lives.

Yahweh Sabaoth Sends His Angelic Warriors to Defend His Servants from Premature Death

According to Acts chapter 12, the Apostle James had been arrested and executed. When King Herod saw that this action had pleased the unbelieving Jews, he also had the Apostle Peter arrested. It was his plan to execute him, too.

This apostle was not simply put in prison. Four squads of soldiers guarded him. Two were set as guards outside the jail cell and two were actually chained to him on the inside. The rest of the account is too fascinating to summarize:

ON THE VERY NIGHT WHEN HEROD WAS ABOUT TO BRING HIM FORWARD, PETER WAS SLEEPING BETWEEN TWO SOLDIERS, BOUND WITH TWO CHAINS, AND GUARDS IN FRONT OF THE DOOR WERE WATCHING OVER THE PRISON.

AND BEHOLD, AN ANGEL OF THE LORD SUDDENLY APPEARED AND A LIGHT SHONE IN THE CELL; AND HE STRUCK PETER'S SIDE AND WOKE HIM UP, SAYING, "GET UP QUICKLY." AND HIS CHAINS FELL OFF HIS HANDS.

AND THE ANGEL SAID TO HIM, "GIRD YOURSELF AND PUT ON YOUR SANDALS." AND HE DID SO. AND HE SAID TO HIM, "WRAP YOUR CLOAK AROUND YOU AND FOLLOW ME."

AND HE WENT OUT AND CONTINUED TO FOLLOW, AND HE DID NOT KNOW THAT WHAT WAS BEING DONE BY THE ANGEL WAS REAL, BUT THOUGHT HE WAS SEEING A VISION.

WHEN THEY HAD PASSED THE FIRST AND SECOND GUARD, THEY CAME TO THE IRON GATE THAT LEADS INTO THE CITY, WHICH OPENED FOR THEM BY ITSELF; AND THEY WENT OUT AND WENT ALONG ONE STREET, AND IMMEDIATELY THE ANGEL DEPARTED FROM HIM.

WHEN PETER CAME TO HIMSELF, HE SAID, "NOW I KNOW FOR SURE THAT THE LORD HAS SENT FORTH HIS ANGEL AND RESCUED ME FROM THE HAND OF HEROD AND FROM ALL THAT THE JEWISH PEOPLE WERE EXPECTING." (ACTS 12:6-11)

This ministry of angelic protection has been confirmed by believers in our own day. One such testimony can be found in the book *Angels* by Billy Graham as told by John G. Paton, a missionary to the New Hebrides Islands in the South Pacific.

One night Paton and his wife found themselves threatened by hostile natives who surrounded their mission headquarters. The Patons thought for sure that the natives would burn down the headquarters and kill them both. They prayed throughout the night asking God to protect them from harm. The next morning, they were astonished when they realized that the natives had gone away. They had no idea where or why they had left. The missionaries again prayed and thanked the Lord for saving them.

About a year later, the chief of the native tribe who had threatened them became a Christian. He came to visit the Patons. When he was asked about the incident of that night of terror, the chief told the Patons that he and his men were too fearful to carry out their plans of attack. They had seen an army of giant men in “shining garments with drawn swords in their hands” surrounding the mission grounds. Paton and the chief agreed that there was no explanation other than that God had sent angels to keep the missionaries from harm.

Yahweh Sabaoth uses angels to deliver His servants from death before their numbered days (as assigned by God) have been fulfilled.

CONCLUSION

In a previous study we considered the Name Yahweh Nissi. We learned that God is our “Banner.” He is our “Point of rally.” As we do battle with an evil value system (the world), an evil craving within us (the flesh), and an evil angel (the devil), God has provided us with an offensive weapon. He has given us His Truth (His Word) to counterattack these formidable enemies.

But there is another way God provides us with help while in battle. As Yahweh Sabaoth, the “LORD of hosts,” our God is the commanding General of a massive army of angels. It is by these spirit-warriors that God protects His people during the intense spiritual war over our minds, souls, and bodies. This war rages all around us; but because it takes place in a spiritual dimension, we are not usually aware of its full ferocity. (We only experience this war in part.)

We are, in the truest sense, like Elisha’s servant. We are unable to see that the LORD of hosts has dispatched some of His angels to fight on our behalf against our demonic foes.

There may be times when we are in more danger than we realize. It is likely that local churches – faithful to God’s Word – are surrounded by “chariots of fire” as we assemble to study the Scriptures and to worship our Savior. These activities are not something the enemy would let slide. We are probably unaware of much of the protection we are often given.

At other times we are very much aware of the spiritual battle raging around us. All those who are faithful to the Word of God have experienced vexing, humiliating, painful, dangerous, even life-threatening situations. Often, we are tempted to “throw in the towel.” It is when we find ourselves surrounded by adversity and filled with discouragement that we become acutely aware of our own weakness and realize our need to cry out to Yahweh Sabaoth.

We will have to leave a more thorough study of angels to another time. But it is apparent from this brief discussion that God uses angels to guard and comfort His people. Let us be encouraged by this truth.

His Name is Yahweh Sabaoth. He is the faithful Commander of a vast assembly of angelic warriors sent forth to defend, comfort, and strengthen His people in time of need.

"I AM A GREAT KING," SAYS THE GOD WHO FAITHFULLY DISPATCHES HIS MASSIVE ARMY OF SPIRIT-WARRIORS TO DEFEND AND MINISTER TO HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE, "AND MY NAME IS FEARED AMONG THE NATIONS." (MALACHI 1:14)

"A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD"

Our God is a mighty Fortress, a never-failing Bulwark.
He (is) our Helper, prevailing amid the flood of mortal ills.
For our ancient foe still seeks to *[cause]* us *[anguish]*.
His craft and power are great and armed with cruel hate.
His equal is not on earth.

[Were] we *[to]* confide in our own strength ... were the right Man not on our side, the Man of God's own choosing ... our striving would be losing.

[Do you] ask who that may be? It is Christ Jesus.

His Name (is) LORD Sabaoth. (He is) the same from age to age.
And He must win the battle.

And though this world – filled with devils – should threaten to undo us, we will not fear,
for God has willed (that) His Truth triumph through us.

We (do) not tremble *[because of]* the grim prince of darkness.

We can endure his rage, for *[let us take careful note]*, his doom is sure.

One little word shall *[cut]* him *[down]*.

That word abides above all earthly powers – no thanks to them.

The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who sides with us.

Let goods and kindred go. Also, (let) this mortal life (go).

They may kill the body; God's Truth still abides.

His Kingdom is forever.

– Martin Luther

ADONAI**GOD IS A LOVING MASTER**

BUT GOD DEMONSTRATES HIS OWN LOVE TOWARD US, IN THAT WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US. (ROMANS 5:8)

The Cross of the Lamb and the Throne of the Lion

In his book, Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ, the late Dr. Harold W. Hoehner presents evidence that Jesus Christ was crucified on Friday, April 3rd, AD 33. ¹³ On that day several individuals, whose lives would have otherwise faded into obscurity, became infamous participants in the most notorious Crime in history. To be sure, some of them knew they were committing a heinous act of injustice (in particular, the Jewish religious leaders who sentenced Jesus to death). But it is doubtful that any of them fully understood what was happening. What was, to them, the “good riddance” of One Who threatened to disrupt their lives was, in fact, the God-orchestrated Sacrifice of the Redeemer Whose Death was in place of their own. Far from being just another execution (the Romans crucified hundreds of Jews), Golgotha was the pivot point of human history. It was a day when the justice of God intersected with the mercy of God ... a weekend in which the Son of God’s humiliation ended, and His glory was renewed.

On that hill those who had arranged for Him to die stood in front of His Cross to gawk at His agony and shame: His shredded skin hanging loose from His back and sides, dripping with blood ... His battered face bruised and bleeding from pounding fists ... His lips cut open ... His eyes swollen shut ... His exposed body shivering in the cold of the morning hours ... pushing His weight down on the spike driven through His feet to raise His chest for a gasp of breath ... and using that breath to ask the Father to forgive them for what they were doing.

(We do well to picture this scene in our minds. Was it not for you and me that He endured the wrath of God so that we – through faith in His Payment for our moral crimes – would not have to?)

Faithful Savior, an eternity is not long enough to thank You for what You did for us.

And so, they stood before Him as He hung on the Cross. They watched Him suffer; and then they watched Him die. But this would not be the last time they would stand before Him.

Have you ever wondered what it will be like for those who played a role in the Death of the Sin-Bearer to be summoned to His throne for judgment? Let us consider

- *the Jewish Temple guards* who were responsible for guarding Jesus during His trial

NOW THE MEN WHO WERE HOLDING JESUS IN CUSTODY WERE MOCKING HIM ... THEN THEY SPAT IN HIS FACE ... AND THEY BLINDFOLDED HIM ... AND BEAT HIM WITH THEIR FISTS; AND OTHERS SLAPPED HIM ... AND WERE ASKING HIM, SAYING, "PROPHECY TO US, YOU CHRIST; WHO IS THE ONE WHO HIT YOU?" (MATTHEW 26:67-68; LUKE 22:63-64)

Can you imagine the One Whose

EYES ARE A FLAME OF FIRE (REVELATION 19:12)

looking right at these men and saying, "You were the ones who hit Me."

- *the members of the Jewish Supreme Court (the Sanhedrin)* who said of Jesus at His trial

HE DESERVES DEATH! (MATTHEW 26:66)

Can you imagine hearing the Righteous One say to each of them, "I was the only One in the room that did not deserve death"?

- *Herod and his soldiers* who,

AFTER TREATING HIM WITH CONTEMPT AND MOCKING HIM, DRESSED HIM IN A GORGEOUS ROBE AND SENT HIM BACK TO PILATE. (LUKE 23:11)

Can you imagine these men looking upon the majesty of the King of glory

*SITTING ON A THRONE, LOFTY AND EXALTED,
WITH THE TRAIN OF HIS ROBE FILLING THE TEMPLE (ISAIAH 6:1)*

and hearing Him say, "Do you remember that robe of disdain you put on Me"?

- *the Roman Soldiers* who, surrounding Him,

STRIPPED HIM AND PUT A SCARLET ROBE ON HIM. AND AFTER TWISTING TOGETHER A CROWN OF THORNS, THEY PUT IT ON HIS HEAD, AND A REED IN HIS RIGHT HAND; AND THEY KNELT DOWN BEFORE HIM AND MOCKED HIM, SAYING, "HAIL, KING OF THE JEWS!" (MATTHEW 27:28-29)

What will it be like for them to kneel down before the One

*ON (WHOSE) HEAD ARE MANY DIADEMS (REVELATION 19:12)
(AND FROM WHOSE HAND) THE SCEPTER SHALL NOT DEPART (GENESIS 49:10)*

- *the Jews in Jerusalem for Passover* who demanded the execution of the Messiah-King

NOW IT WAS THE DAY OF PREPARATION FOR THE PASSOVER; IT WAS ABOUT THE SIXTH HOUR. AND HE SAID TO THE JEWS, "BEHOLD, YOUR KING!" SO, THEY CRIED OUT, "AWAY WITH HIM, AWAY WITH HIM, CRUCIFY HIM!" PILATE SAID TO THEM, "SHALL I CRUCIFY YOUR KING?" THE CHIEF PRIESTS ANSWERED, "WE HAVE NO KING BUT CAESAR." (JOHN 19:14-15)

Can you imagine each of them bowing before the One

*ON (WHOSE) ROBE AND ON (WHOSE) THIGH HE HAS A NAME WRITTEN,
"KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." (REVELATION 19:16)*

... the One Whose

*APPEARANCE WAS MARRED MORE THAN ANY MAN
AND HIS FORM MORE THAN THE SONS OF MEN. (ISAIAH 52:14)*

but now

*HIS HEAD AND HIS HAIR (ARE) WHITE LIKE WHITE WOOL, LIKE SNOW
AND HIS FACE (IS) LIKE THE SUN SHINING IN ITS STRENGTH. (REVELATION 1:14, 16)*

There is coming a day when those who stood before the Cross, pointing at the nail-impaled Lamb of God and yelling,

"You do not have the right to *live*,"

will bow before this glorified King and declare,

"You Alone have the right to *rule*."

This day will be quite different than the morning of Friday, April 3rd, AD 33. On this day those who once stood before the humiliated Lamb of God will find themselves in the presence of the exalted Lion of Judah. His exposed body is now clothed in radiant

robes. A crown of thorns has been replaced by diadems of glory. And a cross that offered God's mercy has been replaced by a throne that demands God's justice. On *this* day those whose names are not recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life will not stand; they will bow. And their tongues will not mock; they will confess that

JESUS CHRIST IS LORD, TO THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER. (PHILIPPIANS 2:11)

A day is approaching when every person who has ever lived will acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus, something the professing Church is already doing. Most certainly, now is the time to do so. But when we do, what exactly are we saying? It may be that we put this title in front of His Name so frequently – and so easily – that we have forgotten the weight of the word. We would do well, therefore, to become reacquainted with the commitment we are making when we acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The Meaning of the Title “Lord”

In Hebrew there are, in fact, two names for God which are translated into English as “Lord.” One of them is “Yahweh” which – in the NASV, the KJV and the NIV – uses all upper case (capital) letters “LORD.” The other Name is “Adonai” which uses lower case letters, “Lord,” to distinguish it from Yahweh. It is this second Name “Adonai” that concerns us. It comes from a word meaning

“to judge” or “to rule”

Perhaps some of you reading this lesson grew up under the regime of a dictator or theocratic ruler. To you, the word “ruler” may be easier to grasp. But those raised under a democratic form of government do not easily relate to the concept of having a master. We are not used to this word. We were not brought up under that kind of system.

To say that Jesus is our “Master” is vastly different from saying Jesus is our “President” or “Prime Minister.” We do not vote the Son of God into power. If we do not like the way He does things, we cannot simply remove Him from office and find someone else whose ideas we like better.

Nor is this an employer-employee relationship. Jesus Christ is not our “Boss.” If we do not like the expectations He places on our lives, we cannot just quit and find a better employer somewhere else.

To remind ourselves of the weight of this Name, let us return to an event in the Old Testament in which Israel is reminded (once again) that Adonai is “the Lord of all the earth.”

The Historical Context of the Name Adonai

Before Israel crossed the Jordan River to take possession of their covenant-land, Moses and Eleazar, the priest, were told to get a headcount of all the males old enough to fight.

TAKE A CENSUS OF ALL THE CONGREGATION OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL FROM TWENTY YEARS OLD AND UPWARD, BY THEIR FATHERS' HOUSEHOLDS, WHOEVER IS ABLE TO GO OUT TO WAR IN ISRAEL. (NUMBERS 26:2)

According to Numbers 26:51, males of military age numbered 601,730. If we assume there were just as many women over 20 years of age, this will mean that the adult population of Israel at this time was approximately 1,200,000. If we assign two children per couple, this will mean that around two and one half million people were assembled on the east bank of the Jordan River, waiting to wade into a river ... at flood stage.

FOR THE JORDAN OVERFLOWS ALL ITS BANKS ALL THE DAYS OF HARVEST. (JOSHUA 3:15)

As Israel camped near the bank of the Jordan River, they watched the muddy current of this swollen river roll by. And there they waited for three days, not knowing their next step.

At the end of the third day, officers passed through the camp, instructing the people

BEHOLD, THE ARK OF THE COVENANT OF THE LORD (HEBREW, ADON) OF ALL THE EARTH IS CROSSING OVER AHEAD OF YOU INTO THE JORDAN. (JOSHUA 3:11)

Adonai Is Israel's Master

Their marching orders were clear. They were commanded to step forward ... into a flooded river. But instead of following a pillar of cloud, Israel was now to follow the Ark of the Covenant. And because the Ark was a symbol of their God, it was the Lord – not Joshua – Who would be leading them into Canaan.

WHEN YOU SEE THE ARK OF THE COVENANT OF THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH THE LEVITICAL PRIESTS CARRYING IT, THEN YOU SHALL SET OUT FROM YOUR PLACE AND GO AFTER IT. (JOSHUA 3:3)

Adonai had every right to expect Israel to follow Him. He was their Master; and the commands He gave were just that. They were commands, not requests. He was not asking them to do this. (We will not find the word "Please" in front of any of God's commandments.)

“In Old Testament times, the slave was the absolute possession of his master, having no rights of his own. His chief business was to carry out the wishes of his master. The slave had a relationship and responsibility different from that of the hired servant. The hired servant could quit if he did not like the orders of his master. But not so with the slave; he could do nothing but obey ... It was not the slave’s place to choose his work; he must do what he was told to do.” ¹⁴

FIRST AND FOREMOST, THE MASTER HAS THE RIGHT TO EXPECT OBEDIENCE FROM HIS SLAVE.

Adonai Is Israel’s Revered Master

But notice that they were not to walk close to the Ark. They were to keep a distance of 2,000 cubits (about 3,000 feet / 914 meters) between it and themselves.

HOWEVER, THERE SHALL BE BETWEEN YOU AND IT A DISTANCE OF ABOUT 2,000 CUBITS BY MEASURE. DO NOT COME NEAR IT (JOSHUA 3:4)

Their fathers had been given a similar warning forty years earlier when God met with Moses on Mt. Sinai to give Israel His Law. They were told at that time to “keep their distance.” If anyone touched even the border of the mountain, they were to be put to death.

Why? Why were their fathers told to keep their distance from Mt. Sinai? And why was this generation being told to keep their distance from the Ark of the Covenant?

Both occasions were to teach this nation that God was not like them. Yes, He was *with them*; but He was not *one of them*. They were sinful; but He was not. They were common; but He was not. He was not “the Man upstairs.” He was not their “rad Dad in the sky.” He was nothing less than God almighty ... their Lord of glory ... their exalted Master ... their sovereign Ruler ... One to be respected ... One to be feared. They were not to lower Him to their level. Adonai was to be regarded as “holy.”

As a bond-slave of God, the believer’s obedience is to be more than an outward conformity to a set of rules. He is to be motivated by a sincere reverence for his Master. This can be seen in the earthly relationship a slave is to have with his master:

SLAVES, BE OBEDIENT TO THOSE WHO ARE YOUR MASTERS ACCORDING TO THE FLESH, WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING, IN THE SINCERITY OF YOUR HEART, AS TO CHRIST; NOT BY WAY OF EYE-SERVICE, AS MEN-PLEASERS, BUT AS SLAVES OF CHRIST, DOING THE WILL OF GOD FROM THE HEART. WITH GOOD WILL RENDER SERVICE, AS TO THE LORD, AND NOT TO MEN. (EPHESIANS 6:5-7)

Israel was to never allow herself to have a casual or irreverent attitude toward God. And neither are we, His New Testament people. Our Lord is the sovereign and holy Ruler of all the earth. He deserves to be honored by descriptions nobler than any language this earth has to offer.

THE MASTER HAS THE RIGHT TO EXPECT *REVERENT* OBEDIENCE FROM HIS SLAVE.

Yet, this relationship between master and slave is not one-sided. The bond-slave of God has much to gain as he submits his will to the will of his Lord.

Adonai Is Israel's Loving Guide

When Israel crossed the Jordan, the distance between them and the Ark of the Covenant would have made it possible for this huge population to see the Ark. (It could be that Israel did not simply walk behind it; they may have positioned themselves around it on three sides, like a horseshoe.) They were about to enter unfamiliar territory; and because of that, they needed to be assured of the Lord's guidance.

HOWEVER, THERE SHALL BE BETWEEN YOU AND IT A DISTANCE OF ABOUT 2,000 CUBITS BY MEASURE. DO NOT COME NEAR IT THAT YOU MAY KNOW THE WAY BY WHICH YOU SHALL GO, FOR YOU HAVE NOT PASSED THIS WAY BEFORE. (JOSHUA 3:4)

One blessing the slave can expect from his Master is loving guidance.

“The master is responsible to manage the affairs of the slave since his work is the master's bidding. So, it is with God as our Adonai, our Lord. When we are willing to be His obedient servants, He will give us direction in service.” ¹⁵

THE SLAVE CAN EXPECT GUIDANCE FROM HIS MASTER.

Adonai Is Israel's Loving Sustainer

Before Israel moved forward, Joshua described to the nation what they could expect:

IT SHALL COME ABOUT WHEN THE SOLES OF THE FEET OF THE PRIESTS WHO CARRY THE ARK OF THE LORD, THE LORD OF ALL THE EARTH, REST IN THE WATERS OF THE JORDAN, THE WATERS OF THE JORDAN WILL BE CUT OFF, AND THE WATERS WHICH ARE FLOWING DOWN FROM ABOVE WILL STAND IN ONE HEAP. (JOSHUA 3:13)

Have you ever seen a river at flood stage? The waters are often muddy and swirling, and the current can be quite swift. That is what this nation was looking at.

But Joshua assured them that, somewhere upstream, the water would “stand in one heap.” Anyone *under* the age of forty would have to accept this by faith. But those *over* the age of forty, including Joshua and Caleb, had witnessed this miracle once before at the Sea of [Papyrus] Reeds (or the Red Sea). Perhaps throughout the nation, the older ones began to encourage the younger ones with, “Yes, with God this is very possible. We have seen Him do this once before!” Perhaps these of the older generation were the ones who physically moved the rest of the nation forward toward the river.

Nevertheless, a river at flood stage is a threatening sight; and it would prove to be a severe test of their faith. Would they hesitate in fear? Or would they advance in faith?

Before they moved forward, Joshua gave the reason for this miracle. In fact, he gave two reasons:

JOSHUA SAID, “BY THIS YOU SHALL KNOW THAT THE LIVING GOD IS AMONG YOU, AND THAT HE WILL ASSUREDLY DISPOSSESS FROM BEFORE YOU THE CANAANITE, THE HITTITE, THE HIVITE, THE PERIZZITE, THE GIRGASHITE, THE AMORITE, AND THE JEBUSITE.” (JOSHUA 3:10)

Know That the Living God Is Among You

First, this miracle would prove to the nation that God was “among” them. He was “on their side.” Israel’s conquest of the Promised Land was neither conceived by the heart of man nor was it directed by his hand. It was orchestrated by the will and power of God. Based on His covenant with Abraham, Israel could rest assured that Yahweh was with them.

“I will be with you” is a promise that is made throughout the book of *Joshua*. It is an assurance that would sustain them as they took possession of their land. This same promise, “I will be with you,” continues to sustain God’s people today. It is a promise of His presence given to us, the New Testament Church, as we move forward to do His will.

GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL THE NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THAT I COMMANDED YOU; AND LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, EVEN TO THE END OF THE AGE. (MATTHEW 28:19-20)

Know That the Living God Will Drive Out Your Enemies

Second, this miracle of the parting waters was to assure Israel that God could, and would, defeat their enemies. The One Who has the power to get Israel across the Jordan River “on dry ground” also has the power to defeat the seven people-groups that occupied the land.

Most certainly, Adonai, “the Lord of all the earth” was quite capable of getting His people across a river. And in so doing, *the promise of His presence and the proof of His power* would go far to sustain Israel during the conquest of their promised land.

So, the slave may expect to be cared for by his good and loving master. Along with the responsibility to obey his lord is the benefit of being sustained by him.

“The slave had no worry of his own. It was the master’s business to provide food, shelter, and the necessities of life. Since the slave is the possession of the master, his needs become the master’s.” ¹⁶

THE SLAVE CAN EXPECT TO BE CARED FOR BY HIS MASTER.

In the Bible the advantages within a master-slave relationship are not one-sided. Both parties benefited. The master was to receive submissive and reverent obedience from his slave. And the slave was to receive both guidance and provision from his master. These traits of the lord and the servant can be seen in the life of national Israel as She awaited her marching orders to enter the land of promise.

THE NAME ADONAI PORTRAYS GOD AS A MASTER
WHO EXPECTS TO BE OBEYED AND REVERED
AND, IN RETURN, WILL LOVINGLY GUIDE AND SUSTAIN HIS SLAVES

Our Master’s Love

Our Master is not a tyrant. Rather, He is the Lord of love. When we say that God loves us, we do not mean that His goal is to make us happy. (What makes us happy is not always what is best for us.) No, when we say God loves us, we mean that

HE SEEKS OUR HIGHEST GOOD

Do you believe that? Do you believe that your Master seeks your highest good and will do whatever it takes for you to reach that goal? We should. He proved that love for us on Friday, April 3rd, AD 33.

GOD DEMONSTRATES HIS OWN LOVE TOWARD US, IN THAT WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US. (ROMANS 5:8)

While we were moral criminals, deserving the capital punishment of eternal death, God sent His only Son to die in our place. There is no greater proof of His love for us than this: as a willing Substitute, our Master died for you and me. He died so we would not have to. And He was raised from the dead that we, with Him, could have eternal life.

*GREATER LOVE HAS NO ONE THAN THIS,
THAT ONE LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS. (JOHN 15:13)*

If He were willing to pay *this* Price on our behalf, what good would He possibly withhold from us? For the glory of His Own Name, our best is His goal. Our circumstances may be pleasant ... or they may be painful. Either way, our highest good is our Master's goal.

A True Profession of Lordship

There is coming a day when every human being will verbally acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

AT THE NAME OF JESUS EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, OF THOSE WHO ARE IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH AND UNDER THE EARTH, AND THAT EVERY TONGUE WILL CONFESS THAT JESUS CHRIST IS LORD, TO THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER. (PHILIPPIANS 2:10-11)

With this confession, we are saying that Jesus Christ has the right to rule:

He has the right to rule creation.
He has the right to rule the nations.
He has the right to rule His Church.
And He has the right to rule our individual lives.

There are, of course, those who are willing to confess His Lordship during their lives on earth. And when we do, we should understand that our confession is not what gives Christ the right to rule. He already has that right. We are not "*making* Him Lord of our lives." He already is. When we sing "Crown Him with many crowns," we are asking God to do that, not the Church. The coronation of the King of kings and Lord of lords is the Father's prerogative, not ours.

BUT AS FOR ME, I HAVE INSTALLED MY KING UPON ZION, MY HOLY MOUNTAIN. (PSALM 2:6)

When we declare the Lordship of Christ, we are acknowledging an established reality: Jesus Christ already is Master of all.

But how does the individual believer acknowledge the reality of Christ's Lordship? According to Jesus, this declaration goes far beyond mere words. Indeed, the Lord clearly warns against paying mere lip service to His authority.

*NOT EVERYONE WHO SAYS TO ME, "LORD, LORD," WILL ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN
(MATTHEW 7:21)*

What then does a true profession of His Lordship look like?

WHY DO YOU CALL ME, "LORD, LORD," AND DO NOT DO WHAT I SAY? (LUKE 6:46)

Clearly, the way one confesses the Lordship of Christ is

BY STRIVING TO OBEY THE WILL OF GOD

And just to keep our theology straight, let us be clear on this point: The believer seeks to obey the will of God, not to *get* saved but because he already *is* saved (through faith alone).

CONCLUSION

Is the Lordship of Christ a daily reality in our lives? Do we seek to be submissive to His will? Certainly, this resolve is not something that is completely lacking one day and then, the next day, is in full operation. Sanctification is a work of the Spirit of God. And it is gradual. We do not go from 0 to 100 overnight. All true believers are in the *process* of being conformed to the image of Christ. In fact, 100% ("completed") sanctification will not take place until we meet Him face-to-Face.

BELOVED, NOW WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD, AND IT HAS NOT APPEARED AS YET WHAT WE WILL BE. WE KNOW THAT WHEN HE APPEARS, WE WILL BE LIKE HIM, BECAUSE WE WILL SEE HIM JUST AS HE IS. (1ST JOHN 3:2)

May we all submit our wills to the will of "the Lord of all the earth." With our words and with our lives, let this Truth be our whole-hearted confession: Jesus Christ is Lord. He is our Master. He has the right to rule over us, a rule that seeks our absolute best. Why would we want it any other way?

One of God's Names is Adonai. He is our loving Master.

BEHOLD, THE ARK OF THE COVENANT OF THE REVERED MASTER OF ALL THE EARTH, THE ONE WHO LOVINGLY GUIDES AND SUSTAINS HIS SERVANTS, IS CROSSING OVER AHEAD OF YOU INTO THE JORDAN. (JOSHUA 3:11)

¹³ Hoehner, Harold W., Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977, page 114.

¹⁴ Lightner, Robert P., The God of the Bible, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1973, page 116.

¹⁵ ibid., p. 117.

¹⁶ ibid.

ELOHIM**GOD IS ALL-POWERFUL**

AH LORD GOD! BEHOLD, YOU HAVE MADE THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH BY YOUR GREAT POWER AND BY YOUR OUTSTRETCHED ARM! NOTHING IS TOO DIFFICULT FOR YOU. (JEREMIAH 32:17)

In the Palm of His Hand

It is a little-known fact, but what drove the development of the atomic bomb was not America's fear of Japan. It was America's fear of Germany.

When Adolph Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933, he conducted over the next 13 years a reign of brutality few people could have imagined possible. There were some in Europe with enough foresight (and money) to escape Nazi Germany and make their way to the United States. Many of these refugees were Jewish; and a few of them were some of the world's most brilliant scientists. When they arrived in America, they brought with them a fear that Hitler was on the brink of developing a weapon he must *never* have.

Germany was the center for the study of nuclear physics. In a government laboratory located in Berlin, a German chemist had split an atom of uranium. And when he did, nuclear energy was discovered. The scientific community knew that this new form of energy had the potential to replace other forms such as oil and gas. They also suspected that it could be used to create a new kind of bomb. (They were not sure of this.)

News coming out of Europe was that the German War Department had taken over one of the country's finest laboratories. Furthermore, they had outlawed the export of uranium from Czechoslovakia. So, these refugee scientists believed that the German bomb project had already begun; and they were horrified at the prospect of Hitler having in his possession nuclear weapons to execute his campaign of terror.

Once these scientists had convinced the United States government of the danger, a half dozen research facilities were constructed all over the country. (The two most important were located at Los Alamos, New Mexico, and Oak Ridge, Tennessee.)

On December 2nd, 1942, at the University of Chicago, the first nuclear reactor was built. The scientists learned that if they fired what is called a neutron at a uranium atom, the atom would split, releasing an enormous amount of stored energy. It would also release other neutrons which could split other atoms. If they lined up the uranium a certain way, they could create a chain reaction, causing a vast amount of energy to be released. When the U. S. government turned this scientific research over to the military, it became known as "The Manhattan Project." Their orders were clear: "Finish a bomb as

soon as possible.” They thought that scientists in Germany were ahead of them in the development of an atomic bomb for Hitler’s use; and they were scared.

By 1945 Germany was losing the war. And in April of that year, Hitler committed suicide. After his death, the Allies learned that he had never understood the potential of the atomic bomb. Consequently, he had not provided his atomic scientists the resources they needed to build this weapon.

And so, it turned out that the weapon designed to be used against Hitler was not needed for the war in Europe. But research on the atomic bomb continued. And to end the war in the Pacific, President Harry Truman decided to use it against Japan.

The atomic bomb was dropped on two Japanese cities: Hiroshima on August 6th, 1945, and Nagasaki three days later.

The explosive power of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima was equal to 12,500 tons (25 million pounds) of TNT. Eighty thousand (80,000) people died immediately from the blast. And by the end of 1945, an additional 60,000 more died from nuclear fallout sickness. Total destruction was two miles in diameter. The destruction by fire was 8.8 miles in diameter. Sixty-nine percent of the buildings were destroyed. And it was all from one bomb.

The explosive power of the bomb dropped on Nagasaki was equal to 22,000 tons (44 million pounds) of TNT. Between 39,000 – 75,000 people died immediately from the blast. And by the end of 1945, an additional 75,000 more died from nuclear fallout sickness. The heat from the blast is estimated to have reached 7,052° Fahrenheit. The wind from the blast is estimated to have reached 624 miles per hour, four times the speed of the largest hurricane. (The wind speed of a category 5 hurricane is anything over 155 miles per hour.) All from one bomb.

The power released from split atoms is awesome. But that power does not hold a candle to the power of the One Who holds *all* atoms together “in the palm of His hand.” This lesson is about Him, the all-powerful God. His Name is Elohim. And we are about to see that He uses His power to fulfill His *good* will.

The Power of the Plural

The Name Elohim (translated “God”) is used approximately 2,310 times in the Old Testament. It is the first Name of God ever mentioned in the Scriptures. In fact, we find it in the very first verse of the Bible, Genesis 1:1. From this one verse we can easily see which perfection of God this Name highlights.

IN THE BEGINNING ELOHIM CREATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH. (GENESIS 1:1)

The Name Elohim speaks of God's almighty power. The One Who created the universe simply by speaking it into existence is "the strong One."

There is something quite interesting about this Name Elohim. It is in the plural. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning *Gods* created the heavens and the earth." Why did Moses, the author of Genesis, do that? Certainly, he believed that there was only one, true God.

HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD IS OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE! (DEUTERONOMY 6:4)

Why would Moses use the plural Elohim instead of the singular El?

In English, when we want to emphasize a word or phrase, we will *italicize* it ... or underline it ... or CAPITALIZE it ... or put it in **boldface**. But when Jewish writers wanted to emphasize an object, they would sometimes put it in the plural.

- When Jonah was thrown overboard and found himself sinking to the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea, he described himself as being cast

INTO THE HEART OF THE SEAS (JONAH 2:3)

The idea of "sea" being in the plural is this: Jonah was surrounded by so much water, it was as though he were in more than one sea.

- And during Jesus' public ministry, we are told that

CROWDS GATHERED AROUND HIM (MARK 10:1)

In other words, so many people surrounded him, it was as if more than one crowd had gathered around Him.

For Elohim to be in the plural is the way Moses emphasized the greatness of God's power. The power He used to create the material universe was so immense, it was as though more than one God were at work. Thus, God is not merely powerful. He is all-powerful.¹⁷

Elohim is omnipotent.

Definition of Omnipotence

When we say that God is “omnipotent,” we mean that He is able to do anything (and He *will* do so if it is in His sovereign plan).

- 1) He is able (and willing) to answer any prayer that conforms to His will.
- 2) He is able (and willing) to transform the lives of His people into the likeness of His Son.
- 3) And He is able (and willing) to fulfill every promise He has ever made.

Elohim Has the Power to Answer Our Prayers

Since God had the power to create the angelic realm as well as this material universe, He most certainly is able to answer prayer. Often, He will use the laws of nature to do so. (For example, He will use medicine to answer prayers for healing.) At other times, He may interrupt or alter these physical laws to do so (that is, He sometimes uses miracles to answer prayer). No matter what means He chooses to use, Elohim is *able* to say “Yes” to our every prayer. Nothing is impossible for almighty God.

*BEHOLD, I AM THE LORD, THE GOD OF ALL FLESH; IS ANYTHING TOO DIFFICULT FOR ME?
(JEREMIAH 32:27)*

Yet, we have all known the disappointment of a prayer answered “No.” Indeed, the hearts of many saints – ill-prepared for that possibility – have been shaken. Why does this happen?

Is it because we are not as spiritual on some days as we are on others?

Or perhaps it is because we do not have as much faith on some days as we do on others.

No, these are not the reasons. There are countless examples of godly men and women – prayer warriors who are strong in faith – who went before the Lord with their requests for healing or for employment or for some other felt-need, only to receive the answer “No.”

Why does God do that? We believe He is a good God. We believe that He has the power to give us the good thing we are asking for ... but then He does not. Why? What reason does He have to turn down these requests that make such good sense to us?

Often, it is because *our perspective is limited*. What we are calling “good,” He calls “mediocre” ... or even “detrimental.” Simply put, we who are creatures do not have the whole picture of the Creator’s plan for our lives. Nor do we understand how our sovereign and wise God intends to merge His plan into our lives.

For example, let’s say that our beloved aunt, a godly woman, is diagnosed with a serious illness. And so, we – along with her entire church – pray for her to be healed. (Isn’t her healing a good thing? Surely, this is God’s will!) Yet, we do not realize that it is her illness that is causing our uncle to now think about eternity. And it would be her death that would draw him to the Savior, Christ Jesus. And so, the answer to our prayers is “No.” Much to our sorrow, our aunt dies ... but then to our unexpected joy, our uncle is rescued from the kingdom of eternal death to the kingdom of eternal life. Was his *eternal soul* not worth the taking of *her* life?

Or let’s say that we pray for a job promotion that doubles our salary and takes us to an office on the 10th floor next to the president’s. (Surely, this is God’s will! It is just too good not to be.) Yet, we do not realize that a co-worker’s marriage is in trouble; and the only thing holding it together is our stable witness of God’s redemption as we converse with him around the water cooler on the 2nd floor. And so, the answer to our prayer is “No” ... our promotion is denied ... we still cannot afford that cabin on the lake. In the meantime, there is a struggling couple who come to realize that their marriage cannot make it without Jesus Christ.

Perhaps prayers are sometimes answered “No” because God wants to use one’s life to impact the eternal wellbeing of another’s.

When God answers our prayers “No,” it is not because He is a weak God, *unable* to say “Yes.” It is because He is a wise God, *unwilling* to say “Yes.” The requests to which God is always willing to answer “Yes” are those that are in alignment with *His* good will. And it is always His will

to prepare us and others for eternity ...
and to bring great honor to His Name.

That is why we must immerse ourselves in the Scriptures.

IT IS THE WORD OF GOD THAT REVEALS THE WILL OF GOD

The better we know the Bible, the better we know how to pray according to God’s will. In fact, that is what prayer is. Prayer is a priceless gift from God that allows His people *to participate with Him* in the outworking of His will. If we trust Him to do His will (instead of trusting Him to do *our* will), we have this wonderful promise:

THIS IS THE CONFIDENCE WHICH WE HAVE BEFORE HIM, THAT, IF WE ASK ANYTHING ACCORDING TO HIS WILL, HE HEARS US. AND IF WE KNOW THAT HE HEARS US IN WHATEVER WE ASK, WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE THE REQUESTS WHICH WE HAVE ASKED FROM HIM. (1ST JOHN 5:14-15)

Elohim, the all-powerful One, is *able* to answer every one of our prayers; but we should be grateful that He is not always *willing* to. He loves us too much to give us a rattlesnake when we *think* we are asking Him for a family pet.

Elohim Has the Power to Change Our Lives

From the very beginning it has been God's purpose to transform every believer into the image of Christ. God determined beforehand (He "predestined") that all His redeemed sons and daughters were to become like His only begotten Son.

FOR THOSE WHOM HE (GOD) FOREKNEW, HE ALSO PREDESTINED TO BECOME CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON, SO THAT HE (CHRIST) WOULD BE THE FIRSTBORN AMONG MANY BRETHREN. (ROMANS 8:29)

This promise in Romans 8:29 is the "good" of Romans 8:28:

AND WE KNOW THAT GOD CAUSES ALL THINGS TO WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THOSE WHO LOVE GOD, TO THOSE WHO ARE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE. (ROMANS 8:28)

This is a promise the omnipotent One has made to every single believer: "I am going to make you like Christ." And as with prayer, He allows His children to participate with Him in this transforming work.

SO THEN, MY BELOVED, JUST AS YOU HAVE ALWAYS OBEYED ... WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING. (PHILIPPIANS 2:12)

Our part is to obey the moral will of God. But we have a problem. We can't. There is not one commandment in the Bible we can obey ... in our own strength. What we are responsible to do, we are too weak to do. The bar is just too high.

FOR I KNOW THAT NOTHING GOOD DWELLS IN ME, THAT IS, IN MY FLESH; FOR THE WILLING IS PRESENT IN ME, BUT THE DOING OF THE GOOD IS NOT. (ROMANS 7:18)

It takes time for us to realize that God has commanded us to do the impossible. Romans 7:18 can be translated from the original Greek ... it can be memorized ... it can be analyzed for sermon delivery ... and it can be discussed in home Bible study groups. But the reality of its truth will usually not "soak in" until we have tried and tried and tried (and *failed* and *failed* and *failed*) to live the Christian life in our own strength. And yet,

far from being a waste of time, our series of failures can teach us the first half of a priceless lesson. It can cultivate within us

A STRONG AWARENESS OF OUR GREAT WEAKNESS

This sense of moral frailty is important. If we do not first comprehend our weakness, we will never pursue God's strength. And *that* is the second half of the lesson. We must not only have a strong awareness of our own weakness, but we must also have

A STRONG AWARENESS OF ELOHIM'S GREAT POWER

Dear friends, those who truly live by faith ... those saints who depend upon almighty God for help ... are individuals that have had the props knocked out from under them. They walk with a spiritual limp. They are acquainted with the pain of failure. They now know what was true all along:

ONLY GOD HAS THE POWER TO OBEY GOD

It is at this point that our prayers become more fervent and more trusting:

"DEAR GOD, I CANNOT STAND BEING AROUND MY COUSIN'S CONSTANT CRITICISMS. I KNOW THAT YOU HAVE TOLD ME TO LOVE HIM; AND YOU HAVE TOLD ME TO FORGIVE HIM. BUT I CANNOT. I HAVE TRIED, BUT IT IS JUST NOT IN ME. BUT, LORD, IT IS IN YOU. SURELY YOU, WHO LOVED AND FORGAVE ME OF SO MUCH, CAN HELP ME FORGIVE HIM OF SO LITTLE (IN COMPARISON). I KNOW THIS IS YOUR WILL. HELP ME ALMIGHTY GOD. HELP ME LOVE MY COUSIN."

Ironically, we who consider ourselves weak have now become quite strong ... in the Lord's strength. Elohim can now fill our lives with Himself.

*FOR IT IS GOD WHO IS AT WORK IN YOU, BOTH TO WILL AND TO WORK FOR HIS GOOD PLEASURE.
(PHILIPPIANS 2:13)*

That is why we must depend upon the Spirit of God to be in control of our lives.

IT IS THE SPIRIT OF GOD THAT MOTIVATES AND EMPOWERS US TO OBEY THE WILL OF GOD

It is God almighty that has the power to change our lives. We might say that Elohim ("the all-powerful One") has the power to *be* Yahweh Meqaddishkem ("the LORD Who sanctifies you"). He, and He alone, is able to transform us into what He predestined us to become.

Elohim Has the Power to Fulfill His Promises to Us

A promise is only as sound as the integrity of the person making it. If one's character is trustworthy, then his word will also be trustworthy.

But there is another quality that must be present in the life of the promise-maker. He must be *able* to carry out his pledge. This leads us to our final consideration of Elohim's power. The One Who is able to do anything He wills – the almighty One – is able to fulfill every promise He has ever made.

We have already seen that Elohim has the power to fulfill two promises He has made to His people:

He has the power to answer prayer (1st John 5:14-15)

And He has the power to change lives (Romans 8:28; Philippians 2:13)

And those are just two of God's promises to us!

He also has the power to give us eternal life (John 3:16)

... and to forgive our sins and lawless deeds and remember them no more (Hebrews 10:15-18)

... and to guard our hearts and minds with His peace as we make our requests known to Him (Philippians 4:6-7)

... and to raise our bodies from the dust (John 6:39-40)

... and to prepare for us dwelling places in our future residence, the holy city, the New Jerusalem (John 14:2)

... and to return to earth with His mighty angels and glorified saints (2nd Thessalonians 1:6-8; Revelation 19:11-16)

... and to judge all the nations upon His Return (Matthew 25:31-46)

... and to establish His world-wide Kingdom on earth (Zechariah 14:1-9; Revelation 20:4)

... and to set creation free from its slavery to corruption (Romans 8:19-22)

... and to establish and maintain world-wide peace (Isaiah 9:5-7; Zechariah 9:10)

... and to send the heavens away with a roar, to destroy the elements with intense heat, and to incinerate the earth and its works (2nd Peter 3:10)

... and to create a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1)

It is our responsibility to trust God to fulfill these and all His other promises. In this respect we are to be like Abraham:

WITH RESPECT TO THE PROMISE OF GOD, HE (ABRAHAM) DID NOT WAVER IN UNBELIEF BUT GREW STRONG IN FAITH, GIVING GLORY TO GOD, AND BEING FULLY ASSURED THAT WHAT GOD HAD PROMISED, HE WAS ABLE ALSO TO PERFORM. (ROMANS 4:20-21)

But how can we trust Him to fulfill His promises if we do not know what He has promised? That is why we must immerse ourselves in the Scriptures.

IT IS THE WORD OF GOD THAT REVEALS THE PROMISES OF GOD

Elohim is able to do what he says He will do. He has the power to fulfill His promises concerning the present and the future. We might say that Elohim (“the all-powerful One”) has the power to *be* Yahweh (“the LORD is faithful”).

CONCLUSION

Have you ever seen a picture of an exploding atomic bomb? The power of split atoms is awesome. Can you imagine the power of the One Who holds all atoms together “in the palm of His hand”?

FOR BY HIM ALL THINGS WERE CREATED, BOTH IN THE HEAVENS AND ON EARTH, VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE, WHETHER THRONES OR DOMINIONS OR RULERS OR AUTHORITIES – ALL THINGS HAVE BEEN CREATED THROUGH HIM AND FOR HIM. HE IS BEFORE ALL THINGS, AND IN HIM ALL THINGS HOLD TOGETHER. (COLOSSIANS 1:16-17)

Such is the omnipotence of our God. He has the power to answer our prayers. He has the power to change our lives. And He has the power to keep His promises.

His Name is Elohim. He is God almighty.

IN THE BEGINNING THE ALL-POWERFUL, ALMIGHTY GOD CREATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH. (GENESIS 1:1)

17 For Elohim to be in the plural *allows* for the existence of the Trinity; but it does not *prove* the Trinity. Additional, fuller revelation (especially in the New Testament) is needed for that.

EL SHADDAI**GOD IS ALL-SUFFICIENT**

I AM THE VINE, YOU ARE THE BRANCHES; HE WHO ABIDES IN ME AND I IN HIM, HE BEARS MUCH FRUIT, FOR APART FROM ME YOU CAN DO NOTHING. (JOHN 15:5)

“Thank You Just the Same Anyway Lord”

The setting of the 1965 American film *Shenandoah* ¹⁸ is a family farm in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley during the American Civil War. It is a story about a family’s struggle to maintain their isolation from a war that rages all around their property. Within this family are eight children, all of whom are young adults: six sons, one daughter, and one daughter-in-law. And at the head of this clan is a strong, hardened, and fiercely independent father, Mr. Charlie Anderson (played by actor Jimmy Stewart).

In one scene the nine Andersons are seated around the dinner table ... but there are ten places set. And where the tenth plate is set, there stands an empty chair. It soon becomes apparent that the mother of the family had died 16 years earlier while giving birth to the youngest of the sons. Martha Anderson had been a religious woman. And right before she died, she made her husband promise to give their children a Christian upbringing. Although Charlie Anderson believed that recognizing God was nothing but a waste of time, he agreed to do so that he might honor the wife he still deeply loved and greatly missed.

There were two things he did to give his children proper religious training: he made sure they went to church every Sunday, and he offered a prayer before every meal. But let’s listen in on one of his prayers:

“Lord, we cleared this land. We plowed it, sowed it, and harvested it. We cooked the harvest. It wouldn’t be here, and we wouldn’t be eatin’ it if we hadn’t done it all ourselves. We worked dog-boned hard for every crumb and morsel. But we thank You just the same anyway Lord for this food we’re about to eat. Amen.”

There is no doubt where Mr. Anderson stood with God. He saw no point in thanking God (sincerely) for the food on their table when it seemed to him that he, his sons, and his daughters had done all the work. This father was convinced that his family did not need anyone to help them with their farm. He did not need the state of Virginia. (He was not a Confederate.) He did not need the federal government. (He was not a Unionist.) And he most certainly did not need God. (He was not wise.) Charlie Anderson believed his family to be *entirely* self-sufficient.

Webster’s dictionary defines “self-sufficient” as

“able to provide for oneself without the help of others”

At this point we should take note that there is a *healthy* degree of self-sufficiency. It is only right to live in such a way that we are not dependent upon someone else to do for us what we can do – and should do – for ourselves. It is not wrong to hold the view, “I can and should stand on my own two feet.”

This level of self-sufficiency does not have to conflict with one’s attitude of dependence upon God. In fact, merging these two mindsets is quite Biblical. For example, we are told that God the Father feeds the birds of the air (that is, they are dependent on their Creator for food). But not once has a bird been observed sitting on a tree limb with its head tilted back and its beak open, waiting for a Hand from heaven to drop worms into its mouth. The birds fed by God scratch around in the dirt looking for bugs and worms. The command for us to trust God for our needs is not a command for us to do nothing. It is both right and necessary to live responsibly as we seek to live by faith.

But the attitude of self-sufficiency can also be taken to an extreme. This is when we do not consider ourselves to be dependent upon anyone for anything. It is an attitude that says, “I do not need you for anything. And I do not need God for anything either.”

This was the attitude of Mr. Charlie Anderson. According to his prayer, he believed that he and his family had no need for God. After all, they had worked hard to acquire what they had. But we should take note that he left out a few things in his prayer: he makes no mention of the existence of seed ... or the fertility of the soil ... or the regularity of spring and autumn rainfall ... or the sun’s light ... or its warmth ... or, for that matter, his and his wife’s ability to produce sons to work the land.

It is in the sinful nature of man to consider ourselves independent of God. And to be honest, this way of thinking is not limited to unbelievers. Just because a person is a purchased possession of the Father does not mean he has been delivered from the attitude, “I do not need God.” It sometimes takes years for us to realize that there is only one Person Who is truly self-sufficient. And His Name is El Shaddai.

El Shaddai, the All-Sufficient One

The Name Shaddai occurs 48 times in the Old Testament. It occurs 41 times by itself and is translated “the Almighty.” It also occurs as *El Shaddai* an additional seven times; and when it does, it is translated “God Almighty.”

Because this Name uses “El” (the singular form of Elohim), the idea of “almighty power” plays a part in what this Name means. But what about the word “Shaddai”? What perfection of God does this part of the Name highlight?

Some believe that the word “shaddai” comes from a Hebrew word for “mountain” and refers to God’s might and power as seen in His judgments. Therefore, El Shaddai portrays God as the overpowering, almighty One standing on a mountain.

Others believe that the word “shaddai” more accurately refers to a mother’s breast. Therefore, El Shaddai portrays God as a loving mother, able to provide the nourishment His children need to make them grow strong and fruitful.

The ancient rabbis believed that the word “shaddai” carried the idea of “sufficiency.” This word “sufficient” combines the two ideas of strength and nourishment. El Shaddai has the strength (“mountain”) to provide whatever nourishment we need (“mother’s breast”) for growth and fruitfulness.

Thus, the Name El Shaddai portrays God as the “all-sufficient One.” He is our “all in all.” For this reason, C. I. Scofield believed that “God Almighty” was an inaccurate translation of this Name.

“It is to be regretted that Shaddai was translated ‘Almighty.’ The primary Name, El or Elohim, sufficiently signifies almightiness. ‘All-sufficient’ would far better express the characteristic use of the name in Scripture.”¹⁹

It is worth noting that, of the 48 times this Hebrew Name appears in the Old Testament, 38 of those times occurred *before* God revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush. In fact, the book of Job (who was perhaps a contemporary of Abraham) uses the Name “Shaddai” a total of 31 times.

In other words, this Name was frequently used by believers before the days of Moses; but once God revealed His personal Name to Moses, the Name Shaddai was largely replaced by the Name Yahweh, the covenant-God of Israel.

*GOD SPOKE FURTHER TO MOSES AND SAID TO HIM, “I AM YAHWEH; AND I APPEARED TO ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB AS EL SHADDAI; BUT BY MY NAME, YAHWEH, I DID NOT MAKE MYSELF KNOWN TO THEM.” (EXODUS 6:2-3)*²⁰

What is of interest to us is the *first* appearing of this Name El Shaddai:

NOW WHEN ABRAM WAS NINETY-NINE YEARS OLD, THE LORD APPEARED TO ABRAM AND SAID TO HIM, “I AM EL SHADDAI. WALK BEFORE ME AND BE BLAMELESS.” (GENESIS 17:1)

We have been following the life of Abram, now, since he was 75 years old. But God does not refer to Himself by the Name El Shaddai until the patriarch is 99 years old! Why would He wait so long before presenting Himself as “the all-sufficient One”? The

answer to this question has a lot to do with the kind of life Abram, Sarai, you, and I have been called to live.

“Here Lord, Let Me Help You with That Promise of Yours”

Abram and Sarai wanted a son. Oh, how they longed for a son! Without him the covenant between Yahweh and Abram would be worthless. There would be no descendants whose numbers would rival the stars in the heavens. There would be no heir to stake his claim on the land of Canaan. And there would be no one to inherit its promised physical and spiritual blessings. Yet year after year after year, Abram and Sarai remained childless.

Perhaps this promised blessing needs *the touch of man* to “sort-of move things along a bit.” So, Abram devises a plan to help the all-powerful One fulfill the promise He had made. He suggests that he be allowed to adopt one of his household servants to be his heir.

ABRAM SAID, “O LORD GOD, WHAT WILL YOU GIVE ME, SINCE I AM CHILDLESS, AND THE HEIR OF MY HOUSE IS ELIEZER OF DAMASCUS?” AND ABRAM SAID, “SINCE YOU HAVE GIVEN NO OFFSPRING TO ME, ONE BORN IN MY HOUSE IS MY HEIR.” (GENESIS 15:2-3)

Interestingly, there was nothing unusual about this suggestion. According to the custom of that day, it was perfectly acceptable for a wealthy, childless couple to adopt a servant to inherit their property. *The logic of it all makes so much sense!* Yet, the petition is denied.

THEN BEHOLD, THE WORD OF THE LORD CAME TO HIM, SAYING, “THIS MAN WILL NOT BE YOUR HEIR; BUT ONE WHO WILL COME FORTH FROM YOUR OWN BODY, HE SHALL BE YOUR HEIR.” (GENESIS 15:4)

Before we leave this scene too quickly, we should pause to take note of what just happened. Apparently, this patriarch of the covenant had come to believe that his covenant-Partner could use a little help. Too much time had passed for almighty God to be *able* to fulfill His promise of an heir ... biologically. And so, in their thinking that promise could only be fulfilled legally / culturally. But God’s answer to his petition was crystal clear:

ABRAM, YOUR HEIR WILL BE YOUR OWN FLESH AND BLOOD.

So, Abram was to be the father. But we should observe that nothing was said of the mother. The years continued to drag by. Ten years after receiving the terms of the covenant, Abram is now 85 years old. And his wife Sarai is now 75 years old, long past

her child-bearing years. But still ... no son. *This does not make any sense!* Surely, they must have misunderstood what God wanted from them.

Perhaps this promised blessing needs *the touch of woman* to “sort-of move things along a bit.” So now *Sarai* devises a plan to help the all-powerful One fulfill the promise He had made. She suggests to her husband that he use her maidservant as a stand-in mother to bear a son in her name.

SO, SARAI SAID TO ABRAM, “NOW BEHOLD, THE LORD HAS PREVENTED ME FROM BEARING CHILDREN. PLEASE GO IN TO MY MAID; PERHAPS I WILL OBTAIN CHILDREN THROUGH HER.” (GENESIS 16:2)

Actually, there was nothing unusual about this suggestion either. According to the custom of that day, it was perfectly acceptable for a barren wife to permit another woman to bear children in her name. *The logic of it all makes so much sense!* In this way, the couple would produce an heir by means of a legal proxy.

Again, let us pause to take note of what just happened. Apparently, this covenant-couple had come to believe that their covenant-Partner could use a little help. Too much time had passed for almighty God to be *able* to fulfill His promise of an heir ... biologically. And so, in their thinking that promise could only be fulfilled legally / culturally.

Do you see a pattern beginning to emerge?

This time, however, Abram did *not* consult God for the go-ahead.

AND ABRAM LISTENED TO THE VOICE OF SARAI. AFTER ABRAM HAD LIVED TEN YEARS IN THE LAND OF CANAAN, ABRAM’S WIFE SARAI TOOK HAGAR THE EGYPTIAN, HER MAID, AND GAVE HER TO HER HUSBAND ABRAM AS HIS WIFE. (GENESIS 16:2-3)

We then read that this slave-girl conceives and bears a son ... and Abram does not hear from God again for 13 years! But when he does, he learns that God has another Name, a Name he has never used before ... which brings us to Genesis 17.

“You Can’t Do This. But I Can.”

When our acquaintance with Abram is renewed in Genesis 17:1, he is 99 years old, and his wife Sarai is 89.

NOW WHEN ABRAM WAS NINETY-NINE YEARS OLD, THE LORD APPEARED TO ABRAM AND SAID TO HIM, “I AM EL SHADDAI; WALK BEFORE ME, AND BE BLAMELESS. I WILL ESTABLISH MY COVENANT BETWEEN ME AND YOU, AND I WILL MULTIPLY YOU EXCEEDINGLY.” (GENESIS 17:1-2)

Thirteen years had passed between the last verse in Genesis 16 and the first verse of Genesis 17. Sometime during this interval of silence, Abram had convinced himself that Ishmael, the son of Sarai's maidservant, was the fulfillment of God's promised male heir. But then came the most unexpected, jaw-dropping announcement Abram had ever heard:

*AS FOR SARAI YOUR WIFE, YOU SHALL NOT CALL HER NAME SARAI, BUT SARAH SHALL BE HER NAME. I WILL BLESS HER, AND INDEED I WILL GIVE YOU A SON BY HER. THEN I WILL BLESS HER, AND SHE SHALL BE A MOTHER OF NATIONS; KINGS OF PEOPLES WILL COME FROM HER. THEN ABRAHAM FELL ON HIS FACE AND **LAUGHED**, AND SAID IN HIS HEART, "WILL A CHILD BE BORN TO A MAN ONE HUNDRED YEARS OLD? AND WILL SARAH, WHO IS NINETY YEARS OLD, BEAR A CHILD?"*
(GENESIS 17:15-17)

He laughed! This Hebrews chapter 11, "Hall of Faith" man laughed! At almighty God! (We should all be encouraged. Even men and women of renowned faith needed time and trials to become what they eventually became.) This announcement was not at all expected! Was not Ishmael – this son by manipulation – the promised heir of the covenant? Abraham apparently did not know until that very minute that, 13 years ago, he had stepped out of God's will!

AND ABRAHAM SAID TO GOD, "OH THAT ISHMAEL MIGHT LIVE BEFORE YOU!" BUT GOD SAID, "NO, BUT SARAH YOUR WIFE WILL BEAR YOU A SON, AND YOU SHALL CALL HIS NAME ISAAC; AND I WILL ESTABLISH MY COVENANT WITH HIM FOR AN EVERLASTING COVENANT FOR HIS DESCENDANTS AFTER HIM." (GENESIS 17:18-19)

Well, one year later 90-year-old Sarah gives birth to Isaac – the true, God-intended heir of the covenant.

SO, SARAH CONCEIVED AND BORE A SON TO ABRAHAM IN HIS OLD AGE, AT THE APPOINTED TIME OF WHICH GOD HAD SPOKEN TO HIM ... NOW ABRAHAM WAS ONE HUNDRED YEARS OLD WHEN HIS SON ISAAC WAS BORN TO HIM. (GENESIS 21:2, 5)

A full 25 years had passed between the time Abram first received the promise of a multitude of descendants and the birth of the covenant's heir. Why would God wait so long before introducing Himself to Abram and Sarai as "the all-sufficient One"? Could it be to drive home a lesson they had not yet learned?

ABRAM AND SARAI, YOU CAN'T DO THIS. BUT I CAN.

The Name El Shaddai enters the Biblical record at a most appropriate time. Using their own strength and their own logic, Abram and Sarai did everything they could to help God out. But their every effort fell short. They themselves were helpless to give birth to the son necessary to fulfill the most important of the covenant's blessings. And what is worse (or so they thought), the older they got, the more hopeless the situation became.

And then El Shaddai, the all-sufficient God, suspended one of His Own natural laws to fulfill His purpose. (That is, He performed a miracle.) He made a man, described as being “as good as dead” – as well as a woman whose own reproductive organs were “as good as dead” – strong enough to produce life.

THEREFORE, THERE WAS BORN EVEN OF ONE MAN, AND HIM AS GOOD AS DEAD AT THAT, AS MANY DESCENDANTS AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE. (HEBREWS 11:11-12)

El Shaddai did not want there to be any doubt as to the One Who really brought about this birth. He waited until the bodies of Abram and Sarai were, without question, beyond their ability to reproduce. And from these two “dead” people, He produced a nation whose population rivals – to this day – the grains of sand on the seashore.

This lesson has a lot to do with the kind of life you and I have been called to live. As with Abram and Sarai, we have been given the responsibility to participate with God in the outworking of His will. And He has promised to supply us with everything we need to fulfill our part. With these resources, we are expected to

WORK AS IF EVERYTHING DEPENDS UPON US
(THAT IS, GOD EXPECTS US TO GIVE HIM OUR VERY BEST)

But the fact is, if doing all *we* can do is *all* that we do, we can expect our best efforts to fall flat. God’s plans also require God’s power. And we who are responsible to participate in the plans of God are not strong enough to perform miracles. (Our weakness is by divine design.) Only God Almighty has the power to accomplish His will. We cannot do the will of God without God, and He wants us to know that. And so, we who are to

WORK AS IF EVERYTHING DEPENDS UPON US
(AS FAITHFUL STEWARDS)

are also to

PRAY AS IF EVERYTHING DEPENDS UPON GOD
(BECAUSE IT DOES)

The life of faith and obedience to which we have been called should be characterized by the attitude:

WE CAN’T DO THIS ... BUT EL SHADDAI, THE ALL-SUFFICIENT ONE, CAN

The Self-Sufficiency of God

How is it that God *can* supply us with all we need to participate in His perfect will? How can He be our “all in all”? The reason God can be “the all-sufficient One” is because He is the only Person Who is truly *self*-sufficient. For God to be self-sufficient means that

He is not dependent upon His creation for anything. He has no need for anyone or anything outside Himself to sustain Him.

What Charlie Anderson was not – nor ever could be – God is. The only One who can be *all-sufficient* is the One Who is *entirely self-sufficient*. He was Abram’s all-in-all. And He is the same to us. His Name is El Shaddai.

“I Command You to Do the Impossible”

There is a certain event that occurred one day during the public ministry of Christ commonly known as “the feeding of the 5,000.” All four Gospels record this event; so whatever lesson we are supposed to take away from it must be important. ²¹

According to the eyewitnesses, it was getting late. This caused some of the twelve disciples to become concerned about the crowd’s physical wellbeing. So, they approached the Lord with the request that He send them away to buy food for themselves in the nearby villages. But instead of following that suggestion, Jesus said to these men

“YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT.”

According to the account as recorded in John 6, we read that Jesus was testing them

FOR HE HIMSELF KNEW WHAT HE WAS INTENDING TO DO. (JOHN 6:6)

Jesus had a plan in mind *for Himself*. But have you ever wondered what He really expected *them* to do? What these men ended up saying was

WE CAN’T

And they were right, they couldn’t. But that was only part of the answer to this test. And in this case, to be only partly right is to fail the test. Apparently, the Lord wanted these men to say

WE CAN’T ... BUT **You** CAN

They failed the test because they left God out of the equation. The Lord fully expected these twelve men *to participate with Him in the impossible*.

He wanted them ...
to trust Him ...
to accomplish His will ...
through them ...

... which is what He expects from us. You and I have also been commanded to participate in the impossible.

*THIS IS MY COMMANDMENT, THAT YOU LOVE (AGAPAO) ONE ANOTHER, **JUST AS** (TO THE SAME DEGREE, IN THE SAME WAY THAT) I HAVE LOVED YOU. (JOHN 15:12, PARENTHESES ADDED)*

LOVE (AGAPE) IS PATIENT, LOVE IS KIND AND IS NOT JEALOUS; LOVE DOES NOT BRAG AND IS NOT ARROGANT, DOES NOT ACT UNBECOMINGLY; IT DOES NOT SEEK ITS OWN, IS NOT PROVOKED, DOES NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT A WRONG SUFFERED, DOES NOT REJOICE IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS, BUT REJOICES WITH THE TRUTH; BEARS ALL THINGS, BELIEVES ALL THINGS, HOPES ALL THINGS, ENDURES ALL THINGS. LOVE NEVER FAILS. (1ST CORINTHIANS 13:4-8, PARENTHESIS ADDED)

Can you do this? I can't. I believe I am speaking for you as well as myself: It is impossible for us to love every single brother and sister in Christ with the same kind of love, to the same degree, in the same way that Jesus Christ loves them. But this is exactly what our Master expects us to do! In fact, we are also commanded to

BLESS THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU; BLESS AND DO NOT CURSE. (ROMANS 12:14)

*BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER, TENDER-HEARTED, FORGIVING EACH OTHER, **JUST AS** (TO THE SAME DEGREE, IN THE SAME WAY THAT) GOD IN CHRIST ALSO HAS FORGIVEN YOU. (EPHESIANS 4:32, PARENTHESIS ADDED)*

We can do none of this ... in our own strength. Each of these commandments requires a God-generated miracle.

We cannot *understand* the Scriptures using our own cleverness. Only the Spirit of God can understand the Word of God. We need Him to do that.

We cannot *obey* God through our own resolve. The spirit may be willing; but the flesh is weak. Only God has the power to obey God. We need Him to do that.

We cannot *bear fruit* simply by devising good strategies. Only God can change lives. We need Him to do that.

Indeed, there is not one commandment in the entire New Testament that you and I can obey ... on our own. We might just as well be commanded to feed thousands of people

with five loaves of bread and two fish. Every single commandment in the Bible is a command to do the impossible. And *that* is by divine design. The Lord wants us to feel the impossibility of the command. He wants us to feel our weakness so that we fall to our knees with the plea

WE CAN'T ... BUT YOU CAN

He wants us to feel unequal to the task just as He wanted Abram and Sarai to admit over 4,000 years ago

WE CAN'T ... BUT YOU CAN

He wants us to take a good, long look at what He expects us to know ... and be ... and do. And having done so, He wants us to look up to Him with a single-minded faith and humbly admit that we cannot know ... or be ... or do anything without His all-sufficient help.

WE CAN'T ... BUT YOU CAN

It is when we finally recognize our own helplessness that the power of God becomes a reality in our lives.

AND WHEN GOD IS THE ONLY ONE WE HAVE TO TURN TO,
WE WILL FIND THAT GOD IS REALLY ALL WE NEEDED TO BEGIN WITH

This is not a “let go and let God do everything” theology. Those who know what it means to be saved by faith in Christ have been commanded to be *responsible participants* in their lives of faith and obedience. We have a part to play in our spiritual lives.

*SO THEN, MY BELOVED, JUST AS YOU HAVE ALWAYS OBEYED, NOT AS IN MY PRESENCE ONLY, BUT NOW MUCH MORE IN MY ABSENCE, WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.
(PHILIPPIANS 2:12)*

But El Shaddai also wants us to know that we need Him to supply us with all we need to fulfill His impossible commands.

*FOR IT IS GOD WHO IS AT WORK IN YOU, BOTH TO WILL AND TO WORK FOR HIS GOOD PLEASURE.
(PHILIPPIANS 2:13)*

We cannot afford to leave God out of the equation. We are not self-sufficient. In fact, we could not be any further from it than we are. We are an utterly helpless and needy people. God, however, is able to provide us with all we need to do His will.

I AM THE TRUE VINE, AND MY FATHER IS THE VINEDRESSER ... ABIDE IN ME, AND I IN YOU. AS THE BRANCH CANNOT BEAR FRUIT OF ITSELF UNLESS IT ABIDES IN THE VINE, SO NEITHER CAN YOU UNLESS YOU ABIDE IN ME. I AM THE VINE, YOU ARE THE BRANCHES; HE WHO ABIDES IN ME AND I IN HIM, HE BEARS MUCH FRUIT, FOR APART FROM ME YOU CAN DO NOTHING. (JOHN 15:1, 4-5)

His Name is El Shaddai. He is the all-sufficient One. He is our all ... in all.

NOW WHEN ABRAM WAS NINETY-NINE YEARS OLD, THE LORD APPEARED TO ABRAM AND SAID TO HIM, "I AM THE ONE WHO IS MIGHTILY ABLE TO PROVIDE WHATEVER MY CHILDREN NEED TO MAKE THEM GROW STRONG AND FRUITFUL. WALK BEFORE ME AND BE BLAMELESS." (GENESIS 17:1)

"I HEAR THE SAVIOR SAY"

I hear the Savior say, "Your strength indeed is small.
Child of weakness, watch and pray. Find in Me your all in all."

Lord, now indeed I find Your power and Yours alone
can change the leper's spots and melt the heart of stone.

For nothing good have I whereby Your grace to claim.
I'll wash my garments white in the blood of Calvary's Lamb.

Jesus paid it all.
All to Him I owe.
Sin had left a crimson stain.
He washed it white as snow.

– Elvina M. Hall

18 *Shenandoah*, directed by Andrew V. McLaglen; produced by Robert Arthur; written by James Lee Barrett; music by Frank Skinner; Cinematography by William H. Clothier, edited by Otho Lovering, distributed by Universal; starring James Stewart, Doug McClure, Glenn Corbett, Patrick Wayne, Katharine Ross, and Rosemary Forsyth; release date June 3, 1965.

19 *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, Scofield, C. I., footnote on Genesis 17:1, page 25.

20 According to Charles Ryrie, "The name Yahweh was known to the patriarchs (Gen.13:4), but its significance as the One who would redeem Israel from Egyptian bondage was not known until this time." (*Ryrie Study Bible*, New American Standard Bible, The Lockman Foundation, Ryrie, Charles Caldwell, footnote on Exodus 6:3, page 98)

21 Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:5-13.

EL ROI**GOD IS AN ALL-KNOWING, EVER-PRESENT HELP**

SINCE I AM AFFLICTED AND NEEDY, LET THE LORD BE MINDFUL OF ME. YOU ARE MY HELP AND MY DELIVERER; DO NOT DELAY, O MY GOD. (PSALM 40:17)

Not a Friend in the World

It was late. As the men walked down the stairs and stepped into the street, their breath could be seen in the brisk night air. A few of them agreed with Simon that it would be a good night to warm themselves around a fire.

Of the thirteen men in this band of brothers, one of them was missing. He apparently had been sent out to buy something for the group. But Judas would catch up with the others later. He knew where they would be since they had used that garden as a meeting place many times before.

As they made their way through the streets toward the city's gate, their Master seemed to be in a world of His Own. But maybe He was just tired like the rest of them. After all, it had been an extraordinary week. The thousands of pilgrims who had assembled in Jerusalem for Passover were calling for the coronation of this Son of David. Surely these disciples, who had so faithfully stood by His side, would be assigned positions of authority in His Kingdom.

Anyway, the day was over. It would be good to get some sleep.

Once the twelve men made their way over a narrow gorge, they entered the grove of trees. But instead of bedding down for the night, Jesus tells them to join Him in prayer. As He separates Himself from them, there is a look on His face that is not normally there. A deep, pensive look. Thus began the most intense period of suffering any human has ever had to endure.

Falling to the ground, the Son of Man begins to plead loudly before the Judge of men. His cup of Death was not even twelve hours away ... and He knew it. Blood begins to mix with the sweat coming from His pores. And while His soon-to-be-scattered friends were sleeping, more than twelve legions of angels stand ready to answer a call to save the Savior from His Own Death. It was a call that was never made. *Thank God it was never made!* That was not the Father's Plan. God's calling placed upon this Lamb of God was to die bearing the sins of the world.

What the Sin-Bearer goes through, He will go through alone. He will be completely abandoned. Not one person will be left standing by His side.

Certainly, none of His family members would be there for Him ... and He knew it.

FOR NOT EVEN HIS BROTHERS WERE BELIEVING IN HIM. (JOHN 7:5)

One from his band of disciples was about to betray Him ... and He knew it.

JESUS ... BECAME TROUBLED IN SPIRIT ... AND SAID, "TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, THAT ONE OF YOU WILL BETRAY ME ... THE ONE FOR WHOM I SHALL DIP THE MORSEL AND GIVE IT TO HIM." SO, WHEN HE HAD DIPPED THE MORSEL, HE TOOK AND GAVE IT TO JUDAS, THE SON OF SIMON ISCARIOT. (JOHN 13:21, 26)

The other eleven, the most faithful of His followers, were about to abandon Him ... and He knew it.

THEN JESUS SAID TO THEM, "YOU WILL ALL FALL AWAY BECAUSE OF ME THIS NIGHT, FOR IT IS WRITTEN, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.'" (MATTHEW 26:31)

Even Peter, the most zealous of His friends, was about to deny Him three times while warming himself around the campfire of his enemies ... and He knew it.

PETER SAID TO HIM, "LORD ... I WILL LAY DOWN MY LIFE FOR YOU." JESUS ANSWERED, "WILL YOU LAY DOWN YOUR LIFE FOR ME? TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, A ROOSTER WILL NOT CROW UNTIL YOU DENY ME THREE TIMES." (JOHN 13:37-38)

The nation had been enthusiastic toward Him ... as long as He provided them with food and healthcare. Four days ago, they had enthusiastically cheered Him as He paraded triumphantly into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. But in just a few hours, many of these same people would demand that His hands and feet be impaled to one of Rome's crosses ... and He knew it.

BUT FIRST HE MUST SUFFER MANY THINGS AND BE REJECTED BY THIS GENERATION. (LUKE 17:25)

Even the Jewish religious leaders, the ones who could quote from memory the Messianic prophecies, had refused to acknowledge Him. More than anyone else, they should have recognized Him as their long-awaited King. But they were about to turn Him over to the Romans to be executed ... and He knew it.

BEHOLD, WE ARE GOING UP TO JERUSALEM; AND THE SON OF MAN WILL BE DELIVERED TO THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND SCRIBES, AND THEY WILL CONDEMN HIM TO DEATH, AND WILL HAND HIM OVER TO THE GENTILES TO MOCK AND SCOURGE AND CRUCIFY HIM, AND ON THE THIRD DAY HE WILL BE RAISED UP. (MATTHEW 20:18-19)

As this King of glory – bowed down on the floor of the garden – pleaded with His Father, He knew that humiliation and torture and excruciating pain were only hours away. He knew that He was about to be falsely accused, mocked, spit upon, beaten in the face, lashed over and over with a whip, and have three spikes driven through his hands and feet for lawless acts He did not commit. Your capital crimes and mine were about to be transferred over to Him ... and He knew it.

He also knew that He was going to go through all this by Himself. How could He possibly feel more alone ... more abandoned ... more rejected than this? And then, when the weight of all our sins was placed upon Him, the unimaginable happens:

ABOUT THE NINTH HOUR JESUS CRIED OUT WITH A LOUD VOICE, SAYING ... "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" (MATTHEW 27:46)

Have you ever been forsaken? The question is not, "Have you ever been lonely?" but "Have you ever been completely abandoned ... by someone you would have sworn would never leave your side?" We are about to be introduced to a slave girl who learned first-hand what the despair of rejection felt like. Separated from the only place of security she knew and with no one to turn to, this soon-to-be single mother found herself alone and vulnerable in a hostile environment. That is, at least she thought she was alone.

In fact, this young woman was about to encounter the all-knowing God Who has been watching the details of her situation unfold. She is about to be introduced to an ever-present Help in her time of need. Hagar is about to meet El Roi. It is this same El Roi Who, centuries later, would experience firsthand – while on a cross – what it felt like to be utterly forsaken. And He would willingly do so that He might become our sympathetic High Priest.

The Historical Context of the Name El Roi

Several years after God had promised Abram to make a great nation of him, he and Sarai were still childless. This led him to ask God if his servant Eliezer was meant to be his legal heir.

ABRAM SAID, "O LORD GOD, WHAT WILL YOU GIVE ME, SINCE I AM CHILDLESS, AND THE HEIR OF MY HOUSE IS ELIEZER OF DAMASCUS?" AND ABRAM SAID, "SINCE YOU HAVE GIVEN NO OFFSPRING TO ME, ONE BORN IN MY HOUSE IS MY HEIR."

*THEN BEHOLD, THE WORD OF THE LORD CAME TO HIM, SAYING, "THIS MAN WILL NOT BE YOUR HEIR; BUT ONE WHO WILL COME FORTH FROM YOUR OWN BODY, HE SHALL BE YOUR HEIR."
(GENESIS 15:2-4)*

So, the heir was to be fathered by Abram. But nothing was said of the mother. Abram had assumed all along that Sarai would bear his son; but she had remained barren and was now long past her child-bearing years.

So, Sarai suggests that Abram do what was the customary thing for a barren wife to do in those days ... she gave her maid-servant Hagar to her husband to bear children in her name.

SO, SARAI SAID TO ABRAM, "NOW BEHOLD, THE LORD HAS PREVENTED ME FROM BEARING CHILDREN. PLEASE GO IN TO MY MAID; PERHAPS I WILL OBTAIN CHILDREN THROUGH HER." AND ABRAM LISTENED TO THE VOICE OF SARAI.

AFTER ABRAM HAD LIVED TEN YEARS IN THE LAND OF CANAAN, ABRAM'S WIFE SARAI TOOK HAGAR THE EGYPTIAN, HER MAID, AND GAVE HER TO HER HUSBAND ABRAM AS HIS WIFE. (GENESIS 16:2-3)

Once Sarai's slave-girl became pregnant, however, friction arose between her and her mistress. Hagar's attitude had become haughty. After all, she had been able to do something Sarai could not do!

AND SARAI SAID TO ABRAM, "... I GAVE MY MAID INTO YOUR ARMS, BUT WHEN SHE SAW THAT SHE HAD CONCEIVED, I WAS DESPISED IN HER SIGHT." BUT ABRAM SAID TO SARAI, "BEHOLD, YOUR MAID IS IN YOUR POWER; DO TO HER WHAT IS GOOD IN YOUR SIGHT." SO, SARAI TREATED HER HARSHLY, AND SHE FLED FROM HER PRESENCE. (GENESIS 16:5-6)

Rejected by her mistress, Hagar runs from the campsite of Abram into the wilderness. Here she encounters an "Angel"; and with this Angel of the LORD, the slave of Sarai has an interesting conversation. The first thing He does is ask her two questions. We should take note that Hagar answers only one of them.

HAGAR, SARAI'S MAID, WHERE HAVE YOU COME FROM ... ? (GENESIS 16:8)

to which she replies

I AM FLEEING FROM THE PRESENCE OF MY MISTRESS SARAI. (GENESIS 16:8)

But she gives no answer to the second question

... AND WHERE ARE YOU GOING? (GENESIS 16:8)

Apparently, Hagar had no idea where she was going. This young woman's plight is serious. In fact, it is life-threatening. She is pregnant and has no one to turn to. Furthermore, she is in a dangerous place and has nowhere to go. With these probing questions the Angel wants Hagar to carefully assess her situation. He wants her to evaluate the cause of her predicament (her arrogant attitude toward her master's wife)

and the seriousness of its consequence (estrangement and possible death). Having done so, she is now ready to obey what He then tells her to do:

RETURN TO YOUR MISTRESS AND SUBMIT YOURSELF TO HER AUTHORITY. (GENESIS 16:8)

What makes this exchange between these two so extraordinary is that this Angel knew all about Hagar's situation before their dialogue had even begun:

He does not have to ask for her name; He already knew that her name was "HAGAR."

He does not need to ask about her station in life; He already knew that she was a "MAID."

Nor does He need to ask for the name of her mistress; He already knew that she was "SARAI'S MAID."

He already knew all the details of her past. In fact, He already knew all the details of her *future*. He tells her what she can expect from the child she carries:

This Angel knew that her child would have so many descendants that

THEY WILL BE TOO MANY TO COUNT. (GENESIS 16:10)

He knew the gender of the child:

BEHOLD, YOU ARE WITH CHILD, AND YOU WILL BEAR A SON. (GENESIS 16:11)

He knew the character of the child:

HE WILL BE A WILD DONKEY OF A MAN, HIS HAND WILL BE AGAINST EVERYONE, AND EVERYONE'S HAND WILL BE AGAINST HIM. (GENESIS 16:12)

He even knew where her son would live as an adult:

AND HE WILL LIVE TO THE EAST OF ALL HIS BROTHERS. (GENESIS 16:12)

There is something else the Angel tells this young woman. He tells her what to name him:

YOU SHALL CALL HIS NAME ISHMAEL. (GENESIS 16:11)

And then He tells her why that was to be his name:

BECAUSE THE LORD HAS GIVEN HEED TO YOUR AFFLICTION. (GENESIS 16:11)

This name is quite appropriate for the child of a young woman rejected and alone. Ishmael means “God hears.” The Angel of the LORD says to her, “You are to call your son, ‘God hears’ because God knows about – and is doing something about – your terrible plight. He is an all-knowing God Who is always present to help in time of need.”

At some point in this conversation, Hagar realizes that she is in the company of Someone Who is more than a created angel. As she declares later,

HAVE I EVEN REMAINED ALIVE HERE AFTER SEEING HIM (THE LORD, THE GOD WHO SEES)? (GENESIS 16:13)

It is interesting that Hagar not only gave her son the name “Ishmael, “the God Who hears”; she ends up giving God a name as well. She calls Him by a new and fitting title, El Roi. As with the other names we have studied, the meaning of this Name highlights a certain perfection of God. El Roi is “the God Who sees.”

That is, He is omniscient.

The Omniscience of God

O LORD, YOU HAVE SEARCHED ME AND KNOWN ME. YOU KNOW WHEN I SIT DOWN AND WHEN I RISE UP; YOU UNDERSTAND MY THOUGHT FROM AFAR. YOU SCRUTINIZE MY PATH AND MY LYING DOWN AND ARE INTIMATELY ACQUAINTED WITH ALL MY WAYS. EVEN BEFORE THERE IS A WORD ON MY TONGUE, BEHOLD, O LORD, YOU KNOW IT ALL. YOU HAVE ENCLOSED ME BEHIND AND BEFORE AND LAID YOUR HAND UPON ME. (PSALM 139:1-5)

For God to be omniscient means that He knows all things the way they are as well as everything that is possible. There has never been a time of ignorance when He did not know all things. (He never had to study to learn about them.)

The fact is, our God knows all the facts. He knows every single detail about every single situation in the lives of every single person, including yours and mine. What is more, El Roi knows what *would have happened* in the life of an individual if his circumstances had been different.

THEN HE BEGAN TO DENOUNCE THE CITIES IN WHICH MOST OF HIS MIRACLES WERE DONE, BECAUSE THEY DID NOT REPENT. "WOE TO YOU, CHORAZIN! WOE TO YOU, BETHSAIDA! FOR IF THE MIRACLES HAD OCCURRED IN TYRE AND SIDON WHICH OCCURRED IN YOU, THEY WOULD HAVE REPENTED LONG AGO IN SACKCLOTH AND ASHES." (MATTHEW 11:20-21)

Such is the vastness of His understanding.

*SUCH KNOWLEDGE IS TOO WONDERFUL FOR ME; IT IS TOO HIGH, I CANNOT ATTAIN TO IT.
(PSALM 139:6)*

But there is another perfection this Name highlights: He not only knows each situation His people face. He is, also, present – all the time – to comfort and help us as we face each situation.

That is, He is omnipresent.

The Omnipresence of God

*WHERE CAN I GO FROM YOUR SPIRIT? OR WHERE CAN I FLEE FROM YOUR PRESENCE? IF I ASCEND TO HEAVEN, YOU ARE THERE; IF I MAKE MY BED IN SHEOL, BEHOLD, YOU ARE THERE. IF I TAKE THE WINGS OF THE DAWN, IF I DWELL IN THE REMOTEST PART OF THE SEA, EVEN THERE YOUR HAND WILL LEAD ME, AND YOUR RIGHT HAND WILL LAY HOLD OF ME. IF I SAY, "SURELY THE DARKNESS WILL OVERWHELM ME, AND THE LIGHT AROUND ME WILL BE NIGHT," EVEN THE DARKNESS IS NOT DARK TO YOU, AND THE NIGHT IS AS BRIGHT AS THE DAY. DARKNESS AND LIGHT ARE ALIKE TO YOU.
(PSALM 139:7-12)*

For God to be omnipresent means that God is present everywhere ... all the time ... with all His being. In other words, it is not that some of Him is over here and some of Him is over there. *All* of Him is everywhere at the same time.

The believer in China lives his life in the full presence of God at the exact same time the believer in Poland lives in the full presence of God. This is the kind of God we serve, One Who knows everything and is present everywhere. His Name is El Roi, a well-informed and ever-present Help in times of need ...

... including the times that we, like Hagar, have been rejected.

What to Do When You Are Abandoned by Others

If you have ever been forsaken by someone, you know firsthand that rejection is not something you can easily "forget about and move on." To discover that someone you care for does not want to be around you anymore can be a painful stab to the heart. And the closer you were to that person, the deeper the pierce.

Perhaps it was a family member that turned against you or a close friend or a co-worker or a classmate. The one you never dreamed would leave your side began to avoid you. Perhaps he began to treat you with contempt or slander you behind your back or criticize you publicly. You may have even been abandoned by your wife or husband.

Perhaps your spouse decided that he or she does not want to be married to you anymore. This is likely the most painful of all wounds.

If this is something you are going through, be assured that the Lord knows exactly how you feel.

His own family rejected Him.

One of His closest companions betrayed Him.

All His closest friends abandoned Him when He needed them the most.

His most zealous follower denied even knowing Him, not one time, not two times, but three times.

The nation, to whom He offered Himself as their King, called for His execution.

And those at the front of the line demanding His death were Israel's Bible scholars and spiritual leaders.

Even the Father "turned His back" on His Son as He bore the sins of the world.

Christ Jesus knows quite well what you are going through.

WE DO NOT HAVE A HIGH PRIEST WHO CANNOT SYMPATHIZE WITH OUR WEAKNESSES, BUT ONE WHO HAS BEEN TEMPTED IN ALL THINGS AS WE ARE, YET WITHOUT SIN. (HEBREWS 4:15)

With Hebrews 4 verse 15 in mind, what should we do when we are rejected? We should do Hebrews 4 verse 16:

LET US DRAW NEAR WITH CONFIDENCE TO THE THRONE OF GRACE, SO THAT WE MAY RECEIVE MERCY AND FIND GRACE TO HELP IN TIME OF NEED. (HEBREWS 4:16)

In times of rejection, let the *seasoned* believer cling to the God Who is *on* his side and *by* his side. Let him anchor his soul in the One Who is, in fact, at the right hand of the Father praying for him.

And let the believer *not yet strong in faith* spend a lot of time with someone who is ... a seasoned, mature, Bible-centered saint who will constantly direct his attention toward the One Who has promised to never leave him or forsake him.

As He did with Hagar the slave girl, El Roi stands by us, not aloof from us. He is not indifferent to our pleas for strength and comfort. When no one else can, He is able to

clearly see our situation, sympathize with us, and provide us with what we need to turn the despair of rejection into hope.

But what should we do when we *feel* rejected by God Himself?

What to Do When You Feel Abandoned by God Because of Your Sin

Perhaps you think God Himself has turned against you because of a sin you have committed. According to your battered conscience, this sin is so horrendous that you ask (in despair), "After what I did, why would God even *want* to restore my fellowship with Himself. Surely, my sin is greater than His willingness to forgive."

If this is where you are, you should know that these thoughts are based on a *lie* which is telling you, "The grace of God has a ceiling. My sin is greater than His grace." But the *truth* is

... WHERE SIN INCREASED, GRACE ABOUNDED ALL THE MORE. (ROMANS 5:20)

This verse, of course, does not give us a license to go out and disobey God because, "If we do, He will forgive us." The truth of Romans 5:20 is for the one who has come to a knowledge of God's moral law and is overwhelmed by his failure to keep it. It is to reassure the person who is weighed down by the sins in his past that the magnanimous grace of God is greater than any sin he could commit. It is a wonderful truth for the one who asks in despair, "How could God possibly forgive me and restore me to His fellowship?"

If you are trusting in Christ for your salvation, then allow this truth to soak in: your sins have already been washed away from you ... fully and forever. Because Christ was condemned in your place, you no longer carry the guilt of your sins ... not any of them. The Savior has already been punished for them ... all of them. A *just God* does not demand that your crimes be paid for twice. Just once. And that Payment was made on the cross of Christ.

THERE IS NOW NO CONDEMNATION FOR THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS. (ROMANS 8:1)

Therefore,

LET US DRAW NEAR WITH CONFIDENCE TO THE THRONE OF GRACE, SO THAT WE MAY RECEIVE MERCY AND FIND GRACE TO HELP IN TIME OF NEED. (HEBREWS 4:16)

And when we approach His throne, let us be fully assured (according to His promise) that our Divine Friend will most gladly restore us to full fellowship with Himself.

IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND RIGHTEOUS TO FORGIVE US OUR SINS AND TO CLEANSE US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. (1ST JOHN 1:9)

But if you do not know Christ as your Savior, you should know that it is possible for you to be completely forgiven of your sins ... every one of them (even the most horrendous ones). According to the promise of God, you can be cleansed of your sins ... thoroughly ... and forever.

... ALL THE PROPHETS BEAR WITNESS THAT THROUGH HIS NAME (THE NAME OF CHRIST JESUS) EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM RECEIVES FORGIVENESS OF SINS. (ACTS 10:43)

*FOR **WHOEVER** WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED. (ROMANS 10:13)*

What to Do When You Feel Abandoned by God Because of Your Circumstances

But maybe that is not why you feel abandoned by God. Perhaps you believe that God has forsaken you, not because of a sin you have committed but because of the *painful circumstance* you are going through.

“DEAR GOD, WHERE ARE YOU?”

To strengthen us in our faith, God will – at times – place us in circumstances that do not make any sense to us. And when we ask “Why,” He remains silent. We then are tempted to believe that He has forsaken us.

But the fact is, these situations are by Divine design. The God of our faith wants us to laser beam our attention, not on the “Why” but on the “Who.” Who is the God I follow? What is He like? It is when our focus becomes the character of God rather than the circumstances of life that we will have taken a major step forward in spiritual growth. The silence of God has done its work. It has tempered our faith.

Perhaps you are in a painful situation. And the *lie* that now dominates your thoughts is telling you, “God does not care about me anymore. He has stopped loving me. He has forsaken me.” But the *truth* is

SINCE GOD IS FOR US, WHO IS AGAINST US? HE WHO DID NOT SPARE HIS OWN SON, BUT DELIVERED HIM OVER FOR US ALL, HOW WILL HE NOT ALSO WITH HIM FREELY GIVE US ALL THINGS? ... FOR I AM CONVINCED THAT NEITHER DEATH, NOR LIFE, NOR ANGELS, NOR PRINCIPALITIES, NOR THINGS PRESENT, NOR THINGS TO COME, NOR POWERS, NOR HEIGHT, NOR DEPTH, NOR ANY OTHER CREATED THING, WILL BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD, WHICH IS IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD. (ROMANS 8:31-32, 38-39)

If this is where you are, then this is what you should do:

DRAW NEAR WITH CONFIDENCE TO THE THRONE OF GRACE, SO THAT WE MAY RECEIVE MERCY AND FIND GRACE TO HELP IN TIME OF NEED. (HEBREWS 4:16)

Be honest. For the sake of your own mental and emotional wellbeing, tell the Lord what you think and how you feel. (When we do this, we are not informing an omniscient God of something He does not already know. Our honesty is for our own sake, not His.) Then quote some of the promises He has made to you. As you remind yourself of what He is like and what He has promised to do, be sure to place this truth up toward the top of your list:

I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU. (HEBREWS 13:5)

CONCLUSION

Beloved family in Christ, it is likely that one of these days you are going to be rejected by a family member, or a co-worker, or a school mate, or a close friend, or even a spouse. He may not care for your new-found faith. He may not like the stance you are now taking for righteousness. And the values you are laying aside are the ones he still holds to.

We should, in fact, *expect* to be abandoned by the world. Is this not what our Lord prepared us for when He prayed

(FATHER), I HAVE GIVEN THEM YOUR WORD; AND THE WORLD HAS HATED THEM, BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT OF THE WORLD, EVEN AS I AM NOT OF THE WORLD. (JOHN 17:14)

Just like Christ, we can expect to be rejected ... to be held in contempt ... to be forsaken by those we never dreamed would do such a thing. But when we feel estranged from the world, we should not forget this:

WE WILL NEVER, EVER BE ABANDONED BY OUR GOD

His Name is El Roi.

He sees our situation and is our ever-present help in times of need. And when we turn to Him for comfort, we can rest assured that He does not hear our plea for help with indifference. He, above anyone else, knows the pain we are going through and what it is like to yearn for the loving fellowship of a faithful Friend.

THEN SHE (HAGAR) CALLED THE NAME OF THE LORD WHO SPOKE TO HER, "YOU ARE THE ALL-KNOWING, EVER-PRESENT HELP IN TIME OF NEED." (GENESIS 16:13)

EL ELYON**GOD IS THE SUPREME SOVEREIGN**

*THE LORD HAS ESTABLISHED HIS THRONE IN THE HEAVENS; AND HIS SOVEREIGNTY RULES OVER ALL.
(PSALM 103:19)*

When We've Been There Ten Thousand Years, Bright Shining as the Sun

When you were in school (and perhaps you still are), you took a lot of tests. The teacher would then grade them and hand them back to you. If your tests looked like mine, you had some red "Xs" beside some of your answers ... that is, the ones that were wrong.

I do not ever remember getting back a test from the teacher, looking it over, and thinking, "I'm really glad I answered this one right, and this one right, and this one right" No, what I did was look at all the red on the page and think, "I wish I had not answered this one wrong, and this one wrong, and this one wrong" Is that what you did? Did you focus your attention on all the red?

Some of us *go through life* doing that. We tend to look back on those parts of our past that have "red Xs" beside them. "I messed up here ... and here ... and here." If that is our *practice*, our daily lives become little more than a broken record of perpetual regrets. We are, in fact, allowing our yesterdays sour our todays ... and our tomorrows.

It is an oppressive thing to go through life playing over and over in our minds those things we *did*, but wish we had not ... and those things we did *not* do, but wish we had. So, let us take some time to do just the opposite. Sometime soon, sit down and make a list that begins with these words:

I AM GLAD THAT I _____

... then list as many things as possible you can remember that you are glad you did. We need to take some time to consider the things in our past that have some "green" marks by them.

Allow me the liberty to mention a few things from my list:

I am glad that I learned how to play a musical instrument. I had a lot of fun with those drumsticks.

I am glad that I worked for a brick layer one summer. It was hard work; but I learned a few construction skills in the process. And I grew to respect those in this line of work.

I am glad that I married my wife Carol. Apart from the Lord Jesus, she is the most influential person in my life. (Plus, who else would put up with all these lists I make?)

And most surely, I am glad that I trusted in Jesus Christ as my Savior at the age of nineteen. No doubt about it ... it was the turning point of my life.

These are a few things in my life that have green marks by them. Perhaps you, too, will *enjoy* thinking through the choices you are glad you made at some point in your past. But there is something else I would encourage you to think through, and that is the wise choices you are making *right now*. But let's not begin with these words:

"AT THE END OF MY LIFE, I AM GOING TO BE GLAD THAT I _____."

No, let's think beyond the next few years. Instead, let's begin with these words:

"10,000 YEARS FROM NOW, I AM GOING TO BE VERY GLAD THAT I _____."

"When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun," what choices are we making *right now* that we are going to be glad that we made? Certainly, the only answers that will be on *that* list are the choices we are making with an eternal perspective.

If the focus of our lives is on this world and everything it has to offer, we may feel "in sync" with everyone else right now; but the fact is, we are piling up a whole lot of future regrets. But if we are living for the King of kings and Lord of lords Who reigns over an eternal kingdom

10,000 YEARS FROM NOW, WE ARE GOING TO BE EXCEEDINGLY GLAD WE DID THAT.

We are going to be glad we lived for El Elyon, God Most High.

A Short-Sighted Folly

Our primary passage for this Name, El Elyon, is from Genesis chapter 14. But before we stop off at Genesis 14, we need to run by Genesis 13. There is some information we need to pick up there.

In Genesis chapter 13 we are informed of a tension that existed between the herdsmen of Abram and the herdsmen of Lot. Let's pause to observe how Abram responds to this discord ... and how Lot responds to Abram. The action each one takes speaks volumes about his character. We are told that:

THE LAND COULD NOT SUSTAIN THEM (ABRAM AND LOT) WHILE DWELLING TOGETHER, FOR THEIR POSSESSIONS WERE SO GREAT THAT THEY WERE NOT ABLE TO REMAIN TOGETHER. (GENESIS 13:6)

When it became apparent that there was not enough pasture for their two herds, Abram initiates a solution:

SO, ABRAM SAID TO LOT, "PLEASE LET THERE BE NO STRIFE BETWEEN YOU AND ME, NOR BETWEEN MY HERDSMEN AND YOUR HERDSMEN, FOR WE ARE BROTHERS. IS NOT THE WHOLE LAND BEFORE YOU? PLEASE SEPARATE FROM ME; IF TO THE LEFT, THEN I WILL GO TO THE RIGHT; OR IF TO THE RIGHT, THEN I WILL GO TO THE LEFT." (GENESIS 13:8-9)

This was a magnanimous gesture on Abram's part. All this land was his to begin with (and none of it was Lot's). Yet, he is giving Lot first choice. (He did not have to do that.) And this is what Lot decided to do:

LOT LIFTED UP HIS EYES AND SAW ALL THE VALLEY OF THE JORDAN, THAT IT WAS WELL WATERED EVERYWHERE ... LIKE THE GARDEN OF THE LORD, LIKE THE LAND OF EGYPT AS YOU GO TO ZOAR. SO, LOT CHOSE FOR HIMSELF ALL THE VALLEY OF THE JORDAN, AND LOT JOURNEYED EASTWARD. THUS, THEY SEPARATED FROM EACH OTHER. ABRAM SETTLED IN THE LAND OF CANAAN, WHILE LOT SETTLED IN THE CITIES OF THE VALLEY ... (GENESIS 13:10-12A)

At first there does not seem to be anything wrong with Lot's choice ... until we read on:

*... AND (LOT) MOVED HIS TENTS **AS FAR AS SODOM**. NOW THE MEN OF SODOM WERE WICKED EXCEEDINGLY AND SINNERS AGAINST THE LORD. (GENESIS 13:12B-13)*

The location Lot chose for his campsite reflects his priorities. It does not seem to matter to him that he is exposing his own soul and the souls of his family to an environment of moral filth. Apparently, his only concern is to further his own material and political interests. Lot is willing to compromise the purity of his and his family's spiritual lives in order to gain what this world has to offer. He is going to regret that choice in more ways than one.

This brings us to Genesis chapter 14, a chapter we do not hear a lot about. Nevertheless, we would do well to consider its lesson carefully.

The first half of this chapter is an account of a battle. It started when five kings rebelled against another king named Chedorlaomer who ruled over them. They had been under his thumb for 12 years but apparently had gotten tired of it. So, they revolted.

When King Chedorlaomer was challenged, he called on three other kings for support; and together, the armies of these four kings went out to squelch the rebellion of the other five kings. And Chedorlaomer won. We then read in verse 11:

THEN THEY TOOK ALL THE GOODS OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH AND ALL THEIR FOOD SUPPLY AND DEPARTED. (GENESIS 14:11)

But when King Chedorlaomer gathered his spoils to take back home with him, he grabbed something that, later, he wished he had not!

THEY ALSO TOOK LOT, ABRAM'S NEPHEW, AND HIS POSSESSIONS AND DEPARTED ... (GENESIS 14:12)

And let's not miss this

*... FOR HE (LOT) WAS LIVING **IN SODOM**. (GENESIS 14:12)*

Lot had moved from living in tents *near* the city of Sodom (Genesis 13:12b-13) to living *in* the city of Sodom (Genesis 14:12).

When Abram heard that his nephew had been taken hostage, he took 318 of his servants and went out after this king. And this time, Chedorlaomer lost. As Abram returned from the battle with the hostages and the spoils, two kings met him. One of these kings was Bera, the wicked king of Sodom (one of the kings that had rebelled against Chedorlaomer and lost). And this king wanted to get something back.

THE KING OF SODOM SAID TO ABRAM, "GIVE THE PEOPLE TO ME AND TAKE THE GOODS FOR YOURSELF." (GENESIS 14:21)

A man can be a king without material goods; but he cannot be a king without people. A king without people has no kingdom. In other words, Bera wanted his political power restored. And so, these freed POWs were handed over to King Bera. What is so tragic about this scene is that *Lot returned to Sodom with the Sodomites*. The reason we know this is because, in Genesis 19, we find him back there

***SITTING IN THE GATE OF SODOM** (GENESIS 19:1)*

Not only has Lot moved from living *near* the city of Sodom to living *in* the city of Sodom, but now we find him seated *in the gate of the city*. For Lot to be seated in the gate of Sodom means that he has become one of the city's leaders. It was at the gate of a town where judicial decisions were made in that day. When one sought to present his legal case to a city's judges, he was to

STAND AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE GATE OF THE CITY AND STATE HIS CASE IN THE HEARING OF THE ELDERS OF THAT CITY. (JOSHUA 20:4)

We see this same location of authority in the Book of Proverbs. As King Lemuel describes the virtues of "an excellent wife," he describes her husband as one who

IS KNOWN IN THE GATES, WHEN HE SITS AMONG THE ELDERS OF THE LAND. (PROVERB 31:23)

So, Lot was no longer a nomad tending his herds in the fields near Sodom; he is on the town council of Sodom! The shame of Lot's life was that he was willing to compromise the eternal wellbeing of his soul – and that of his family – in order to gain the world. As a result, Lot is described as being

... OPPRESSED BY THE SENSUAL CONDUCT OF UNPRINCIPLED MEN (FOR BY WHAT HE SAW AND HEARD THAT RIGHTEOUS MAN, WHILE LIVING AMONG THEM, FELT HIS RIGHTEOUS SOUL TORMENTED DAY AFTER DAY BY THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS). (2ND PETER 2:7-8)

Did you notice how Lot is described in this passage? He is called a “righteous man” with a “righteous soul.” Probably because of Abram's influence, Lot was a follower of Yahweh; yet the roots of his heart were firmly planted in this world. Let us be wary of this sobering truth: to be “worldly” in mind and heart is not limited to unbelievers.

Bera and Lot are long departed from this earth. Yet, right now, even as we read these words, this King of Sodom and this nephew of Abram are conscious (Luke 16:19-23). Whether in Paradise or in Hades (God knows), both are wide awake in their eternal homes with plenty of time to reflect on the choices they made during their lives on earth. We do not know if either of them ever repented of his poor lifestyle. We would like to think they both did. (A silent record gives us hope.) But there is one thing we do know: the choices they made during their lives on earth – *and the ones you and I are making right now* – bear eternal consequences.

A Far-Sighted Wisdom

Returning to Genesis 14, we find two men with goals just the opposite of Bera's and Lot's. First, there is Abram. When King Bera offered this man of God the material possessions of Sodom, he refuses to accept any of it for himself.

ABRAM SAID TO THE KING OF SODOM, “I HAVE SWORN TO THE LORD GOD MOST HIGH, POSSESSOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, THAT I WILL NOT TAKE A THREAD OR A SANDAL THONG OR ANYTHING THAT IS YOURS, FOR FEAR YOU WOULD SAY, ‘I HAVE MADE ABRAM RICH.’ ” (GENESIS 14:22-23)

Abram is protecting the glory of God. He does not want Bera to be able to claim any credit for making him wealthy. Abram wants all credit to go to Yahweh, His “covenant-Benefactor.” His focus is *not* centered upon the world. It is centered upon *God*.

10,000 YEARS FROM NOW, ABRAHAM IS *STILL* GOING TO BE REALLY GLAD HE DID THAT.
HE WILL BE GLAD THAT HIS HEART HAD BEEN DEVOTED TO THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

It is interesting how Abram describes God to this king of Sodom. He is the

POSSESSOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH (GENESIS 14:22)

The One Abram served owned all the resources of earth (including the resources King Bera was offering him). He also owned all the resources of heaven as well. “Bera, you are a pauper compared to *my* King, the King of glory.”

At this point another figure suddenly steps into the Biblical record. King Melchizedek, the righteous king of Salem, also came out to meet Abram after the battle. But unlike the king of Sodom, he did not come out to *get* something from God’s servant. He came out to *give* something to God’s servant.

AND MELCHIZEDEK KING OF SALEM BROUGHT OUT BREAD AND WINE; NOW HE WAS A PRIEST OF GOD MOST HIGH. HE BLESSED HIM AND SAID, “BLESSED BE ABRAM OF GOD MOST HIGH, POSSESSOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH. AND BLESSED BE GOD MOST HIGH, WHO HAS DELIVERED YOUR ENEMIES INTO YOUR HAND.” (GENESIS 14:18-20)

Melchizedek calls God by a name that exalts Him far above any earthly ruler. He blesses Abram in the name of El Elyon, God Most High, the One Who is superior to all other kings. Like Abram, Melchizedek is *God-centered*. He is focused on the things of God. He refreshes God’s servant, blesses God’s servant, and then blesses God Himself.

10,000 YEARS FROM NOW, MELCHIZEDEK IS *STILL* GOING TO BE REALLY GLAD HE DID THAT.
HE IS GOING TO BE GLAD THAT HIS HEART WAS FOCUSED UPON THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

The Significance of the Name El Elyon

We have seen from this lesson that God has yet another Name by which He is known. He is El Elyon, “God Most High.” He rules as supreme Governor of the universe. It is to this King that we are to be devoted. But to what kind of Sovereign are we submitting ourselves?

First, He refuses to share His reign with anyone or anything else. Our King expects to have first place in our lives. El Elyon is a *jealous Sovereign*.

YOU SHALL NOT WORSHIP ANY OTHER GOD, FOR THE LORD, WHOSE NAME IS JEALOUS, IS A JEALOUS GOD. (EXODUS 34:14)

Our King is also detail oriented. He controls the orderly movement of the planets as well as the minutest details of our lives. El Elyon is a *meticulous Sovereign*.

ARE NOT FIVE SPARROWS SOLD FOR TWO CENTS? YET NOT ONE OF THEM IS FORGOTTEN BEFORE GOD. INDEED, THE VERY HAIRS OF YOUR HEAD ARE ALL NUMBERED. (LUKE 12:6-7)

Furthermore, our King knows exactly what He is doing. El Elyon is a *wise Sovereign*.

LET THE NAME OF GOD BE BLESSED FOREVER AND EVER, FOR WISDOM AND POWER BELONG TO HIM ... HE GIVES WISDOM TO WISE MEN AND KNOWLEDGE TO MEN OF UNDERSTANDING. IT IS HE WHO REVEALS THE PROFOUND AND HIDDEN THINGS; HE KNOWS WHAT IS IN THE DARKNESS, AND THE LIGHT DWELLS WITH HIM. (DANIEL 2:20-22)

And finally, our King is good. He seeks what is best for His kingdom. El Elyon is a *loving Sovereign*.

THE LORD IS GOOD TO ALL, AND HIS MERCIES ARE OVER ALL HIS WORKS. (PSALM 145:9)

This is our King! He is most worthy of our devotion, our trust, and our obedience.

Just What Are You Trying to Accomplish?

Have you ever written down your life's goal? If not, you might consider doing so. A wise life does not just "happen." A wise life is a deliberate life ... one that has been given some thought. A life that is not aiming at a target is an aimless life, one that tends to wander. But when one has an objective ... and is committed to reaching that objective ... he or she typically makes the most of his time, his energy, his resources, and his abilities. When an opportunity presents itself – whether small or great – a clearly defined goal often helps him know when to say "Yes" and when to say "No." He only needs to ask the question, "Will this opportunity help me reach my objective?"

As long as the believer is prepared to give his loving Lord *plenty of room to adjust* His child's plans to conform to His will,

A WELL-AIMED LIFE WILL LIKELY BE A WELL-LIVED LIFE.

So, what are you trying to accomplish with your life? It is true, most of us could create a list with more than one goal. (After all, we all have more than one aspect to our lives.) But if you were to move one of your ambitions to the top of your list, which one would it be? More than likely, the one you position at the very top is more than a goal to you. It probably would reflect your life's *passion*.

The Apostle Paul had more than one goal. For example, we know that he wanted to visit those regions of the known world that had never heard the Gospel (Spain, for example). But Paul had one ambition that topped all the rest. To be sure, it was the passion of his heart.

*BUT WHATEVER THINGS WERE GAIN TO ME, THOSE THINGS I HAVE COUNTED AS LOSS FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST. MORE THAN THAT, I COUNT ALL THINGS TO BE LOSS IN VIEW OF THE SURPASSING VALUE OF KNOWING CHRIST JESUS MY LORD ... AND THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS, BEING CONFORMED TO HIS DEATH; IN ORDER THAT I MAY ATTAIN TO THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD ... BRETHREN, I DO NOT REGARD MYSELF AS HAVING LAID HOLD OF IT YET; BUT **ONE THING I DO**: FORGETTING WHAT LIES BEHIND AND REACHING FORWARD TO WHAT LIES AHEAD, I PRESS ON TOWARD THE GOAL FOR THE PRIZE OF THE UPWARD CALL OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS. (PHILIPPIANS 3:7-8, 10-11, 13-14)*

This apostle knew what he wanted. He wanted to *know* his Savior and Lord.

Not just casually or superficially, but deeply, intimately, up-close. Compared to this passion, nothing else had any value to him. (Everything else was “counted as loss.”) He lived for the “surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus.” This was no mere “Sunday morning from 10:00 AM to noon” acquaintance he wanted.

Paul also wanted to *be like* His Savior. And to be so, he needed to live out – by faith – His resurrection power ... 24/7.

This apostle wanted to be so closely identified with his Lord that others would treat him as they had treated his Savior, whether with respect or with rejection. He was willing to endure even “the fellowship of His sufferings.” (Why would he want to be *accepted* by those who *rejected* his Savior ... to be *loved* by those who *hated* the One Who had done so much for him?)

In fact, Paul wanted to be “perfect” (though he knew that “*completed* maturity” was impossible on this side of his resurrection).

To know Christ and to be like Christ was Paul’s “goal” toward which he “pressed on.” This was at the top of his list of ambitions. All other passions placed a distant second.

There is something else Paul wanted. He also wanted all of *us* to have this same ambition:

LET US THEREFORE, AS MANY AS ARE PERFECT (SPIRITUALLY MATURE), HAVE THIS ATTITUDE; AND IF IN ANYTHING YOU HAVE A DIFFERENT ATTITUDE, GOD WILL REVEAL THAT ALSO TO YOU. (PHILIPPIANS 3:15, PARENTHESIS MINE)

Why is it important that you and I adopt Paul’s top priority as our own top priority? Surely, we could list more than one reason. But one of those reasons has to do with our future judgment. There is coming a day when each believer’s faithfulness to the King of kings and Lord of lords will be evaluated.

FOR IT IS WRITTEN, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." SO THEN, EACH ONE OF US WILL GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF TO GOD. (ROMANS 14:11-12)

This Event is known as the Judgment Seat of Christ. At that time, you and I will bow before God most High. And there, face-to-face with El Elyon, you and I are going to have the frankest discussion of our lives.

The subject of that conversation will not be about our sins. That issue – at least for the believer – has already been resolved through our faith in the Son of God Who was punished in our place. Rather, as we bow before Christ, the matter before us will focus on our *stewardship*:

“WHAT DID YOU DO WITH THE RESOURCES I ENTRUSTED INTO YOUR CARE
TO PREPARE YOURSELF AND OTHERS FOR ETERNITY
FOR THE GLORY OF MY NAME?”

That is, were we faithful to use the time, energy, abilities, and opportunities placed within our care to strengthen God’s people and promote God’s reputation? Were our hearts and minds given to the One Who reigns over our lives? If so, our labors of “gold, silver, and precious stones” will be rewarded. If not, our labors of “wood, hay, and straw” will be incinerated.

*ACCORDING TO THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH WAS GIVEN TO ME, LIKE A WISE MASTER BUILDER I LAID A FOUNDATION, AND ANOTHER IS BUILDING ON IT. BUT EACH MAN MUST BE CAREFUL HOW HE BUILDS ON IT ... NOW IF ANY MAN BUILDS ON THE FOUNDATION WITH GOLD, SILVER, PRECIOUS STONES, WOOD, HAY, STRAW, EACH MAN'S **WORK** WILL BECOME EVIDENT; FOR THE DAY WILL SHOW IT BECAUSE IT IS TO BE REVEALED WITH FIRE, AND THE FIRE ITSELF WILL TEST THE QUALITY OF EACH MAN'S **WORK**. IF ANY MAN'S **WORK** WHICH HE HAS BUILT ON IT REMAINS, HE WILL RECEIVE A REWARD. IF ANY MAN'S **WORK** IS BURNED UP, HE WILL SUFFER LOSS; BUT HE HIMSELF WILL BE SAVED, YET SO AS THROUGH FIRE. (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:10, 12-15)*

Here, we need to be careful to keep our theology correct. We are not saved by works. We are *saved* by grace through faith. But we are *rewarded* by works. This means that *now* is the time to be asking ourselves some questions:

“JUST WHAT AM I TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH WITH MY LIFE?”

“IS MY HEART DEVOTED TO THIS TEMPORAL WORLD AND WHAT IT HAS TO OFFER?
OR IS IT DEVOTED TO THE ETERNAL KINGDOM AND WHAT IT HAS TO OFFER?”

WHAT AM I GOING TO BE REALLY GLAD I DID THIS WEEK ...
10,000 YEARS FROM NOW?

There are some good reasons why we should be asking ourselves these questions:

We believers are in the process of taking a test ... *right now*. As mentioned above, this test has to do with responsible stewardship; and the choices we are making ... *right now* ... are the issues for which we will be evaluated.

This test cannot be taken over.

Nor will it be graded on a curve. How the Church – throughout the world – has conducted itself – throughout the centuries – will have no bearing on your judgment or mine. (We are not going to be evaluated as a group.) You and I face a *one-on-One*, face-to-Face accounting of our stewardship.

What we have chosen as our priorities are going to be evaluated by an all-knowing Judge as each of us bows before His Throne. And we will carry with us into and throughout eternity the results of that evaluation.

The Judgment Seat of Christ is a guaranteed Event. And it is approaching rapidly. Therefore, *now* is the time to ask these questions. Yes, it is true: those who have an eternal perspective during this life are going to feel out of sync with the rest of this world (because we are). We will wonder why the world gets so excited over the fool's gold that so easily enamors them ... and they are going to wonder why we don't. Nevertheless, those who go through this life with an eternal perspective are going to be glad they did.

THEY ARE GOING TO BE GLAD THEY WERE DEVOTED
TO THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS

Time is running out. Eternity awaits us all. Let us take care in what we choose to crave. Like the patriarch Abram and the king-priest Melchizedek and the Apostle Paul, may we prove ourselves faithful in devotion and service to God Most High.

His Name is El Elyon. He is the supreme Sovereign, King over all kings and Lord over all lords.

HE (MELCHIZEDEK) BLESSED HIM AND SAID, "BLESSED BE ABRAM OF THE SUPREME SOVEREIGN, POSSESSOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH." (GENESIS 14:19)

EL OLAM**GOD IS ETERNAL AND UNCHANGING**

I, THE LORD, DO NOT CHANGE. (MALACHI 3:6)

Telephone Booths and Typewriters, Slide Rules and Cassette Tapes

Have you ever noticed how an older generation seems to get stuck in something of a “time rut”? They want those of the younger generation to appreciate – perhaps even relive – the times of *their* youth. For some reason, they really do believe that teenagers and those in their twenties will find 30 years ago to be interesting.

For instance, my parents thought that my sister and I would be interested in listening to Glenn Miller’s *“A String of Pearls”* (released in 1941) while we were trying to listen to our new album, *“Meet the Beatles”* (released in 1964).

And before I left for college in the early 1970’s, my father tried to convince me that I was going to need his white dinner jacket to wear to all the college dances. Was he serious ... as if I were going to wear a white dinner jacket to a Nitty Gritty Dirt Band concert?

But, of course, the only ones who appreciate the nostalgia of an era gone by are those of that same generation. Younger people are just too busy creating their own future “yesteryears” to care. OK, that is fair enough. Perhaps, then, this stroll down memory lane will be appreciated only by those of you who are Baby Boomers. But if you do not fall in this category, please allow me this indulgence. I hope you will soon see why I am doing this.

I can remember a day

when elevators in department stores had “operators” who would ask the store’s patrons for the floor number they wanted ... push the button for them ... and then announce when they had arrived at that floor.

when a person only had one decision to make when he ordered a cup of coffee: Did he want “regular or decaf?” He did not have to decide if he wanted an espresso or not, how many shots of espresso he wanted, what size cup he wanted, what flavor of syrup he wanted, did he want “whip or no whip, skim or whole milk, or just leave room for cream,” did he want “white or raw sugar or artificial sweetener,” and did he want his drink to be “extra hot.” (These days, I need a cup of “brewed coffee, black” to recover from the mental fatigue I get just from ordering a cup of coffee.)

I can remember when cutting edge technology meant

telephone booths and electric typewriters and slide rules and 33^{1/3} vinyl albums and 8-track tape players and cassette tapes.

going through a telephone operator to make a long-distance phone call.

waiting for the television tube to warm up before the picture gradually appeared ... adjusting the “rabbit ears” (the antennae positioned on top of the TV) ... and then *manually* turning a dial to change the channel.

I can remember an era

when a day in *public* schools would begin with a time of Bible reading and prayer.

when parents *wanted* schoolteachers and principals to discipline their child if he misbehaved ... without having to give them permission to do so.

when it was rare (and abhorrent) for a woman to use coarse language (at least, in public) ... and when a man would stand when a woman entered the room.

I can remember all of this. But that was then; and this is now. What happened to many of the traits of my yesteryear can best be described by the title of Margaret Mitchell’s book. They are gone with the wind.

If it had been possible, I would have really enjoyed watching you read over this list.

Perhaps you are of the age that smiled or chuckled or nodded your head up and down when you did so.

Or maybe you are of the age that did not nod your head up and down but, rather, shook your head from side to side, rolled your eyes, and thought, “O brother.”

Or it could be that your age is somewhere in the middle, relating to some parts of it but not relating to other parts.

But no matter what category you are in, there are a couple of things with which we should agree:

First, in some cases the “then” was truly better than the “now.” Yes, it would be nice if gasoline were 29 cents per gallon today. And I am sorry that children cannot play outside without the fear of becoming someone’s prey.

So, change is not always good.

But in other cases, the “now” is definitely an improvement over the “then.” I am glad that I did not have to create this course on a typewriter.

And so, “the good ol’ days” are not everything they are cracked up to be, either.

There is a lot of truth to the saying, “The only thing that is permanent is change.” But there is at least one Exception to that rule. And His Name is El Olam, the everlasting, never-changing God.

The Historical Context of the Name El Olam

The book of Isaiah is one of the most beloved books of the Bible. This prophet spoke more than any other prophet of the glorious Kingdom into which believing Jews would enter upon the arrival of the Messiah. His message describes both the depths of Judah’s idolatry and the heights of God’s glory.

Isaiah’s book can be divided into two parts:

- 1) Chapters 1 – 39 mostly have to do with *divine judgment* upon the disobedient southern kingdom of Judah and her oppressors.
- 2) Chapters 40 – 66 have to do with the *divine deliverance* of Judah from captivity.

In chapters 40 – 48 the prophet tells the people of Judah that they would be delivered from captivity for two reasons:

- 1) The first reason has to do with *the Lord’s greatness*.
- 2) The second reason has to do with *the relationship Israel has with Yahweh by means of the Abrahamic Covenant*.

It is within this context of deliverance that the Name El Olam appears.

DO YOU NOT KNOW? HAVE YOU NOT HEARD? EL OLAM, THE LORD, THE CREATOR OF THE ENDS OF THE EARTH DOES NOT BECOME WEARY OR TIRED. HIS UNDERSTANDING IS INSCRUTABLE.
(ISAIAH 40:28)

Let’s watch as Isaiah contrasts El Olam, the everlasting God, with the creatures of the world, the nations of the world, and the rulers of the world.

“Surely All Flesh Withers”

ALL FLESH IS GRASS, AND ALL ITS LOVELINESS IS LIKE THE FLOWER OF THE FIELD. THE GRASS WITHERS, THE FLOWER FADES, WHEN THE BREATH OF THE LORD BLOWS UPON IT. SURELY THE PEOPLE ARE GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, THE FLOWER FADES, BUT THE WORD OF OUR GOD STANDS FOREVER. (ISAIAH 40:6-8)

Notice from this passage the duration of every creature’s existence. When the breath of God blows upon you and me,

we “*WITHER*” like the grass ... and our loveliness “*FADES*” like the flower.

There is coming a day when all flesh (as it presently exists) will be gone with the wind.

(WE) ARE JUST A VAPOR THAT APPEARS FOR A LITTLE WHILE AND THEN VANISHES AWAY. (JAMES 4:14)

And yet,

THE WORD OF OUR GOD STANDS FOREVER. (ISAIAH 40:8)

Heaven and earth will pass away; but God’s Word will never pass away. His Truth remains forever, and it remains unchanged. Why? Because the Author remains forever, and He remains unchanged.

EL OLAM IS THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND FOREVER

We have seen that all that is of flesh is temporary. Now let’s consider the duration of all the nations in the sight of God.

“Behold, the Nations Are Less than Nothing ... and Meaningless”

BEHOLD, THE NATIONS ARE LIKE A DROP FROM A BUCKET, AND ARE REGARDED AS A SPECK OF DUST ON THE SCALES. BEHOLD, HE LIFTS UP THE ISLANDS LIKE FINE DUST. ALL THE NATIONS ARE AS NOTHING BEFORE HIM; THEY ARE REGARDED BY HIM AS LESS THAN NOTHING AND MEANINGLESS. (ISAIAH 40:15, 17)

Did you notice how God views the nations?

“*LIKE A DROP FROM A BUCKET*”
 “*AS A SPECK OF DUST ON THE SCALES*”
 “*LIKE FINE DUST*”
 “*AS NOTHING BEFORE HIM*”
 “*AS LESS THAN NOTHING*”
 AS “*MEANINGLESS.*”

Today, we might say

BEHOLD, THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, RUSSIA, AND CHINA ARE LIKE A DROP FROM A BUCKET, AND ARE REGARDED AS A SPECK OF DUST ON THE SCALES. BEHOLD, HE LIFTS UP GREENLAND AND ICELAND LIKE FINE DUST.

ARGENTINA AND COSTA RICA, GERMANY AND FRANCE, KENYA AND SOUTH AFRICA, INDIA AND PAKISTAN, INDEED, ALL THE NATIONS ARE AS NOTHING BEFORE HIM; THEY ARE REGARDED BY HIM AS LESS THAN NOTHING AND MEANINGLESS. (ISAIAH 40:15, 17)

There is coming a day when these present-day kingdoms will go the way of Egypt and Assyria and Babylon and Persia and Greece and Rome. They will all be gone with the wind. Ten thousand years from now, the United States of America is going to be a mere footnote in God's history book.

Not so with the Kingdom of God. According to the Prophet Daniel,

AND TO HIM (THE MESSIAH) WAS GIVEN DOMINION, GLORY AND A KINGDOM, THAT ALL THE PEOPLES, NATIONS AND MEN OF EVERY LANGUAGE MIGHT SERVE HIM. HIS DOMINION IS AN EVERLASTING DOMINION WHICH WILL NOT PASS AWAY; AND HIS KINGDOM IS ONE WHICH WILL NOT BE DESTROYED. (DANIEL 7:14)

As with us creatures of flesh, the kingdoms of this world will pass away. Every single one of them. But the Kingdom of God will never pass away. It remains forever because the Lord Jesus Christ, her King, remains forever.

EL OLAM IS THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND FOREVER

“The Earth's Rulers and Judges Wither”

We should also notice the duration of this world's presidents and prime ministers, kings and queens, congressmen and parliamentarians:

HE IT IS WHO REDUCES RULERS TO NOTHING, WHO MAKES THE JUDGES OF THE EARTH MEANINGLESS. SCARCELY HAVE THEY BEEN PLANTED, SCARCELY HAVE THEY BEEN SOWN, SCARCELY HAS THEIR STOCK TAKEN ROOT IN THE EARTH, BUT HE MERELY BLOWS ON THEM, AND THEY WITHER, AND THE STORM CARRIES THEM AWAY LIKE STUBBLE. (ISAIAH 40:23-24)

In His control of history, our sovereign God is the One Who establishes rulers in their positions of political authority.

*SO, PILATE SAID TO HIM, "YOU DO NOT SPEAK TO ME? DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT I HAVE AUTHORITY TO RELEASE YOU, AND I HAVE AUTHORITY TO CRUCIFY YOU?" JESUS ANSWERED, "YOU WOULD HAVE NO AUTHORITY OVER ME, UNLESS IT HAD BEEN GIVEN YOU FROM ABOVE."
(JOHN 19:10-11)*

EVERY PERSON IS TO BE IN SUBJECTION TO THE GOVERNING AUTHORITIES. FOR THERE IS NO AUTHORITY EXCEPT FROM GOD, AND THOSE WHICH EXIST ARE ESTABLISHED BY GOD. (ROMANS 13:1)

And in His control of history, our sovereign God is the One Who removes them from those positions.

He *"REDUCES RULERS TO NOTHING"*
 He *"MAKES THE JUDGES OF THE EARTH MEANINGLESS"*
 He *"MERELY BLOWS ON THEM, AND THEY WITHER"*
 And *"THE STORM CARRIES THEM AWAY LIKE STUBBLE."*

Americans might put it this way:

HE IT IS WHO REDUCES THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES TO NOTHING, WHO MAKES THE UNITED STATES SENATE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND THE SUPREME COURT AS MEANINGLESS.

SCARCELY HAVE THEY BEEN VOTED INTO OFFICE, SCARCELY HAVE THEY BEEN SWORN IN, SCARCELY HAS THEIR AUTHORITY TAKEN ROOT IN THE EARTH, BUT HE MERELY BLOWS ON THEM, AND THEY WITHER, AND THE STORM CARRIES THEM AWAY LIKE STUBBLE.

A day approaches when the influence they had upon the affairs of man will be gone with the wind. Only the everlasting God remains forever as King of kings and Lord of lords.

*"TO WHOM THEN WILL YOU LIKEN ME THAT I WOULD BE HIS EQUAL?" SAYS THE HOLY ONE.
(ISAIAH 40:25)*

This explains why the Apostle Paul breaks forth in praise,

NOW TO THE KING ETERNAL, IMMORTAL, INVISIBLE, THE ONLY GOD, BE HONOR AND GLORY FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN. (1ST TIMOTHY 1:17)

All the creatures of flesh, all the nations of the world, and all the rulers of this world will pass away. But the everlasting God will never pass away.

EL OLAM IS THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND FOREVER

The Significance of the Name El Olam

The Hebrew word “olam” means “secret, hidden, concealed, unknown.” The Jews used this word to describe things that had not been revealed.

They would sometimes use this word to describe *time*.

- It could refer to time that is *not known* (“at any time”) or
- Or it could refer to time that is *not measured* (“a long time ago”) as contrasted with time that is measured (“a thousand years ago”)

When describing an unknown time, the idea of “eternity” became associated with this word “olam.” That is because “eternity” has the idea of time in the past or future that cannot be measured. Therefore, it cannot be known. So, the word “olam” came to mean “eternal” or “everlasting.”

Thus, El Olam is translated “the everlasting God.”

El Olam Is Eternal

BEFORE THE MOUNTAINS WERE BORN, OR YOU GAVE BIRTH TO THE EARTH AND THE WORLD, EVEN FROM EVERLASTING TO EVERLASTING, YOU ARE GOD. (PSALM 90:2)

The Bible declares God to be “eternal.” When we say that God is eternal, we are focusing on the *time* of His existence. That is, there has never been a point in time when God started to exist, nor is there a point in time when He will cease to exist. God has always “been” and always “will be.” He has no beginning and no end. He is the ever existing One.

How can that be? How can there be something that never had a starting point? Most certainly, the idea of something being eternal is “unsettling” to us. After all, each of us began to exist at some point in time. So, for God to be eternal is not something we can relate to. It is a concept we cannot get our minds around. We can define the word eternal ... and we can describe it ... but we cannot “connect” with it.

We faced this same kind of question before with the attribute of self-existence. How can anything exist without the aid of something else? As mentioned then, there are some truths about God our finite minds will simply have to accept. But again, is that so bad ... not being able to fully grasp the magnitude of our Maker! Just for a minute, let’s revisit this truth. If we could fully understand everything about God, He would not be much of a God. He would be just as finite as are our minds. Should we not want a God

that is so far beyond our comprehension that we are willing to feel at a loss when we try to comprehend Him?

So, let us be content in this: El Olam is eternal. For God to have no beginning and no end is an incomprehensible truth our finite minds will simply have to grasp by faith.

El Olam Is Immutable

I, THE LORD, DO NOT CHANGE. (MALACHI 3:6)

We have seen that the *existence* of God has no time boundaries. He has always “been.” And He always “will be.” This is also true of His *perfections*. The attributes of God are just as eternal as is His existence.

- God’s character has never been – in the past – any different than what it is now. There has never been a time when God was not merciful, righteous, or all-knowing. As He is now, He has always been throughout eternity past.
- Nor will His character ever be – in the future – any different to what it is now. God will never stop being gracious or holy or all-powerful. As He is now, He will always be throughout eternity future.

The everlasting God is the never-changing God. That is, the one, true God ... the God of the Bible ... is immutable. He does not change Himself nor can anyone or anything else change Him. He did not start out as a God of justice and, sometime between Malachi 4:6 and Matthew 1:1, turn into a God of grace. As He was in the Old Testament, so He is in the New Testament. Furthermore, the perfections He will have during His reign over the new heaven and new earth will be the same as those He has now during His reign over the present heavens and earth.

The glory of our God is not like the glory of this world which – like a vapor – appears for a brief time and then vanishes away. El Olam is the everlasting, never-changing God.

HE IS THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND FOREVER

The Same Yesterday and Today and Forever

El Olam – the never-changing God – remains the same from one generation to the next. He is not evolving to “keep up with the times.” He is immutable. The One to Whom *Israel* looked to meet their every need is the same One to Whom *you and I* can look to meet our every need.

It means that “the LORD” – Yahweh – the *self-existent Creator* Who is independent of anyone or anything else outside Himself for His existence – still knows exactly what we need – and what we do not need – to be His effective servants.

It means that “the LORD” – Yahweh – the God Who is *faithful* to the Covenant He made with Old Testament Israel – will also keep every single promise He has ever made to us, His New Testament Church.

It means that “the LORD Who sanctifies you” – Yahweh Meqaddishkem – the *holy One* of Israel – will also set apart His New Testament saints from a sinful lifestyle to live righteously.

It means that “the LORD is my Banner” – Yahweh Nissi – Israel’s *Banner of Truth* – is the One around Whom today’s saints can also rally. From Him we receive the strength we need from His Word to overcome our three enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

It means that “the LORD (Who) provides” – Yahweh Yireh – Abraham’s *gracious Provider* – will also meet all the needs of His Church as we worship Him with hearts full of devotion.

It means that “the LORD of hosts” – Yahweh Sabaoth – Israel’s *watchful Defender* – will also faithfully dispatch His massive army of angelic-warriors to defend and minister to us, His New Testament people.

It means that “the Lord” – Adonai – Israel’s *revered Master* Who lovingly guides and sustains them – will also seek the highest good for His Church, guiding us and sustaining us as we seek to do His will.

It means that “God” – Elohim – the *all-powerful God* – will also answer any and all our prayers that conform to His will ... Who will transform the lives of His New Testament people into the likeness of Christ ... and Who will fulfill all His promises to us concerning both the human and angelic realms as well as nature.

It means that “God Almighty” – El Shaddai – Abraham’s *all-sufficient God* – will also provide the nourishment His Church Age saints need to enable us to grow strong and fruitful.

It means that “the God who sees” – El Roi – Hagar’s *all-knowing and ever-present Help* – will also provide His Church with strength and encouragement when we are forsaken by others, with forgiveness and assurance when we “feel” abandoned by God because of our sins, and with His love and care when we “feel” abandoned by God because of the painful situations we face.

It means that “God Most High” – El Elyon – Abram’s, Melchizedek’s, and Paul’s *supreme Sovereign* – will also re-direct the hearts of His New Testament people away from living for this world to focus on the King of kings and His eternal kingdom.

El Olam – the everlasting God – is eternal.

This means that we ourselves are *able* to have eternal life. Only an eternal Being can give eternal life. He has to be around forever to sustain us in that life. Because we are “in Christ and Christ is in God,” we will live for as long as God does. Since His life is never-ending, our future existence will also be never-ending.

Yes, all flesh is like grass; it withers. And like the flower, it fades. Generations come and go, none of which being an exact duplicate of the others. Kings and kingdoms rise and fall. Even the present heavens and earth will one day give way to a new heaven and a new earth. But there is at least one Exception to this rule of change.

His Name is El Olam.

He is the *everlasting, never-changing God*.

DO YOU NOT KNOW? HAVE YOU NOT HEARD? THE CONSTANT, UNCHANGING, ETERNAL GOD, THE LORD, THE CREATOR OF THE ENDS OF THE EARTH DOES NOT BECOME WEARY OR TIRED. HIS UNDERSTANDING IS INSCRUTABLE. (ISAIAH 40:28)

*HE WHO IS THE BLESSED AND ONLY SOVEREIGN,
THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS,
WHO ALONE POSSESSES IMMORTALITY
AND DWELLS IN UNAPPROACHABLE LIGHT,
WHOM NO MAN HAS SEEN OR CAN SEE.
TO HIM BE HONOR AND ETERNAL DOMINION!*

AMEN.

1ST TIMOTHY 6:15-16

APPENDIX A

Israel's Use of the Name Yahweh

Initially, the Name Yahweh was pronounced during the Scripture readings; but sometime after the Old Testament was completed, the Jews stopped saying His Name out loud. When the reader came to His written Name, instead of saying "Yahweh," he would say either the Name Adonai (which means Master) or Elohim (which means Almighty God). Therefore, the way this Name was *written* never changed; but the way it was *pronounced* did.

The reason they stopped stating His Name is because of an overreaction to their fear of blasphemy. Leviticus 24:16 says,

MOREOVER, THE ONE WHO BLASPHEMES THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL SURELY BE PUT TO DEATH; ALL THE CONGREGATION SHALL CERTAINLY STONE HIM. THE ALIEN AS WELL AS THE NATIVE, WHEN HE BLASPHEMES THE NAME, SHALL BE PUT TO DEATH. (LEVITICUS 24:16)

Instead of taking any chances of using the Name Yahweh improperly, the Jews used another Name in its place ... usually Adonai.

When the writers of the Old Testament first wrote the inspired words of God, they did not use vowels. Only consonants were used. Later, Jewish scholars called Masoretes added vowels to the consonants. When they came to the *written* Name Yahweh, they added the vowels of the *pronounced* Name Adonai (a o a). Thus, His Name would appear – before the vowels were added – as YHWH and after vowels were added as Yahowah. This is why the translators of the American Standard Bible translated Yahowah as Jehovah.²²

²² In the King James and New American Standard Versions, Yahweh is translated as "LORD" (using capital letters) to distinguish it from Adonai, translated as "Lord" (using small letters).

APPENDIX B

Jesus' Use of the Name Yahweh

We would rob ourselves in our discussion of the Name Yahweh if we ignored an event that occurred in the life of Christ. In one of His many confrontations with the Jews, Jesus' claim of supremacy – even over their revered forefather Abraham – caused a tremendous uproar (John 8:48-59).

"SURELY YOU ARE NOT GREATER THAN OUR FATHER ABRAHAM!"

Christ answered with a "Yes."

YOUR FATHER ABRAHAM REJOICED TO SEE MY DAY.

And the more superior to Abraham Christ claimed to be, the "hotter" the Jews became.

YOU ARE NOT YET FIFTY YEARS OLD, AND HAVE YOU SEEN ABRAHAM?

And then, the clincher!

JESUS SAID TO THEM, "TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS BORN, I AM."

With this, the Lord Jesus was claiming the Name Yahweh for Himself. He was claiming to be equal with the self-existent, covenant-God of Israel! And the Jews picked up on His claim of Deity loud and clear! Taking up rocks, they sought to execute Him for blasphemy right there on the spot but, of course, failed in their attempt to do so.

John 8 is one of the clearest passages in the Bible of Jesus' claim to be God.

*IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD, AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD, AND **THE WORD WAS GOD.** HE WAS IN THE BEGINNING WITH GOD. ALL THINGS CAME INTO BEING THROUGH HIM, AND APART FROM HIM NOTHING CAME INTO BEING THAT HAS COME INTO BEING. **IN HIM WAS LIFE,** AND THE LIFE WAS THE LIGHT OF MEN. (JOHN 1:1-4)*

APPENDIX C

The Source of All Truth: The Individual or the Lord?

There are two opposing views battling for our allegiance. Both claim to offer the Truth we need ... but only one of them does. The other view offers nothing but deception and ruin.

The World's View: The *Individual* Is the Source of All Truth

Have you ever heard someone say, "One's perception is his reality"? What he is saying is this: "How *I* understand something is *true for me*, and how *you* understand that same something is *true for you*. What is true for me is not necessarily true for you and vice versa." With this belief system, truth is relative. It is determined *by* the individual, *for* that individual.

Unfortunately, many have bought into this idea. Truth is found within themselves. They have become their own plumb line. They then turn their personalized, tailor-made "truths" into personalized, tailor-made morality.

"MY BEHAVIOR IS MORALLY RIGHT FOR ME IF I THINK IT IS RIGHT. YOUR MORAL STANDARD MAY BE DIFFERENT THAN MINE BECAUSE WE ARE TWO DIFFERENT INDIVIDUALS. THEREFORE, YOU DO NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO TELL ME WHAT IS MORAL AND WHAT IS NOT. THAT IS FOR ME TO DECIDE FOR MYSELF, NOT YOU."

As with Israel during the days of the judges, they do "what is right in (their) own eyes" (because their beliefs are "right in their own eyes").

Why is this view so dangerous?

- First, it produces *chaos* whenever there is more than one person involved: in the workplace, in marriage, with siblings, with parents, with civil authorities.

If you think driving on the right-hand side of the road is "right for you," and I think driving on the left-hand side of the road is "right for me," there is going to be an accident.

- Second, this view will result in *ruin* for the individual as well as others who are impacted by his foolish behavior. All behavior – good or bad, small or great – carries consequences, both temporal ... and eternal.

If one fashions his god into what he wants god to be, he is placing himself in danger of eternal death, no matter how sincere he is. Sincerity does not turn heresy into truth.

For the individual to be the source of his own truth is to place himself in the position of the all-knowing God, a position no creature is big enough to handle. Only God is big enough to be the fountain of all Truth.

The Biblical View: The *LORD* Is the Source of All Truth

Pontius Pilate asked Jesus:

“WHAT IS TRUTH?” (JOHN 18:38)

To answer this question, we will borrow, once again, from R. C. Sproul. In his book, One Holy Passion, he writes:

“Truth is reality as it is perceived *by God*. In this definition there is no slipping and sliding into relativity.”²³

This means that

TRUTH BEGINS AND ENDS WITH GOD.

Instead of the shifting, conflicting opinions of the earth’s population of eight billion individuals,

THE PLUMB LINE OF TRUTH IS THE UNCHANGING CHARACTER OF THE ONE, TRUE GOD.

And since God’s character does not change, Truth itself does not change. It is not relative according to what the individual says. It is absolute according to what God says. When it comes to Truth, God is the unchanging Standard.

EVERY GOOD THING GIVEN AND EVERY PERFECT GIFT IS FROM ABOVE, COMING DOWN FROM THE FATHER OF LIGHTS, WITH WHOM THERE IS NO VARIATION OR SHIFTING SHADOW. (JAMES 1:17)

²³ Sproul, R. C., One Holy Passion, Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987, page 146.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

YAHWEH (PART 1)

GOD IS SELF-EXISTENT

Something Greater than the Polish of Man (6-7)

- ? What is the point of this story?

- ? Was there anything in particular that stood out to you in this introduction?

An Education in the School of Brokenness (7-9)

It is easy for us to see what Moses gained from the first 40 years of his life: a privileged social status, political influence, a formal education in the best of schools, the best of nutritious food, the best medical care in the world. But it might take a little more thought to comprehend the benefits of his second 40 years of life.

- ? What do you think Moses *gained* from his time in the wilderness herding sheep?

The Significance of the Name "I AM" (9-10)

We learned that the Name Yahweh highlights the self-existence of God.

- ? What does that mean, that God is "self-existent"?

Just because our finite minds are unable to fully grasp (and explain) an infinite God does not mean we should somehow feel dissatisfied with our faith. To the contrary, our inability to comprehend His perfections should produce within us a sense of joyful security and reverent fear.

- ? How can our *limited* ability to comprehend the perfections of God *strengthen* us in our faith?

Why LORD? Why Did You Do This to Me? (10-14)

- ? When God places you in a negative or helpless situation ... one that is going to take more than your own determination to get out of (assuming you can get out of it), why would He do that? Is He not supposed to be making you happy?

The Priceless Gift of Weakness (14-16)

God is our Creator. And as Creator, He has the *right* to “sculpture” our lives as He sees fit: to give to us ... to withhold from us ... and to remove from us ... what He deems best for both His Name and our wellbeing. *Our* responsibility, as creatures, is to submit in faith to His good – but sometimes difficult-to-understand – will.

- ? Has there ever been a time when you had trouble accepting what God was doing in your life – or in the life of someone else you cared about – because it did not make any sense? If so, what *did* you do (or what *should* you have done ... or what *are* you doing) to set unbelief aside and submit to His purposes?

APPENDIX A**Israel’s Use of the Name Yahweh (131)**

The reason the Jews stopped pronouncing the Name “Yahweh” is because of an overreaction to their fear of blasphemy. This, however, may be the lesser of two evils. It is also possible to be *too casual* in our use of God’s Name.

- ? In what ways is the Christian community sometimes *careless* in our use of God’s Name?

YAHWEH (PART 2)**GOD IS FAITHFUL****“Catch Me Pa” (17-18)**

Throughout our lives many people promise to do many things for us: “I will call you back at 10:00.” “I will have your car fixed by closing time.” “I will stay married to you ‘till death do us part.”” But with most of these people, the best we can do is *hope* that they will be true to their word.

Opie, however, had more than mere hope that his father would catch him. He *knew* that he would. With full assurance, this son trusted his father to keep his promises.

? What do you think it took for Andy to gain his son’s full confidence?

God’s Covenant-Promises to Israel (18-19)

Before one can prove his faithfulness, he must first promise to do something. Genesis 15 describes the covenant-relationship the LORD initiated with Abram. The covenant they “cut” is known as the Abrahamic Covenant.

? According to this section, what promises did the LORD make to Abram?

Israel’s Responsibilities / Israel’s Failures (19-21)

? We noted listed several sins committed by Israel in their early history as a nation. What do you think is the worst sin ever committed by Israel?

Some Things Just Never Change (21-22)**The Faithfulness of God**

? We identified Israel’s worst sin throughout their history as a nation was to demand the crucifixion of the Messiah. In view of this crime, is the Abrahamic Covenant still in effect? If so, why? If not, why not?

- ? If the conduct of national Israel neither maintains nor cancels the Abrahamic Covenant, what difference does it make how they live?

Why the LORD Remains Faithful to His Disobedient People (22-23)

One reason Yahweh is faithful to His covenant-people has to do with what Abram was doing when God established His covenant with him.

- ? What is the significance of Abram being asleep during this ceremony?

A second reason Yahweh is faithful to His covenant-people is for the sake of His Own Name. He does not want the world to believe He is unable to keep His promises to Israel.

The New Testament Church often fails to obey the commands God has given to us. Yet our salvation remains intact, not because we deserve to “stay saved” but because God is protecting His Name.

- ? Can you think of a promise(s) Yahweh has given to His Church – regarding the *security of our salvation*?
- ? So, why has God remained faithful to keep *His Church* saved even though we, too, continue to sin against Him?

Yahweh, the Personal Name of God (23)

The Name Yahweh is the personal Name of God. It is a Name that emphasizes His faithfulness to His people. He is a God that keeps His promises.

- ? What are some ways your heavenly Father kept His promises to you in the past?
- ? Can you think of *one promise* that Yahweh made to you ... but failed to keep, and time has run out? (The question is not, “Can you think of one *desire* you had that God did not grant?”)

New Testament Promises (23-24)

When Israel failed to conduct herself as a nation in a covenant-relationship with God, her disobedience did not cancel her covenant with Him. But she *did* forfeit many opportunities to *experience the blessings* of that covenant.

- ? As a member of the New Testament Church, what steps can *you* take to ensure that you *experience* the spiritual blessings you have in Christ?

The Promise of an Eternal Rescue (24-25)

- ? When the Father sacrificed His Son, what do you think that was like for Him to do so? What do you think He went through?

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. (JOHN 3:16)

This verse tells us how we should respond to what God did. It tells us we should “believe in His only begotten Son.” That is, we should believe something about Christ.

- ? What exactly are we to believe about His Son?

John 3:16 also reveals two promises we can claim if we do trust in Christ for salvation.

- ? What two promises from this verse can we trust Yahweh to keep if we believe in Christ for salvation?

The Promise of Boundless Forgiveness (25)

It may be that a *new* believer has not had the time or the teaching to learn that all his sins have been washed away ... and that God remembers them no more.

- ? But when an older believer continues to struggle with the guilt of his past sins, what may be the problem?

The Promise of Divine Wisdom (25-26)

- ? What are the usual results of trying to deal with a problem *apart from prayer* compared to the results *with prayer*?

- ? If these are the usual results of facing a trial *without* prayer, why then, do you think we are sometimes willing to do so?

The Promise of a Glorious Home (26)

We have considered only a few of God's many promises He has given to the New Testament Church.

- ? What are some ways you can continually remind yourself (or a fellow believer) of the promises of God, especially when facing a difficult circumstance?

Application: New Testament Promises

We may think we can, but none of us are able to "make it on our own." The fact is, we are a needy people (by divine design). God has tailored man to be dependent upon Him for all things.

- ? Do you have a need for God's help in some matter (for example, "employment" or "a restored relationship," etc.)

- ? Can you think of a promise Christ has given to His New Testament Church that addresses that need?

APPENDIX B

Jesus' Use of the Name Yahweh (132)

It was stated that Jesus claimed to be the "I AM" of Exodus 3. That is, He claimed to be God.

? Why should the deity of Jesus Christ be important to us?

YAHWEH MEQADDISHKEM

GOD IS HOLY

The Day I Made Three Mistakes (27-28)

Several persons will benefit when the life of a believer becomes more like the life of Christ.

? Who stands to benefit from a spiritually maturing life ... and how?

God's Greatest Hatred: Idolatry (28-29)

? How would you define "idolatry"?

? Why do you think idolatry is so offensive to God?

We should all ask ourselves: Do I have an idol, something I am devoted to even more than God?

God's Highest Priority: His Reputation (30)

Holy

We know that God wants to protect His reputation.

? What does He stand to lose from the world if His reputation is tarnished?

Sanctified (30-31)

We have seen that God is serious about protecting His Name. To do so, He sanctifies His people.

- ? What should motivate God's people to protect their Father's reputation?

The Sanctification of Israel

By Separation from Idolatry (31)

One means Yahweh Meqaddishkem used to sanctify Israel was by separating them from the idolatrous people-groups surrounding them. To do so, He commanded them to execute all of them – men, women, and children – when they entered their promised land.

- ? Why not just command Israel to not associate with them? Why so drastic an action as total annihilation?

By Revelation (31-32)

Another means Yahweh Meqaddishkem used to sanctify His people was by providing them with a written body of moral, ethical legislation, the Mosaic Law.

- ? How does that work? How does a written body of legislation help to sanctify His people?

The Sanctification of the New Testament Church

By Trials (32-33)

It was stated that Yahweh Meqaddishkem uses suffering in the lives of His people to sanctify them.

- ? Why is a trial sometimes the *only way* a life can be sanctified?

By the Word of God (33-34)

There is real benefit in *supplementing* one's time in God's Word with the Biblical insights of godly authors. But it was also stated, "books about the Bible ... are detrimental as a

replacement (of the Bible). If we have time to read only one book, then let it be the Bible.”

- ? Why should the Christ-follower never *replace* the Bible with books about the Bible?

By Separation from Worldliness (34-37)

To separate ourselves from a professing believer who refuses to repent of the sin is beneficial for the believer. The reason is because “Bad company corrupts good morals.”

- ? Why is it not the other way around ... that “good company will improve bad morals”?

Called to Be Conformed to the Image of Christ (37)

- ? The New Testament writings describe God’s children as “saints.” To be a saint is to be “a holy one.” If a child of God is already holy, in what sense are we being *made* holy (sanctified)? Why do we need to be made into something we already are?

YAHWEH NISSI

GOD IS TRUTH

A Most Formidable Foe (38-39)

- ? Was there anything in particular that stood out to you in this introduction?

Israel's Banner in War (39-40)

This latter section concluded with the statement, "We should take note that the context in which this Name is found is that of *battle*."

- ? Why would the New Testament Church need to know about a Name for God that is associated with battle?

The Significance of the Name Yahweh Nissi (40)

- ? According to this section, what is the significance of this Hebrew Name, Yahweh Nissi?

To Have *This* Friend Is to Have These Enemies (41-44)

We learned from our reading that all three of our spiritual adversaries – the world, the flesh, and the devil – were defeated at the Cross. Yet, all three are still attacking the believer.

- ? What exactly was *taken away* from them at the Cross; and what do they *still possess* that makes it possible for them to attack us?

The Banner of God Is Truth (44-45)

- ? Can you think of any values that have changed in your own life since you have been a student of God's Word?

Stationed on the Front Lines (45-46)

- ? Why do you think God left these three enemies – the world, the flesh, and the devil – here to harass His Church? What benefit do they provide to God and His people?

The Battle Plan of Righteousness (46-47)

Using Lucy as our example, a “Battle Plan of Righteousness” was presented in your reading.

- ? Who stands to benefit as Lucy takes this action ... and how?

APPENDIX C

The Source of All Truth: the Individual or the Lord?

The World’s View: The *Individual* Is the Source of All Truth (133-134)

An individual is not the source of Truth, nor can he be.

- ? Why not? What is it about the creature that makes him an untrustworthy source of truth?

The Biblical View: The *LORD* Is the Source of All Truth (134)

It was stated in your reading, “When it comes to Truth, God Himself is the Standard. And since God’s character does not change, Truth does not change.”

- ? How is that beneficial to you, that Truth does not change?

YAHWEH YIREH

GOD IS A GRACIOUS PROVIDER

A Passion for Shrimp (48-49)

The conclusion of this section stated: “The object of our devotion will determine the course of our choices (whether wise or foolish).”

- ? Would you put that principle in your own words?

- ? Would you be willing to give an example of that principle from your own life?

- ? Was there anything in particular that stood out to you in this introduction?

Here, Abraham, Is Your Promised Son. Now ... Give Him Back to Me. (49-50)

- ? What do you think Abraham went through – mentally, emotionally, psychologically – when God commanded him to hand over his son?

The Significance of the Name Yahweh Yireh

In What Context Is This Promise Made? (50-51)

In this section it was stated that the Name Yahweh Yireh, our God is a faithful Provider, was used in the context of worship.

- ? Why would we hope to find worship in the same context as a trial?

To What Kind of Person Will Provision Be Made? (51-52)

We have seen that the character of the worshipper was one of total devotion.

? Have you ever met anyone with Abraham-like devotion to God? If so, what was it about him that made you think he had this depth of passion for God?

? What do you think it took for him to get that way?

What Will God Provide? (52-53)

We saw from this section that God promises to meet the needs of those devoted to Him.

? How would you define (or describe) a “need”?

The Cost of Devotion (53-55)

? When one directs his time, money, or energy away from that which would benefit himself and places that resource on that which honors the Lord Jesus Christ, what, in effect, is he saying?

I Like to Fish. But I Love My Wife. (55)

? What must one do to make Jesus Christ the all-consuming passion of his life?

The Promise (56-57)

? Concerning our spiritual lives, we all want to be more devoted to God. But what does that look like ... to become more devoted to God? How do you know if you are doing that or not?

? If God has promised to supply all the needs of His servants whose lives are fully devoted to Him, why is it that some of these faithful saints are severely treated or languish in prison or put to death (because they are Christians) instead of being rescued. Isn't their *need* for deliverance being withheld from them?

YAHWEH SABAOTH

GOD IS A WATCHFUL DEFENDER

Hello. I'm Pleased We Can Finally Speak. I Was Your Guardian Angel. (58-60)

- ? I thought *the Lord* was my Shield and Defender. Now I am being told that *angels* will guard me. How can both be true?

- ? Was there anything in particular that stood out to you in this introduction?

Yahweh Sabaoth, the Commander of Warrior-Angels (60)

- ? Why do angels need to be *warriors* to fulfill the will of God?

- ? Can you think of any accounts in Scripture where God sent one or more of these spirit-beings to help His people in a time of distress?

The Angels of Yahweh Sabaoth

The Specific Audience Guarded by Angels (61-62)

In Matthew 18 Jesus presents a warning: "Do not despise (even) one of these little ones" (My little children) ... and then He tells us why: "for I say to you that *their angels in heaven* continually see the face of My Father Who is in heaven."

- ? Why would Jesus call our attention to the access a believer's angel has to the Father in the context of this warning?

Why Has Yahweh Sabaoth Assigned a Guardian Angel to Every Believer? (62-63)

- ? What is it about the believer that attracts the assaults of his spiritual enemy, requiring the protection of an angelic "bodyguard"?

**Yahweh Sabaoth Sends His Angelic Warriors
to Protect the Ministries of His Servants (63)**

- ? How can we allow our spiritual enemies to destroy our ministry?

- ? How can we work with God (using His resources) to prevent this from happening?

**Yahweh Sabaoth Sends His Angelic Warriors
to Strengthen His Servants to Persevere in Their Calling (64)**

- ? What forms of opposition do you think Satan's forces use to tempt pastors to leave the ministry?

- ? How can we work with God (using His resources) to support our pastors in their work?

**Yahweh Sabaoth Sends His Angelic Warriors
to Defend His Servants from Premature Death (65-66)**

- ? Has there ever been a time when you could have been badly hurt or killed but, for some unseen reason, were spared? What happened?

ADONAI

GOD IS A LOVING MASTER

The Cross of the Lamb and the Throne of the Lion (68-71)

- ? Was there anything in particular that stood out to you from this introduction?

The Meaning of the Title “Lord” (71)

- ? What does our Master, Christ Jesus, have the right to expect us, His bond-slaves, to do?

The Historical Context of the Name Adonai

Adonai Is Israel’s Master (72-73)

- ? Why do you think your Master sometimes expects you to *do* something that does not make any sense to you ... or expects you to *wait* for something good for no apparent reason?

Adonai Is Israel’s Revered Master (73-74)

The Master has the right to expect *obedience* from his slave. But that obedience is to be more than an outward conformity to a set of rules. He is to be motivated by a *sincere respect* for his Master.

- ? What must take place in a believer’s life for him to grow in reverence for the Lord Jesus?

Adonai Is Israel's Loving Guide (74)

The slave can expect *guidance* from his Master.

- ? Looking back over your Christian life, when was there a time when you sensed the Lord guiding you?

Adonai Is Israel's Loving Sustainer (74-75)

- ? Looking back over your Christian life, when was there a time when you sensed the Lord sustaining you, perhaps at a time of weakness?

Know That the Living God Is Among You (75)

Many missionaries and pastors have faithfully labored – for years – in the ministries to which they believed they were called ... but saw little fruit for their efforts. Yet, they believed that “the living God was with them.”

- ? Why should they have believed that “God was with them” in a labor where human effort had been invested in planning ... and in raising money to purchase materials ... and in recruiting personnel ... and in working hard ... but they saw little fruit? (And for that matter, why should we believe it?)
- ? If seeing fruit is not what determines whether God is with you or not, how do you know when it is time to move to another ministry and when it is time to stay where you are?

Know That the Living God Will Drive Out Your Enemies (75-76)

The believer has three unseen enemies: the world (an evil value system), the flesh (an evil inner craving), and the devil (an evil angel). These three enemies have already been defeated by Christ Jesus.

- ? Why should the Christ-follower believe that Adonai will enable him to be victorious over these same three formidable foes?

Our Master's Love (76-77)

The Master we serve loves us. Love was described as an act of the will to seek what is best for another person.

- ? With this description of love in mind, how is God's love a *perfect* love?

- ? Why isn't God's goal to make someone happy? Is He not a God of love?

A True Profession of Lordship (77-78)

It was stated in your reading, "Clearly, the way one confesses the Lordship of Christ is by striving to obey the will of God."

- ? Is it possible for one to strive to live a life that is free from sin without being legalistic?

ELOHIM

GOD IS ALL-POWERFUL

In the Palm of His Hand (79-80)

- ? Was there anything in particular that stood out to you in this introduction?

Elohim Has the Power to Answer Our Prayers (82-84)

- ? If your will were different than God's will ... and you could somehow get Him to set His will aside in order to give you what *you* want, would you do so? Why or why not?
- ? What causes some to become angry with God ... to believe that He has "let them down"?

Elohim Has the Power to Change Our Lives (84-85)

- ? What can we do to become *fervent* in our prayers for Christlikeness?

Elohim Has the Power to Fulfill His Promises to Us (86-87)

- ? What can we do to ensure that what we are trusting God to do is something He actually promised to do?

EL SHADDAI

GOD IS ALL-SUFFICIENT

“Thank You Just the Same Anyway Lord” (88-89)

- ? How can “the breadwinner” who works hard to get the essentials for life still maintain an attitude of dependence on God?

“Here Lord, Let Me Help You with That Promise of Yours” (91-92)

Have you ever needed God to do something ... as soon as possible ... but you *felt* that He was moving too slowly for *your* own good ... or (as far as you could tell) He was not moving at all?

- ? If you have ever been in that situation, were you tempted to take matters into your own hands?

- ? If you have ever “taken over” from God, what were the results of that action?

“You Can’t Do This. But I Can.” (92-94)

As believers, you and I face a “balancing act.” As we seek to impact lives for eternity, we are to give God our highest quality of work. And yet, as we do, we have the tendency to trust in those efforts – rather than in God’s power – to bear spiritual fruit.

- ? How can the servants of Christ maintain a proper attitude of dependence in God while, at the same time, giving their best efforts to the Lord?

The Self-Sufficiency of God (95)

- ? What is the difference between being “self-sufficient” and being “all-sufficient”?

“I Command You to Do the Impossible” (95-98)

“I Hear the Savior Say” (98)

- ? What does it take for us to realize that – apart from almighty God – we are too weak to accomplish His will on our own and are in constant need of His power to do so?
- ? Is it possible for a new convert to comprehend this truth?
- ? How can you help a new believer prepare for this realization?

EL ROI**GOD IS AN ALL-KNOWING, EVER-PRESENT HELP****Not a Friend in the World (99-101)**

Perhaps you have been abandoned by someone while trying to live out the righteous will of God ... someone you would have sworn would never leave your side.

? If so, why do you think he / they did that?

The Historical Context of the Name El Roi (101-104)

? Was there anything in particular that stood out to you from this introduction?

The Omniscience of God (104-105)

Thinking she was alone in the wilderness, Hagar realizes she has a Companion, One Who knows a lot about her: her past, her present and her future.

? Why do you think that would be to *your* advantage ... having been rejected, you live in the presence of One Who knows your past, present and future?

The Omnipresence of God (105)

? Was there anything in particular that stood out to you from this section?

What to Do When You Are Abandoned by Others (105-107)

When we take a broken relationship to the Lord in prayer, our desire and request will often be for the relationship to return to what it once was. And maybe it will. But there is no *guarantee* that it will. Yet we are told to draw near to the throne of grace “with confidence.”

- ? Since two wills are involved in a strained relationship, what exactly can we be *confident* the Lord will do?

**What to Do When You Feel Abandoned by God
Because of Your Sin (107-108)**

THESE THINGS I HAVE WRITTEN TO YOU WHO BELIEVE IN THE NAME OF THE SON OF GOD, SO THAT YOU MAY KNOW THAT YOU HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. (1ST JOHN 5:13)

- ? According to the above verse, is this letter – 1st John – addressed to believers or unbelievers?

It was pointed out in your reading that the magnanimous grace of God is greater than any sin we could possibly commit. Instead of wallowing in despair over our sins, 1st John 1:9 is presented as the remedy for the sins one commits *as a believer*.

IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND RIGHTEOUS TO FORGIVE US OUR SINS AND TO CLEANSE US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. (1ST JOHN 1:9)

- ? How can a just Judge be *righteous* and forgive sin at the same time? Isn't a just judge responsible to punish sin? What allows God to forgive, yet remain just?

*IF WE SAY THAT WE HAVE **FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM** AND YET WALK IN THE DARKNESS, WE LIE AND DO NOT PRACTICE THE TRUTH; BUT IF WE WALK IN THE LIGHT AS HE HIMSELF IS IN THE LIGHT, WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER, AND THE BLOOD OF JESUS HIS SON CLEANSSES US FROM ALL SIN. (1ST JOHN 1:6-7)*

- ? What are verses 1:6-7 talking about?

OF HIM ALL THE PROPHETS BEAR WITNESS THAT THROUGH HIS NAME EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM RECEIVES FORGIVENESS OF SINS. (ACTS 10:43)

Here, we are told that “everyone who believes in (Christ Jesus) receives forgiveness of sins.” The moment he trusts in Christ for salvation, the believer’s sins are washed away ... all of them ... forever.

- ? If a believer received forgiveness of sins upon faith in Christ, why, then, does 1st John 1:9 encourage him to “confess” his sins to be forgiven and cleansed of all unrighteousness? Has he not already been forgiven and cleansed?

**What to Do When You Feel Abandoned by God
Because of Your Circumstances (108-109)**

When facing a painful circumstance, we are often tempted to focus on the lie, “God has abandoned me.” To combat this lie with truth, it was recommended that we laser beam our attention on God’s character rather than the negative situation we are in.

- ? If we do *not* focus our attention on God but stay focused on our situation, what can we *expect*?
- ? If we focus on God rather than on our circumstances, what will be the *guaranteed* result?
- ? If we do this, is there anything *positive* that is *not* guaranteed?
- ? What, then, does triumphant living look like if it does not pertain to our circumstances?

EL ELYON

GOD IS THE SUPREME SOVEREIGN

When We've Been There Ten Thousand Years, Bright Shining as the Sun (110-111)

? What are some ways we might answer this statement: "10,000 years from now, I am going to be very glad that I _____"?

? Was there anything in particular that stood out to you in this introduction?

A Short-Sighted Folly (111-114)

We saw from this lesson that both Lot and Bera were focused on this world. Their hearts and minds were devoted to what it had to offer.

? Who all stands to suffer loss when a believer has this same heart for the world?

A Far-Sighted Wisdom (114-115)

We saw from this lesson that both Abram and Melchizedek were *God*-centered. Their hearts and minds were devoted to El Elyon.

? What can we do throughout our lives to ensure that we will be well-satisfied with our lives 10,000 years from now?

The Significance of the Name El Elyon (115-116)

This section described El Elyon in four ways:

He is a *jealous* Sovereign, unwilling to share our attention with any other object of devotion.

He is a *meticulous* Sovereign, One Who controls the details of our lives.

He is a *wise* Sovereign, using His Own Counsel (His Truth) to guide us throughout our lives.

And He is a *loving* Sovereign, seeking what His best for His children and His creation.

- ? With what other attributes could you describe El Elyon, your Supreme Sovereign?

Just What Are You Trying to Accomplish? (116-119)

There is much to do to advance the cause of Christ, too much for any one individual. No one can do it all, which means that we need to be discerning as to what we agree to do and what we decline to do.

- ? When you are asked to *serve* the King in some capacity, how do you know what to say “Yes” to and what to say “No” to?

There are times when the servant of Christ must operate in an area of weakness. Out of necessity, he is called upon to do something that is not in his area of strength; but since there is no one else to perform this work, he must do so. That, however, is the exception to the rule. For one to advance the Kingdom of God most effectively, the believer should seek to labor in his area(s) of giftedness.

- ? How does one go about determining what his God-given gifts are (and what they are not)?

EL OLAM

GOD IS ETERNAL AND UNCHANGING

Telephone Booths and Typewriters, Slide Rules and Cassette Tapes (120-122)

The Historical Context of the Name El Olam (122)

Several decades before Nebuchadnezzar's army defeated and exported thousands of Jewish citizens to Babylon, Isaiah warned the southern kingdom of Judah of their impending captivity. It was within the writings of Isaiah that the Name El Olam appears.

- ? Why would the Name, El Olam, the everlasting and unchanging God, have special significance to the people of Judah as they faced captivity in Babylon?

"Surely All Flesh Withers" (123)

The Bible teaches that all flesh is perishing. Our lives upon this earth are temporary.

- ? How should we respond to this Truth right now?

"Behold, the Nations Are Less than Nothing ... and Meaningless" (123-124)

The Bible teaches that all nations are regarded by God as "less than nothing and meaningless."

- ? How should we respond to this Truth right now?

"The Earth's Rulers and Judges Wither" (124-125)

The Bible teaches that the influence of this world's rulers and judges will one day be gone with the wind.

? How should we respond to this Truth right now?

The Significance of the Name El Olam (126)

El Olam Is Eternal (126-127)

? If God stopped being eternal, how would that affect you?

No one has a brighter future in front of him than he who possesses eternal life. In fact, we already possess this eternal life. It has already begun.

? What does your possession of eternal life have to do with you right now?

El Olam Is Immutable (127)

? If God stopped being immutable, how would that affect you?

The Same Yesterday and Today and Forever (127-129)

We have invested the last several weeks carefully pondering a selection of God's wonderful perfections. In a way it was like examining a beautifully cut diamond. It is only one diamond; but as we observe its every cut reflecting light from its various angles, its beauty becomes increasingly apparent the longer we intently gaze upon it.

? From all the perfections we have considered, is there one particular attribute to which your soul especially clings ... perhaps because of a trial you are going through or because of a certain joyous occasion? If so, why is that attribute so special to you at this time in your life?