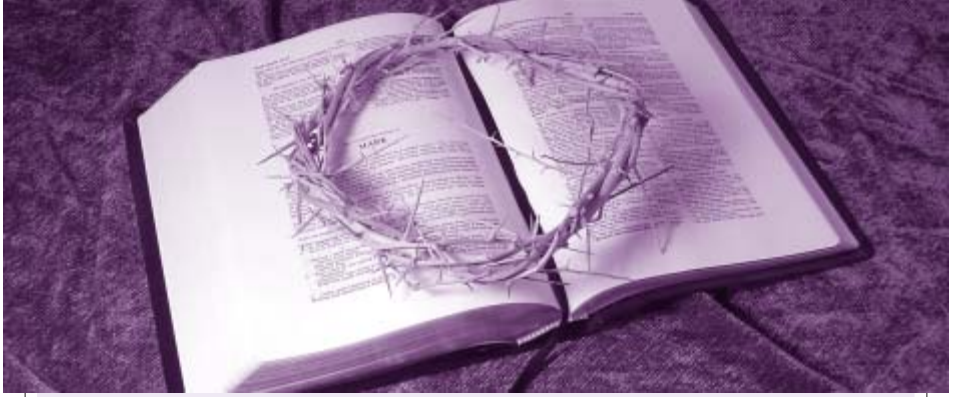


JESUS CHRIST



A GREAT MYSTERY!

ABOUT THE COVER

The cover image for this book incorporates the Biblical record of the momentous events leading to the death of Jesus Christ as recorded in Matthew 27:29: "When they (the soldiers of the governor) had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'"

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Part 1

DID JESUS EXIST?

Is there any historical proof that a person called Jesus Christ ever existed? Although it is sometimes claimed by atheists and agnostics that the very person of Jesus was an invention by early writers, very few educated people down through history have doubted the existence of Christ. There are more than 1,000 works of literature that were written very early in Church history affirming the existence of Christ, and much of it was written by pagans or Jews—people who acknowledged His existence, but denied that He was, indeed, the Son of God.

H.G. Wells wrote in *“Outline of History”*: “...one is obliged to say, ‘Here was a man. This part of the tale could not have been invented.’” Will Durant, professor of philosophy, and a non-Christian, wrote extensively about Christ’s existence and His effect on society in *“The Story of Civilization.”* The *Encyclopedia Britannica* refers to Christ more than 20,000 times—more than Socrates, Aristotle, Buddha, Napoleon, Confucius, Mohammed, or Shakespeare. It says in one instance: “These independent accounts prove that in ancient times even the opponents of Christianity never doubted the historicity of Jesus, which was disputed for the first time and on inadequate grounds by the end of the 18th, during the 19th, and at the beginning of the 20th centuries.”

John Singleton Copley, also known as Lord Lyndhurst, one of the greatest legal minds in British history, once commented in this way on the existence of Christ, His death, and His resurrection: “I know pretty well what evidence is: and I tell you, such evidence as that for the resurrection has never broken down yet.” Also, Lord Chief Justice of England, Lord Darling, once said: “no intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in a verdict that the resurrection story is true.”

Consider also this brief synopsis of many other *non-Biblical* sources attesting to the historical authenticity of Jesus Christ:

- The Huleatt fragments were written in AD 50 and contain the quote from Matthew 26:7–15, referring to Christ’s anointing with oil.
- Tatian, the Syrian, wrote in AD 170 that, “God was born in the

form of a man” (*Address to the Greeks* 21).

- Melito of Sardis wrote in AD 177 about the baptism of Christ and His miracles (Fragment in *Anastasius of Sinai’s The Guide* 13).
- Thallus, a Samaritan historian, wrote in AD 52 about the darkness that occurred at the crucifixion of Christ.
- Mara Bar-Serapion wrote in AD 73 to his son about the death of Socrates, Pythagoras and Jesus.
- Cornelius Tacitus wrote in AD 112 or AD 115 in his *Annal* (15.14) that “Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberias.”
- Lucian of Samostasa (AD 115–200) wrote about Christ as “the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world.”
- Phlegon wrote in his “*Chronicles*” in AD 140 about the ability of Jesus to foresee future events.

In addition, Christian authors such as Clement of Rome [AD 30–101], Ignatius [martyred in AD 117], a writer naming himself Barnabas [in the *Epistle of Barnabas*, written between AD 70 and 135], and Justyn Martyr [AD 100–165] wrote about Christ and His followers.

The Jewish Talmud contains several references to Jesus Christ. It states on one occasion, “On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged” (*The Babylonian Talmud*, vol. iii, Sanhedrin 43a, p. 281). Another quote states, “Our rabbis taught: Yeshu had five disciples—Mattai [i.e. Matthew], Nakkai, Netzer, Buni and Yodah” (from Sanhedrin 43a). Other sources talk about Christians who were following Christ (compare, Aristides, *Apology* 16 [AD 140]; Pliny the Younger [AD 112]; and Suetonius [AD 120]).

Also, the famous Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, mentions Christ on at least two occasions, along with John the Baptist; Herod; James, the brother of Christ; and Ananias, the High Priest. An undisputed reference about “James, brother of Jesus Who was called Christ” can be found in *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 20, chapter 9, paragraph 1. A rather lengthy reference to Christ, found in *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 18, chapter 3, paragraph 3, has been disputed as not genuine by some “scholars.” This quotation reads:

“About this time appeared Jesus, a wise man (if indeed it is right to call Him man; for He was a worker of astonishing deeds, a teacher of

such men as receive the truth with joy), and He drew to Himself many Jews (many also of Greeks. This was the Christ). And when Pilate, at the denunciation of those who are foremost among us, had condemned Him to the cross, those who had first loved Him did not abandon Him (for He appeared to them alive again on the third day, the holy prophets having foretold this and countless others marvel about Him.) The tribe of Christians named after Him did not cease to this day.”

Some “scholars” regard the whole passage as spurious—totally false. Others regard the passage as authentic, with some spurious additions. Then, there are scholars who regard the entire passage as completely genuine. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* points out: “The main arguments for the genuineness of the Josephan passage are the following: ... all codices or manuscripts of Josephus’ work contain the text in question; to maintain the spuriousness of the text, we must suppose that all the copies of Josephus were in the hands of Christians, and were changed in the same way... Eusebius..., Sozomen..., Isidore of Pelusium..., St. Jerome..., Ambrose, Cassiodorus, etc., appeal to the testimony of Josephus; there must have been no doubt as to its authenticity at the time of these illustrious writers.”

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* continues to state about other Jewish writers (sources omitted): “The historical character of Jesus Christ is also attested by the hostile Jewish literature of the subsequent centuries. His birth is ascribed to an illicit..., or even adulterous, union of His parents... The later Jewish writings show traces of acquaintance with the murder of the Holy Innocents..., with the flight into Egypt..., with the stay of Jesus in the Temple at the age of Twelve..., with the call of the disciples... , with His miracles..., ‘Schabbath,’... with His claim to be God..., with His betrayal by Judas and His death... Celsus... tries to throw doubt on the Resurrection, while Toldoth... repeats the Jewish fiction that the body of Jesus had been stolen from the sepulcher.”

The evidence of Jesus’ existence becomes, of course, indisputably compelling **when considering the Biblical record**. Some scholars of the “Historical Jesus” movement hold that the Gospels were fabricated or seriously distorted as the stories of Jesus evolved in the late 1st or early 2nd centuries. However, such a theory is not supported by evidence.

Time and again the New Testament writers claim to be eyewitnesses to the facts. For instance, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, died during

Nero's persecution in 64 A.D. Paul was still alive at the close of Acts, so Acts must have been written sometime before 64 A.D. Since Acts was a continuation of Luke's Gospel, that Gospel must have been written even earlier still. Any scholar, including those in the 'Historical Jesus' movement, will admit that the Gospel of Mark predates the Gospel of Luke. This supports the writing of Mark in the 50s A.D., only about two decades after the crucifixion of Jesus. In addition, Paul wrote Romans in the mid-50s. In Romans, Paul declares that Jesus is the resurrected Son of God. Galatians is another undisputed letter of Paul written in the mid-50s. In Galatians 1:18 and 2:1, Paul discusses his interaction with Peter and James, two of Jesus' primary disciples, at least 14 years earlier. Finally, in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, Paul states that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and was raised from the dead three days later. Scholars, using the historical records of Paul and his early travels to Damascus and Jerusalem, place the above "creed" at about 35 A.D., just 3 to 5 years after the death of Jesus Christ.

Further, Paul's testimony of Christ's resurrection and His appearance to His disciples is important, as Paul was referring to over 500 witnesses who saw the resurrected Christ, "of whom the greater part remain to the present" (1 Corinthians 15:6). In other words, Paul was naming witnesses of the events who were still alive when he wrote the letter. Paul was describing these events and naming witnesses so that people could check up on them. Are we to assume that all of these witnesses had collaborated to lie, including Paul, who had formerly PERSECUTED Christianity?

As the *Catholic Encyclopedia* states, "The four great Pauline Epistles (Romans, Galatians, and First and Second Corinthians) can hardly be overestimated by the student of Christ's life; they have at times been called the 'fifth gospel'; their authenticity has never been assailed by serious critics; ... it is the testimony of a highly intellectual and cultured writer, who had been the greatest enemy of Jesus, who writes within twenty-five years of the events which he relates."

Considering the overwhelming and undisputed evidence, it is nothing less than willful and deliberate ignorance that would bring one to believe that Jesus Christ never existed!

Part 2

WHO WAS JESUS?

Although historical records clearly prove that a person called Jesus Christ did exist, the question remains as to who He was. This is a subject that has been grossly misunderstood by many, including orthodox Christianity! The CORRECT understanding of this topic has been sadly lacking, **even in some, if not many of the Sabbath-keeping Church of God organizations.** We dare to say that this is perhaps the TOPIC WITH MORE ERRONEOUS BELIEFS THAN ANY OTHER! Yet it is fundamentally important that we understand the truth of the matter; otherwise, we are in jeopardy of DENYING the very sacrifice of Jesus Christ! While orthodox Christianity, as well as the world as a whole, are in total ignorance on this vital subject, some in the Sabbath-keeping Churches of God are *dangerously close to rejecting Christ and His sacrifice* without realizing it, because they do not fully understand and appreciate who Jesus was when He lived here on earth as a human being!

Some have come up with their own ideas on the matter and they refuse to change, even rejecting the very plain teaching from the Bible. Some use terminology that is not Biblical, and in doing so, fall into the trap of accepting concepts that are taught by orthodox Christianity, clouding the issue rather than clearly explaining it.

Some have gone back to Judaic thought, adopting a full-fledged monotheistic viewpoint of *just one God being* prior to Jesus' birth, and thereby have *rejected* the sacrifice of Christ.

What, then, is the Biblical teaching on who Jesus was when He was here on this earth?

In order to fully understand what is a mystery to many, we must first briefly address who Jesus was *before* He came to this earth. The Biblical record is very clear on who Christ was before He was born of the virgin Mary, and all who teach something different are **WRONG.** They are, in fact, *DECEIVERS!*

CHRIST WAS GOD BEFORE HE CAME TO THIS EARTH!

Yes, Christ was God before He came to this earth! This all-important statement is supported Biblically in many places. Paul explains in 1 Timothy 3:16: “And without controversy great is the **mystery of godliness: GOD** was manifest in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.”

HOW, exactly, was “God” manifest in the flesh? Some claim that God is just one Being and that He somehow placed some of His thoughts into the mind of a human being called Jesus. But they are wrong. Jesus actually did exist as a God being—a second, individual God being to God, the Father—prior to His birth as a human. The Bible clearly confirms this.

Philippians 2:5–7 reads: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of GOD, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, **TAKING THE FORM OF A BONDSERVANT**, and coming **IN THE LIKENESS OF MEN.**”

Notice, too, John 1:1–3: “In the beginning was the WORD [Note that Christ is still referred to as the “Word of God,” for instance in Revelation 19:13], and the Word was with God, **AND THE WORD WAS GOD.** He was in the beginning with God [that means there were two God beings—Christ, the “Word of God,” and God the FATHER]. All things were made through Him [the Word, Jesus Christ, compare Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:1–2], and without Him nothing was made that was made.”

These passages are clear and speak for themselves. Unless one wants to deceitfully twist, change and pervert the Scriptures, the Biblical testimony is unequivocal: Jesus Christ was GOD before He came to this earth! For more explanation and Scriptural proof, see our booklet, “**God Is A Family**,” specifically, page 14.

We have established the fact that Christ did exist as a human being, and we have shown from the Scriptures that He was a God being before His human birth. So then, where is Christ now? What kind of being is He? And what is He doing?

CHRIST IS GOD!

Again, the Bible is very clear that Christ **IS** God! For undeniable proof, notice Titus 2:11–14: “For the grace of God that brings salvation

has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our GREAT GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”

Jesus Christ, who had been a God being (the “Son of God”) before His human birth, is a God being today, functioning now as our High Priest. He sits next to God, the Father, in heaven and intervenes on our behalf so that we can obtain mercy in time of need (Hebrews 1:3; 4:14–16; 5:5–10; 7:8, 24; 9:11, 24–28; 10:12, 19–22).

But now, let’s go back a bit and address in much more detail, one of the most important mysteries about Jesus Christ

WHO WAS JESUS WHEN HE WAS HERE ON EARTH?

The question of who Jesus was when He was here on earth elicits a multitude of responses, suggestions, and interpretations. Some say that He was “God and man”; that He was “truly God and truly man”; that He was “fully God and fully man”; that He was “only and fully God, and not man”; that He was “fully man, and not God”; and, that He was “fully man, but still God in some ways.”

Are any of these concepts right? How can we know the truth of the matter? Again, we look into God’s written Word to find the truth. But before we do that, let’s consider what effect some of these concepts have had on people.

Those who claim that Christ was “fully God and fully man” have, first of all, created a contradiction. If you are fully one thing, then you can’t be fully something else; even more so if the two things don’t correlate. So, if we say that Christ was “fully God,” then He could not also have been “fully man.” In the same way, if something is fully animal, then it cannot be fully human (a scientific fact that is true in spite of the erroneous ideas of the satanic concept of evolution, according to which a man is just the last evolutionary step within the animal world. For more information, please read our free booklet, “*The Theory of Evolution—a Fairy Tale for Adults?*”) A horse cannot be fully a horse and fully a cat. A flower cannot be fully a flower and fully a bird. To think that Christ was fully God and fully man is just as ludicrous as the

forementioned examples! The retort that this is a mystery which cannot be understood is Biblically incongruous, as the Bible is God's word in print, and He *HAS REVEALED* to His disciples just who and what Christ was when He was here on earth, and for a very good reason! **Without an understanding of the mystery of Christ, we could not accept His sacrifice, our sins would not be forgiven, and we would have no hope of our ultimate resurrection!**

The Bible is clear that humanity and immortality are exclusive of each other—they are separate. Paul says that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:50). The Bible teaches that it is the potential of man to become a member of the God Family. (This important truth is more fully explained in our free booklet, "*The Gospel of the Kingdom of God*.") This means that man must be changed into spirit (1 Corinthians 15:51–52, 42–49) *before* he can attain immortality and enter the Kingdom of God. We read that God is not a man that He would lie (Numbers 23:19). We read that it is impossible for God to lie (Titus 1:2). It is impossible for God to SIN! He cannot even be *tempted* to sin (James 1:13). And most importantly, it is impossible for God to DIE (compare 1 Timothy 6:16; see also Luke 20:35–36). But we read that Christ is the One "who lives, and was dead, and behold," He is "alive forevermore" (Revelation 1:18). We are told that Christ, as God, now "lives forever and ever" (Revelation 4:9). But as a human, He did die, and was then resurrected from the DEAD (1 Corinthians 15:12–13, 16).

So, then, if Christ was fully God when He was here on earth, as some have reasoned, He could not have died; therefore, He could not have become a sacrifice for us. In addition, if Christ was fully God while He was here on earth, He could not have overcome sin *in the flesh* (compare Romans 8:3). Again, He could not have become the perfect sacrifice for us.

Some say that Christ did not die. They use the argument that He was fully God and somehow covered Himself with a fleshly mantle, like a piece of cloth, and so did not die. They reason that while Jesus—the earthly shell—died, the true Son of God—Christ—stood right next to Him. Orthodox Christianity, in fact, teaches the concept that the Son of God never died. In doing so, they reject the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. They say that since Christ was fully God, He did not

really overcome sin because it was impossible for Him to sin. They further reason that Satan thought he could tempt Christ to sin, but Christ, as God, could not be tempted to sin, as God cannot be tempted to sin. Therefore, Christ did not really have to struggle against sin, as it was impossible for Him to sin, so the argument goes.

Sadly, some of these ideas have been embraced over time by some of the splintering entities of the true Church of God, but ALL of these concepts are unbiblical and dangerously WRONG! Casting all wrong concepts aside then, let's turn to the Bible, the inspired Word of God, for the truth.

JESUS CHRIST CAME IN THE FLESH

God clearly reveals who and what Christ was when He was here on earth, and He also tells us that people have been deceived by the “spirit of antichrist” if they don't accept this clear Biblical revelation. 1 John 2:22–23 warns us: “Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.”

What, exactly, is the “spirit of antichrist”? We are told that one follows the “spirit of antichrist” if one denies Jesus Christ. But in what way, specifically, does the “spirit of antichrist” deny Jesus Christ? 1 John 4:2 tells us: “By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ HAS COME IN THE FLESH is of God.”

The “spirit of antichrist,” then, denies that Jesus Christ actually CAME IN THE FLESH. But just how did Christ come in the flesh? By clothing Himself with a flesh-like mantle? Or by materializing or manifesting Himself as a human being like angels are able to do (compare Hebrews 13:2)? Did Christ only “manifest” Himself as a human being without actually BECOMING a human being? We know that Christ—before He was born of the virgin Mary—appeared to the ancients, like Abraham, *looking like* a human being without actually *being* human (John 8:54–58). Is that the way Christ “came in the flesh” as referenced in 1 John 4:2?

A closer look at the Biblical explanation reveals just HOW Christ “came in the flesh.” 1 John 4:14 points out: “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.” Christ

came in the flesh to be the SAVIOR of man. This means that whatever He did while in the flesh would lead to man's ultimate salvation. As we will see, when Christ came in the flesh—lived as a human being—HE HAD TO OVERCOME SIN. He had to CONQUER SIN IN THE FLESH!

Notice 2 John 7: “For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.” The *New King James Bible* correctly translates that the spirit of antichrist denies Christ as “coming” in the flesh. Christ not only *came* in the flesh in the past, but He *is still coming in the flesh TODAY!* That is to say that Christ lives today IN His disciples who are flesh and blood (compare Galatians 2:20). In so doing, He gives His disciples the power to overcome sin while in the flesh.

Do you see the parallel? Christ came in the flesh—born as a human being—to overcome sin in the flesh. He was able to do that only through the power of God's Holy Spirit within Him. Today, we who are in the flesh have the same power available to us to overcome sin—the power of the Holy Spirit in us, which is the power of God, the Father, AND of Jesus Christ, the Son.

JESUS CHRIST WAS FULLY MAN

How, exactly, did Christ come in the flesh? Was He, at that very time, “fully God and fully man”? Was He “fully God”? Or was He “fully man”?

Notice the clear revelation of this mystery in John 1:14: “And the Word [the “Word” referring to Jesus Christ, Who in the beginning was God and was with God the Father, John 1:1–2] BECAME flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Did you catch this all-important statement? Read it again! Are you willing to BELIEVE what God says here without arguing against it? Are you willing to release your preconceived notions and ideas about Christ “coming in the flesh” and to replace them with the truth as revealed by God Himself in the Bible?

God clearly tells us that the Word—Jesus Christ—who was God before His human birth, BECAME flesh. Christ came in the flesh by BECOMING flesh. This means that He became totally and fully flesh

and blood, like you and I! This is CRUCIAL for you to understand! When Christ BECAME flesh, He was no longer Spirit. He was no longer fully God, because He had become fully man!

Think for a moment about the word “became.” When a poor person becomes rich, he is no longer poor. When a person becomes sick, he is, at that point in time, no longer healthy. When a woman becomes pregnant, she is, at that point in time, no longer barren. Likewise, when the Word became flesh, He was no longer Spirit. He was no longer an immortal God being as He was before.

When Mary became pregnant with Jesus, how did that happen? We read that the Holy Spirit of God, the Father, came upon her—that the power of God overshadowed her (Luke 1:35). From this we can understand that through the Holy Spirit, God, the Father, changed the all-powerful Spirit being, Jesus Christ, into a tiny physical human sperm, fertilizing the egg in the womb of Mary, thus impregnating her. The fetus grew within Mary’s womb like any other human fetus. Jesus was born as a little baby like every other human baby. He was fully flesh, just like you and I are fully flesh.

Every human being has within him or her, the spirit in man, and, if converted, we also have dwelling within us the Spirit of God (Romans 8:12–16; 1 Corinthians 2:9–12). The same was true, then, for Jesus Christ. He had the spirit in man from conception because He was fully human. In addition, Christ had God’s Holy Spirit dwelling within Him, but He had God’s Spirit without measure or limit—given at conception—which is how he was able to overcome sin in the flesh.

We read in John 3:34, in the *Authorized Version*, that God the Father gave Christ the Spirit without measure: “For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God; for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.” Some feel that the words “unto him”—as referring to Christ—are not in the original text. Whether they are or not, John was clearly talking about Christ in the context of the One whom God, the Father, had sent to speak the words of God. When it comes to us, we DO receive the Holy Spirit “with measure,” meaning in a limited way. (Compare 2 Corinthians 1:22, *New American Bible*: “[God the Father] has also put his seal upon us and given the Spirit in our hearts as a first installment.”) When we are baptized, we don’t immediately receive all of the fullness of God’s Spirit. Rather, we need to **GROW** into all the

fullness of God. Christ, however, had the entirety of God's Spirit, which is a Spirit of POWER. This is HOW He was able to do the mighty miracles that He did.

Notice Acts 10:36–38: “The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, FOR GOD WAS WITH HIM.”

Christ said about Himself, that left to His own humanity, He could do nothing, and that the Father, through His Spirit, gave Christ the power and strength to do what He was able to do as a human being (John 5:30).

Some say that Christ was fully God, when here on earth, as it says that the **fullness of God dwells in Him bodily**, referring to Colossians 2:9–10 to support their claim. However, this passage does not say what they claim it says. We read: “For in Him dwells all the fullness of God bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”

First of all, this passage talks about the present—not necessarily the past. It says that the fullness of God “dwells,” not “dwelled,” in Christ bodily. Today, God's fullness dwells in Christ because Christ is God. Some claim that this could not be talking about Christ today as Christ, as a Spirit being does not have a “body.” This retort is unfounded, as the Bible clearly teaches that Spirit beings have spiritual bodies; that is, their bodies are composed of Spirit (compare 1 Corinthians 15:44. There is much more detail about this in our free booklet, “**Angels, Demons and the Spirit World.**”) But even if we were to apply this Scripture to Christ when He was here on earth and in the flesh, it would be accurate as well, in this way: God's Spirit dwelled in Christ without measure. Therefore, the fullness of God, through His Holy Spirit, dwelled in Christ when He was in the flesh.

Breaking this down further, let us discuss the word “bodily.” The Greek word for “bodily” is “*somatikos*.” This word is derived from the Greek word, “*soma*,” meaning “body.” It refers many times to the church, the BODY of Christ (compare Colossians 1:18, 24; 2:19). Christ is

today the Head of the church. His fullness dwells in His body, the church. Notice the analogy in Colossians 2:10 (“...you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”). Because Christ’s fullness dwells in His body, the church, we are complete in Him. This is not to say that we are already perfect or that the fullness of God dwells already in each and every one of us. But it does show that the fullness of Christ is available to us. We’ll come back to this in a moment.

Now notice Colossians 1:19: “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell.”

Again, this statement could refer to Christ now, as a God being, and it could refer to the fullness of God’s Spirit dwelling in Christ when He was here on the earth as a human being. Notice that the Scripture does NOT say that Christ was fully God when He was here on earth. Rather, that the fullness of God (the Father) should dwell IN Him, in the same way as the fullness of God should dwell in US. Notice Ephesians 3:19: “... to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

The fullness of God should dwell in us too, ultimately. It is already available to us today through the Holy Spirit in us, but due to our human limitations, we have not been able to take advantage of the FULLNESS of God’s Holy Spirit. Rather, we are told that we have to GROW in the knowledge of Christ to “a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). Or, as the *New Jerusalem Bible* translates Ephesians 4:13, we need to become “fully mature, with the fullness of Christ Himself.”

We are to *become* perfect, as God is perfect (Matthew 5:48). We are to *grow* in the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are to receive more and more of God’s Holy Spirit, until finally, the fullness of God can dwell in us, too, so that, at the time of our resurrection, we will be changed to a God being. Then we will be fully God, as Jesus Christ today is fully God. But until then, we are not fully God, just as Christ was not fully God before His resurrection.

Now notice Ephesians 1:22–23: “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” Here “the fullness of Him” could refer to God the Father’s fullness dwelling in Christ, but it could also refer to God’s fullness dwelling in Christ’s body, the church,

again pointing out that the church is to *grow* spiritually to reach perfection in order to come to “the measure of the stature of the FULLNESS of Christ.”

It is interesting how the *Philips* translation renders Ephesians 1:23: “...and in that body lives fully the one who fills the whole universe.”

No matter how we look at the Scriptures dealing with the fullness of God in Christ and the fullness of Christ in us, none of the passages say that Christ was fully God when He was here on earth in the flesh. They do not contradict the truth that Christ was fully man, like you and I are fully human today, even though God’s Spirit dwells in us. Christ even told us that we will be able, with the help of God’s Holy Spirit, to do mightier works and miracles than He did (John 14:12).

We read that Jesus said that He could do nothing of Himself (John 5:19, 30). When in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed to God, the Father, for strength and God sent an angel to strengthen Him. He knew that the Father could do everything and that nothing was impossible for the Father (Luke 22:40–46; Matthew 26:39–42).

JESUS CHRIST DIED A PHYSICAL DEATH

It was absolutely NECESSARY for Christ to become FULLY MAN, because only in that way could He become the Savior of man. Notice this in 1 Corinthians 15:21: “For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.” We are told that “by MAN came the resurrection of the dead.” We read that Christ was DEAD. HE HIMSELF had died—the person that He was—the Son of God Who had become Man. Revelation 1:18 confirms that HE was dead, not just a part of Him.

Philippians 2:8 adds that “He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of DEATH, even the death of the cross.”

He died the first death, a physical death. He did not die the second death, the final death, mentioned in Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; and 21:8. If He had died the second death, then, again, we would have no Savior, and God, the Father, would not have resurrected Him to eternal life. Neither would we have any hope of being resurrected to eternal life in the future.

Romans 6:9 confirms that Christ DID die the first death: “... knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death

NO LONGER has dominion over Him.” So, we see that death had dominion over Him, when He was here on earth, in the flesh—He died the first death.

Romans 14:9 adds: “For to this end Christ DIED and rose and LIVED AGAIN, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.” This passage defines death and life as opposites: Christ died, and when He was resurrected, He lived again. He did NOT LIVE while He was dead!

1 Corinthians 15:3–4, 13, 15–16, 20 reveal that orthodox Christianity is hopelessly confused on the issue of life and death. When we are dead, we are no longer alive. When Christ died, HE WAS DEAD. Paul says in the aforementioned Scriptures: “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. . . . But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. . . . Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. . . . But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” If there is no resurrection from the dead, then Christ was not raised from the dead. This would mean that Christ would still be dead, and, again, we would have no hope of our future resurrection.

Some teach that Christ rose Himself up from the dead, since, so they say, Christ, the Son of God, never died, only His “human mantle” did. They falsely claim that the alleged immortal Son of God—Christ—raised Himself up. They postulate that Christ—the Son of God—raised up the human mortal Jesus. This ABOMINABLE HERESY is nowhere taught in the Bible! We just read the truth of the matter—it was God, the FATHER, who raised CHRIST from the dead.

Some regard John 2:18–22 as alleged proof that Christ raised Himself up. This passage does not teach this. It says: “So the Jews answered and said to Him, ‘What sign do You show to us, since you do these things?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ Then the Jews said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?’ But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them;

and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.”

Christ prophesied that He would raise the temple of His body within three days. We know from other Scriptures that Christ died, and that the Father brought Him back to life. The Bible teaches that the Father raised up Christ. (Compare Galatians 1:1: “Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead)...”). When a person dies, his spirit—the spirit in man—returns to God who gave it (compare 1 Corinthians 2:11; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 23:46).

For instance, Scripture reports an incident of God resurrecting a girl from the dead so soon after death that her body had not decayed. God placed the spirit of that person back into the same body (compare Luke 8:51–55). Of course, when the body has decayed, God creates a new body—either physical or spiritual—into which He gives the spirit of that person (Ezekiel 37:1–8; 1 Corinthians 15:35–49). When Christ died and was brought back to life shortly thereafter as an immortal spirit being, God CHANGED His physical body (which had not yet decayed) into a spirit body. That is why Christ, after His resurrection, could go through closed doors (John 20:19), and it is also why He could disappear after He had materialized Himself in a bodily, albeit different form (Mark 16:12; Luke 24:13–16, 31). In fact, when Christ returns, His disciples will be resurrected to immortality and those who will still be alive at that time will be CHANGED to spirit beings (compare 1 Thessalonians 4:17; 1 Corinthians 15:51–52).

After three days and three nights in the grave, God the Father changed Christ’s physical dead body to spirit and gave Him the spirit in man that He had when He was human, as well as God’s Holy Spirit that He had from conception. Christ was brought back to life. He got up, and at THAT moment, He fulfilled the prophecy that He had given to the Jews—He raised up His body. In other words, He was lying on the ground, but when He received life from God the Father, He got up from the ground. The word for “raise up” (in Greek, “*egeiro*”), as used in John 2:19, is used many times to describe someone who simply stands up. It is used in Mark 1:31; 9:27, and in Acts 3:7, as well as in James 5:15. In all of those cases, sick people stood up from their sick bed. God “raises or lifts” them up by giving them the power or strength to stand or to get up.

So then we see that John 2:18–22 does not teach that Christ raised

Himself up from the dead. Rather, it teaches that after God the Father resurrected Him from the dead, Christ raised up the temple of His *body*, by getting up.

Some say that John 10:17–18 teaches that Christ was not really dead but that He raised Himself up *from* the dead. Let's note what this Scripture says: "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

The Greek word for power is "*exousia*" and means "privilege or authority." It is not the word "*dunamis*," which is more commonly used and is also translated as power, which describes power in the way of ability. In other words, God, the Father, granted Christ the privilege to die for man. Christ then willingly *gave* His life. He said that man did not really take it away from Him, against His will. He came to die for the world, willingly.

He said, "...I have power [better—the privilege] to take it again." The Greek word for "take" is "*lambano*." It can also mean "receive" (compare *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible*). For instance, we read in Matthew 7:8 that everyone who asks "receives." In the Greek, the word for "receives" is "*lambano*." The *Authorized Version* translates Galatians 2:6 as, "God accepteth no man's person." In the Greek, the word for "accepteth" is "*lambano*." In other words, Christ took—received or accepted—what was given to Him. God, the Father, gave Him eternal life, and He received, or took, or accepted it.

Jesus was not preaching here that He would raise Himself up by giving Himself eternal life. That very idea is preposterous!

We have established, then, that Christ did die. Further confirmation can be found in 2 Corinthians 5:15. So then, in order to be able to die a physical death, He had to be a *human being*.

Hebrews 2:9 teaches very powerfully that Christ died just as all humans die. In fact, He HAD to die that way in order to "...*taste* death for everyone." We read: "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, *for the suffering of death* crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone."

Christ was made lower than the angels, which means that He became a human being so that He *could* die. We are told that He was

made lower than the angels FOR the suffering of DEATH. As a Spirit being, He *could not have died*. He had to become a human being in order to DIE. He was to taste DEATH for everyone!

This concept is extremely important to fully grasp and understand! And it is essential that we correctly understand the ramifications and consequences of Christ's humanity. We have read multiple Scriptures that show that Jesus Christ *became* flesh—that He *came in the flesh*—so that He could die. The only way that Christ—who had been GOD since all eternity—could die, was to *become* flesh. **When He became flesh, He was totally human! He was no longer God, the all-powerful Spirit being!** He was certainly not half god/half human like the Greek mythological figure, Hercules, who is portrayed as being the offspring of the Greek god Zeus and a human mother, having great powers but still being earth-bound.

When Christ became flesh, He gave up all of His divine attributes and powers. Simply put, He became a man so that He could die! He was no longer a Spirit being, He was no longer God as we think of God, since God, a Spirit being, cannot die (compare Luke 20:35–36; Isaiah 57:15; 1 Timothy 6:16; 1 Timothy 1:17).

CHRIST OVERCAME SIN IN THE FLESH

We have hammered home the point that the reason Christ became human was so that he could die a physical death. However, there is another reason why He became human. Christ became flesh so that He could overcome sin in the flesh. He had to prove that it is possible for man, with the help of God's Holy Spirit within him, to overcome sin! In fact, Christ COMMANDS us to overcome sin so that we can inherit the Kingdom of God.

We read in Hebrews 2:14–18: “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore in all things He had to be made like His brethren... For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted...”

Christ was tempted in all points, as we are, but He stayed sinless

(Hebrews 4:15, “[He] was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”). He overcame sin in the flesh, resisting temptation (Revelation 3:21). God, a powerful perfect Spirit being—cannot be tempted (compare James 1:13). But we read that Christ WAS tempted. This proves that He was not the all-powerful perfect Spirit being when He was here on this earth that He HAD been prior to His birth as a human being. It shows that it was NOT IMPOSSIBLE for Christ to sin. Christ had become a flesh-and-blood human being, with human nature, who COULD HAVE SINNED.

Romans 8:3 tells us: “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh [human beings, all by themselves, without God’s Spirit dwelling in them, are too weak to keep the law], God did by sending His own Son *in the likeness of sinful flesh*, on account of sin: He **condemned sin in the flesh.**” In other words, He OVERCAME SIN as a human being.

In that Christ condemned sin in the flesh, He made it possible for us to do the same, as Romans 8:4 explains: “that the righteous requirement of the law *might be fulfilled in us* who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

We understand, of course, that God, the Father, had total and complete confidence in Christ that He *would not* sin. But success was not guaranteed. There was always the possibility, however slim, of failure as long as He was human. It was not impossible for Christ to sin. That is why He had to *struggle* in the days of His flesh, *so that* He would not sin. Notice Hebrews 5:7: “... who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, *with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death*, and **was heard** because of His godly fear...”

God, the Father, heard His pleas. The Father gave Christ strength to not sin, through His Holy Spirit, thereby saving Him from the SECOND death—permanent, eternal death. Christ was **not** saved from the first death—physical death as a human being. In fact, He had to experience the first death in order to free all of us who want to be freed from the second death!

As further proof that Christ was fully man, consider these additional Scriptures:

John 4:6 tells us: “Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being

wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well.” Notice that Christ was *wearied* from His journey. God, of course, the all-powerful Spirit being called God, is never weary as Isaiah 40:28 tells us. When Christ was in the God-state before His human birth, He did not become weary. But when Christ lived in the man-state, He did become weary, just as we human beings do.

Matthew 9 describes one of the mighty miracles that Christ performed. Verse 8 concludes: “Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified GOD, who had given such power TO MEN.” God, the Father, had given the power to perform miracles to the Man, Jesus Christ, as well as to Christ’s disciples.

It was Christ, the Son of God—the One who had been God and who became Man—who overcame sin in the flesh and died for us so that we need not die “the second death” for our sins (Revelation 2:11). When we accept Christ’s sacrifice, we fully understand that the immortal and eternal God being, Jesus Christ—the second member of the God Family—gave up His divine nature and BECAME a flesh-and-blood human being so that He could die for you and me. As the God being that He was, His life was much more valuable than the lives of *all* human beings combined, since He was the one who created all of mankind. And in becoming a human being, He paid—as a human being—the death penalty that human beings brought upon themselves by sinning against God’s law. (The wages of sin is death, Romans 6:23.) When we understand all of that and choose to embrace Christ’s way of life, but then willfully turn away and reject Him permanently, there is no further sacrifice available to us. Hebrews 10:29 points out: “Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?”

Notice from the above Scripture that it was “the Son of God” who died for us. When Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died, there was only one God being left alive—God, the Father. For three long days and three long nights the Father was alone, until He brought Jesus Christ back to life as the eternal and immortal God being He had been before He became human. He was God, the Son—the “Word”—through whom all things were made (again, see John 1:1–3).

It is therefore Scripturally false to say that Christ, when He was

here on this earth, was fully God and fully man. CHRIST WAS FULLY MAN! He was no longer the powerful and immortal God being that He had been before.

GOD WITH US?

Having established that fact, why, then, do we read that Christ would be called “Immanuel,” which means, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23)? And why do we read that people worshipped Christ (Matthew 8:2), since only God is worthy of worship (Matthew 4:10; Revelation 22:8–9)?

Based on what we have already read in the Bible, the answer should be obvious. Christ had been an immortal God being. He was changed into a human being, but He was still the *same personage* He had been since all eternity. Christ, who became human, was still the personage He had always been. He was still the one who had previously met with Abraham, the one who created Adam and Eve, and the one who spoke to Moses face-to-face. He lived as a human being—growing as children do, developing into a young man, and then becoming a rabbi, or teacher, in Judah. But He was still the same individual that He had always been. He had been an immortal God being and He knew that He would become an immortal God being again, subject to qualifying by being and remaining sinless.

By way of analogy, a powerful ruler over a nation may become a poor slave of a conquering empire. But he would always remember who he had been—the king. When King David had to flee from Absalom when he took over Jerusalem, usurping David’s power and becoming king over Jerusalem (compare 2 Samuel 15:34; 16:16), David was still referred to as “King David” (2 Samuel 16:5). David was not in a position to carry out his powers as king at that moment in time, but he had been the king, and he would again become the ruling king over Jerusalem.

Also, in the United States, we still call former presidents by the title of president even though they do not carry out the function of president after they leave office. We still refer to the late President Reagan, President Carter, President Ford, President Clinton, or President George Bush, although they no longer carry out the office of president. In the same way, the Bible referred to someone as a “high priest” even though he was not currently a high priest, but was a former high priest. (Compare John 18:13, 19, 24 where both Annas and Caiaphas are called

“high priest,” although only Caiaphas was the high priest “that year.”)

The same is true, in that sense, for Christ. He HAD BEEN God since all eternity. It was HE who had created man. He Himself identified Himself as the “I am.” He said, “Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58). In John 18:5–6, He identified Himself to those who had come to arrest Him, as the “I AM.” (The word “He” is in italics; it is not in the original Greek and was added by the translators). Christ, when He was here on earth, was, quite literally, Immanuel, or, “God with us.” He was the Son of God who had become a man.

Herbert Armstrong wrote in his article, “Is Jesus God?”: “Jesus was God made mortal human flesh, ‘for the suffering of death.’ So Jesus... was changed into flesh so He could die for our sins... Christ... had now been changed into flesh—still having the personality and will to do right which distinguished Him as an entity—yet now had become human, having human nature with all of its desires, weaknesses and lusts... God cannot be tempted. Yet Jesus Christ was tempted in all points like we are. He was human. He was tempted through the lusts of His human nature (inherited from Mary)...”

Who WAS Christ? Christ was God Eternal, who BECAME man, so that man COULD ultimately become God! Christ was tempted, He suffered, and He died as a man.

Who IS Christ Now? Christ is God. Christ, the man, was resurrected by God, the Father, as the mighty and powerful God being that He had always been before His days in the flesh. He is now the mighty God for whom we wait to bring us redemption, salvation, and eternal life in the very Kingdom of God (Titus 2:11–14)!

Part 3

CHRIST'S RELATIVES

Was Jesus the only child of Joseph and Mary? Did Mary have other children, or did she stay a perpetual virgin, as some claim? And if Christ did have brothers and sisters, does the Bible tell us about them, or are there other historical records that correlate with the Biblical record?

The question of whether Jesus was Mary's only Son has confused many people and has even caused at least one major religion to come to very erroneous and, for that matter, unbiblical concepts. Let us examine what God's Word tells us about Christ's relatives.

We find a description of Christ's physical genealogy in the 1st chapter of the book of Matthew. Verse 16 tells us that this record explains Christ's lineage through His stepfather Joseph: "Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ."

When we turn to the 3rd chapter of the book of Luke, beginning in verse 23, we find *another* record of Christ's genealogy. This record does *not* describe Christ's lineage through Joseph, but His descent from His mother, Mary. Verse 23 reads, as translated in the *New King James Bible*: "Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli..."

This rendering gives the impression that Joseph was the son of Heli, and that Luke is describing Christ's genealogy through His stepfather Joseph. This is not correct, however, as Joseph was *not* a son of Heli, but of Jacob, as we read in Matthew 1:16.

Luke is, in fact, setting forth Christ's genealogy *through His mother Mary*, NOT through His stepfather Joseph. Accurately translated, Luke 3:23 should read: "Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, (being, as was supposed the son of Joseph), which was of Heli..." The parenthesis should start with the words, "being, as was supposed," and it should end after "the son of Joseph."

The word "son" in "son of Heli" cannot be found in the original Greek text. It was added by the translators. So Jesus, who was supposed to be a son of Joseph, was, through Mary, a grandson of Heli. To put it

still differently, Heli was the father of Mary.

Luke 3:23 tells us, though, that Jesus was considered to be a son of Joseph, since people at that time did not accept the idea that Jesus had been supernaturally conceived in Mary's womb through God's Holy Spirit (compare Luke 1:26–35).

The reaction to this truth by the people at Christ's time can be found in several passages. For instance, we read in Luke 4:22: "So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, 'Is this not Joseph's son?'"

They erroneously believed that Christ was the natural offspring of Joseph and Mary. John 6:41–42 tells us: "The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, 'I am the bread which came down from heaven.' And they said: 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?'"

To summarize, the genealogy of Matthew sets forth the *legal lineage* of Jesus through His stepfather Joseph, while the genealogy in Luke sets forth the *real lineage* of Jesus through His mother Mary.

When returning to Matthew's record of Christ's genealogy, we notice that Matthew does not neglect to mention that Jesus' legal genealogy included ancestors who had committed adultery (such as Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, verse 6). Ruth, the Moabitess (compare Ruth 2:2), who married Boaz (Matthew 1:5), is also included. Some claim that Ruth was an Israelite in a foreign land—that she was a "Moabitess" because of geography rather than by natural birth. In any event, we find that God does not have any prejudice against any nation or race, and that any sinner—regardless of his race, ethnic background, color or descent—who repents can obtain forgiveness and become a member of the Family of God (compare Galatians 3:26–29).

MARY'S BETROTHAL TO JOSEPH

We should take note of another important fact when considering the relationship of Joseph and Mary prior to Mary's conception. We read in Matthew 1:18–20: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about

these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.’”

The angel told Joseph that he and Mary were already considered to be husband and wife. But they had not consummated the marriage yet—they were living in the state of betrothal. Legally speaking, they were married, but they had not come together, sexually, as husband and wife.

The concept of betrothal is quite different from today’s concept of engagement. In our society the word “engagement” does not seem to carry much value, as people commonly get engaged and then dissolve the engagement without legal consequence. In ancient Israel and Judah, a betrothal was considered to be a *binding agreement*, and could only be dissolved through divorce. This is why Joseph wanted to “put her away,” a Biblical expression for divorce.

The *Luther Bible* comments on “betrothal”: “The Jewish engagement constitutes a legally binding marital promise. The marital intercourse only occurs, however, after the wedding, when the bridegroom takes the bride into his home.”

Eerdman’s Handbook to the Bible states, “Betrothal, unlike modern engagement, was legally binding and could be broken only by divorce.”

Since Mary became pregnant through God’s Holy Spirit prior to the consummation of her marriage to Joseph, the Jews would later claim that Mary had committed fornication and that Jesus was the product of such fornication. We read in John 8:41: “... Then they said to Him, ‘We were not born of fornication...’”

When Joseph realized that Mary was pregnant, he, too, believed that Mary had committed fornication and initially wanted to put her away. But since Joseph was a just man, he did not want to make a public example of Mary, so he was trying to divorce her secretly. As an example of the seriousness of fornication or adultery at that time in that society, the hypocritical and merciless Pharisees would later drag a woman caught in the act of adultery into a public spectacle before Christ to have Him condemn her (compare John 8: 3). Joseph, by contrast, was not anxious to announce Mary’s supposed sin to the world. Having made a commitment to marry her, he was obviously deeply hurt, but because he loved Mary, he was willing to cover her sin rather than make a display of her (compare Proverbs 10:12).

It is interesting to realize that both Joseph and Mary were righteous people who were diligent in keeping God's laws, including God's ritual laws, which were still in effect at that time. (Only when Christ died were the temporary sacrifices and rituals done away.)

We read in the book of Luke that Mary and Joseph carefully observed the temporary ritual laws, still in force and effect at the time of Christ's birth (Luke 2:21–24, 27, 39), as well as God's permanent laws (Luke 2:41–42).

This does not mean, however, that Mary and Joseph were converted. There is no hint in the Bible that Joseph became converted during his life, and neither do we read that Mary was converted during the time of Jesus' human life here on earth.

Returning to Matthew's account of Jesus' lineage, we realize that Matthew, who described Christ's lineage through Joseph, actually *emphasized* the role Joseph had in his own family and toward Jesus. Matthew wanted to stress the Biblical teaching that Joseph, as long as he was alive, was the rightful leader of the family—the head of the family—not Mary and not Jesus.

We have already read in Matthew 1:20 that the angel appeared to Joseph to give him instructions as to how to conduct himself in this regard. Matthew 1:21, 25 points out that the angel told Joseph to call the name of the child, "JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins," and that Joseph in fact "called His name JESUS."

Matthew emphasized *Joseph's* role in giving the boy the name "Jesus." In the parallel account in Luke 1:31, we find that the angel tells Mary to name the boy. There is no contradiction, however, for we read in Luke 2:21: "His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel."

Since the angel told *both* Joseph and Mary, on different occasions, what the name of the boy should be, it is clear that both Joseph and Mary named the boy—there was no doubt in the minds of either one of them that this had to be the name for the boy. But Joseph was the leader, so *he did it*, while Mary, of course, agreed with that decision, knowing that it was in accordance with the will of God.

We find further confirmation of Joseph's dominant role as head of the family in Matthew's account in the 2nd chapter of Matthew, verses 13–14, 19–22. The angel appeared to *Joseph* in a dream, telling him to take the mother and the child and to flee to Egypt, and then later to

return to the region of Galilee. Within this region, Joseph then was inspired to choose the city of Nazareth for his family to dwell in (verse 23).

In the account of Luke, however, there is emphasis on the important role of Christ's mother, Mary. Recall that Luke described Christ's genealogy through Mary and the appearance of the angel to Mary. Luke also mentioned Mary's visit to Elizabeth, and when the shepherds approached the young couple and Jesus, Mary was mentioned first (Luke 2:16). The prophet Simeon spoke directly to Mary in the temple (Luke 2:34–35). Also, when the couple was looking for the 12 year-old Jesus and found Him in the temple, it is, again, Mary who spoke (not, however, as the leader of the household) in Luke 2:48: "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." Christ did not rebel against the leadership of His mother and His stepfather; in fact, we read: "Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject [margin: obedient] to them..." (Luke 2:51).

There was no question who was leading the family. But Luke's emphasis of Mary makes one thing very clear: that Mary was an extraordinary woman, and God, when dealing with people, does not distinguish between men and women—all are potentially heirs and co-heirs with Christ.

We need to understand, too, that Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience, who would have expected to see that emphasis was placed on the husband as the leader of the family. Also, Matthew started the genealogy with Abraham, stressing the point to the Jewish audience that Christ—through Joseph—was a descendant of Abraham.

Luke, on the other hand, wrote to a Gentile convert, the "most excellent Theophilus" (Luke 1:3). His genealogy of Christ, through Mary, went all the way back to Adam, showing that Mary, Christ's mother, was the descendant from *all* generations of humans. Luke wanted to show, as well, how God had dealt with a Jewish woman, since women were known to be quite influential in Roman and Greek families.

It is also believed by some scholars that Matthew received his account, at least in regard to the birth of Christ and Christ's early years, directly from Joseph, while Luke is believed to have received the information for his account directly from Mary (compare *Halley's Bible Handbook*, copyright 1959, page 488).

JESUS HAD BROTHERS AND SISTERS

How extraordinary the woman was who became the mother of Christ can be seen by the fact that Mary was a virgin when she conceived, thereby fulfilling Old Testament prophecies. We read in Matthew 1:22–25: “So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’ Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and *did not know her...*”

Mary was a virgin. She brought forth Jesus Christ, although she had not known a man. The fact of the “Virgin Birth” has been questioned, even by so-called professing Christians. *Halley* counters this criticism as succinctly as anybody, when he writes: “Both [accounts in Matthew and Luke] state plainly, explicitly, unmistakably and unequivocally that Jesus was born of a virgin. From the beginning, in unbroken sequence, it has been held as a tenet of the church, till the rise of modern criticism. If we believe in the deity of Jesus and his resurrection from the dead, what is gained by discrediting the virgin birth? The resurrection is the greatest of miracles. If we do not believe that, why concern ourselves with Christ at all? If we do believe it, then why carp at the other parts of the miraculous story? His supernatural exit from the world presupposes a supernatural entrance into the world. To call Jesus an illegitimate child is nothing less than blasphemy” (p. 488).

The “Virgin Birth” is clearly taught in Scripture. However, the Bible does not teach that Mary *stayed* a virgin for the rest of her life. We read in Matthew 1:25 that Joseph “did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son.”

The word “till” or “until” signifies that after the birth of Jesus, Joseph DID “know her,” that is, he did have a sexual relationship with her. Let us note several passages, where the word “till” or “until” is used.

Matthew 2:15 tells us that Joseph, Mary and Christ were in Egypt “until the death of Herod.” In Matthew 5:26, Christ said that a debtor will not get out of prison “till” he has paid the last penny. In both cases, the word “till” or “until” describes a change in circumstances.

After Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph did have intercourse, and they did produce children. That means that Christ did have brothers

and sisters! And it also means that Mary did not *remain* a virgin after the birth of Jesus!

Luke 2:6–7 confirms this: “So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her *firstborn* Son...” The Greek word for “firstborn” is, “*prototokon*.” It means, “first-born,” but it does not describe an *only* child. The word for “only-born” is “*monogenes*.” In Luke 7:12, the word “*monogenes*” is used, when describing a person who was “the only son of his mother.”

The Jews knew that Jesus was *not* the only son of Mary. They knew very well that Jesus had brothers and sisters. We read the account in Matthew 13:53–56: “Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there. When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, ‘Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter’s Son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?’”

Christ’s audience knew that He had brothers and sisters. Four brothers are mentioned by name—James; Joses or Joseph; Simon; and Judas or Jude. Notice also the Jews’ reference to ALL of His sisters. They asked whether ALL His sisters were with them. This seems to strongly indicate that Christ had *at least* three sisters. If He had only two, the Jews would have said, “Are not His sisters with us?” or, “Are not both of His sisters with us?”

Still, some doubt that Christ had brothers and sisters. In relying on some apocryphal sources and rejecting the “most normal interpretation of the New Testament,” as the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* puts it (under, “James, Brother of Jesus”), they say that the brothers and sisters were Joseph’s children from a prior marriage. This view is favored by the Greek Orthodox Church and other Eastern churches. But the Bible says nowhere that Joseph had been married before. This idea also contradicts the fact that Christ is called Mary’s FIRST-BORN Son, and that the Bible said that Joseph waited to “know” Mary UNTIL she had brought forth her FIRSTBORN Son.

Halley’s Bible Handbook points out on pages 416, 418: “[Joseph] was a carpenter, and the head of a family of at least seven children... He

surely must have been a good and exemplary man...Who were the 'brothers' and 'sisters' of Jesus...Mary's own children? Or children of Joseph by a former marriage? The plain, simple, natural meaning of these passages is that they were Mary's own children. This is the opinion commonly held among Bible commentaries."

Some teach that Christ's "brothers" were in fact Christ's cousins. This is the official position of the Roman Catholic Church, although this has recently been criticized by Catholic scholars who have concluded that the brothers were, in fact, Christ's real brothers and not His cousins. The word for brother is "*adelphos*." This Greek word is used in Matthew 1:2 and 4:21, clearly referring to literal brothers. The word for cousin is "*exadelphos*," meaning "*from* brothers." When the Jews pointed out in Matthew 13 that Christ's **brothers** were with them, they used the word "*adelphos*," not the word "*exadelphos*."

Some propose that the brothers and sisters mentioned in Matthew 13 were Christ's *spiritual* brothers and sisters, not His *physical* siblings. But as we will see, the Bible makes a clear distinction between Christ's *physical* brothers and His *spiritual* brothers. In addition, as we will explain, Christ's physical relatives did not believe in Him and so they could not possibly have been referred to as Christ's spiritual brothers and sisters.

It is, therefore, clear from the Biblical evidence that: 1) Mary did not remain a virgin throughout her life; and 2) Jesus Christ had at least four brothers and most likely at least three or more sisters.

JESUS' RELATIVES WERE NOT INITIALLY CONVERTED

Consider these revealing facts about Mary and her sons and daughters. We read in Matthew 12:46–50: "While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. Then one said to Him, 'Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You.' But He answered and said to the one who told Him, 'Who is My mother and who are My brothers?' And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, 'Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.'"

This passage affords proof that Christ's "brothers" were not synonymous with His "disciples." At that time, His brothers did not believe in

Him—they were not His disciples. In addition, Christ made it clear that He would not permit His mother and His brothers to prevent Him from teaching and living God’s Word. In the parallel Scripture, in the 3rd chapter of the book of Mark, we are given an additional detail to show why Christ’s mother and His brothers came to “speak” with Him. We read in verse 21: “But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, ‘He is out of His mind.’” Verse 31 continues, “Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him.”

This account strongly suggests that they had come down to seize Him, thinking He had gone mad. After all, Christ’s brothers did NOT believe on Him, as we are told in John 7:5. Christ told them that the world did not hate them, as they were still part of this world (verses 6–7).

But how could Mary have doubted in Christ? How could she have thought that Christ had gone mad? After all, she had received a special revelation from an angel of God. How could she have ended up NOT believing in Christ?

This is even more astonishing when we remember what was said about Mary after she had received the message from the angel: “Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord” (Luke 1:45). Mary believed the angel’s message that she was pregnant of the Holy Spirit and that her Child would fulfill a special role. But there were things regarding Jesus that she clearly did not understand, and neither did Joseph. We read, in Luke 2:19, that “Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.” Later, in Luke 2:33, we are told that “Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him.” Subsequently, they “did not understand the statement which He spoke to them... but His mother kept all these things in her heart” (Luke 2:50–51).

They did not understand what role Jesus had to fulfill, and when He later acted in a way that Mary had not anticipated, she thought He had gone mad. We can find somewhat of a parallel in the life of John the Baptist. He had clearly understood who Jesus Christ was, but when he was in prison, he was wondering whether it was really Him or whether he should wait for another (compare, John 1:29–34; Luke 7:18–23; Matthew 11:2–6).

Likewise, Mary and Joseph were uncertain as to what Jesus had to accomplish and Mary could not understand why He did the things He did.

On the other hand, at the wedding in Cana, Mary was totally convinced that Christ could help the bridegroom who was short of wine. Perhaps she believed that Christ could even do a miracle (John 2:3–5). If so, Mary’s subsequent attempt to seize Christ and to stop Him from doing what He was doing would be even more surprising and, at the same time, “human.” Don’t we sometimes have doubts, too, about what God is doing in our life, especially when things don’t go the way we would like?

Note that Joseph is *not* mentioned when Mary and Christ’s brothers are standing outside to talk to and to seize Christ. After Joseph and Mary were looking for the 12-year old Christ in the temple, Joseph is not mentioned anymore in the Scriptures, except when people talk about him. Many have therefore concluded that Joseph died some time after Christ turned 12 years of age and before He started His public ministry at the age of 30. We can conclude that Joseph must have died before Christ’s crucifixion, since Jesus had committed the care of His mother to His disciple John. In any event, it is very probable that Joseph was already dead when Christ began His public ministry. He was dead, then, when Mary and her sons were trying to seize Christ.

In regard to this episode, we might wonder if Christ’s response showed lack of respect and care for His mother and His brothers. But this is not the case. Rather, Christ wanted to make it clear at that time that His mother and His brothers, and, by implication, His sisters, were NOT doing the will of God when they tried to seize Christ to prevent Him from preaching God’s Word. Since they were not converted at that time, they did not fully understand God’s Will. (Compare Matthew 12:50: “For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.”) Luke 8:21 adds: “My mother and My brothers are these who HEAR the word of God and DO it.” On the other hand, His disciples, both men and women—spiritual brothers and sisters—WERE doing God’s Will at that moment in time, when they listened to Christ. (At other times Christ had to rebuke Peter, before his conversion, calling him “Satan,” when he desired the things of men and not of God, compare Matthew 16:23). Christ did not try to dishonor His mother

or His brothers; rather, He used this opportunity to point out accurately just who His real brethren were.

We might also want to take note of Luke 11:27–28: “And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!’ But He said, ‘More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!’” Again, we see the clear implication that Mary was not converted—she was not hearing and keeping the word of God as Christ taught it.

Christ tells us that if we love anything or anyone more than Him, including our own life, our mate, our parents, our children, or any of our relatives, we cannot enter God’s Kingdom. He even pointed out that it *may* become necessary to leave “houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for [Christ’s] name’s sake,” that is, when they prevent us from worshipping God in spirit and in truth (Matthew 19:29).

The *Ryrie Study Bible* has this comment on Matthew 12:50: “The spiritual relationship between Christ and believers is closer than the closest of blood ties. Obedience to God takes precedence over responsibilities to family.”

Some have erroneously claimed that Christ *hated* His mother and His brothers and sisters, and that we must do the same. They quote Luke 14:26 to support this assertion, where Christ said: “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”

But when comparing this passage with the parallel Scripture in Matthew 10:37, we realize that the Greek word for “hate,” as translated in Luke 14:26, has the meaning of “to love less in comparison.” Matthew 10:37 says: “He who loves his father or mother *more than Me* is not worthy of Me. And he who loves his son or daughter *more than Me* is not worthy of Me.” We must love God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our might. In comparison with that love for God, we must love everything else less, including our own lives.

Still others claim, from John 2:4, that Jesus *did* dishonor His mother when He said to her (*Authorized Version*): “Woman, what have I to do with thee?”

We must realize that if Jesus Christ committed *just one sin*, we would not have a Savior. If He had violated the Fifth Commandment (“Honor your father and your mother...,” Deuteronomy 5:16; Exodus 20:12), He would have sinned, as “sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4, *Authorized Version*). Many Scriptures make it clear that the law spoken of in the New Testament includes the Ten Commandments (compare James 2:8–12).

We read that Christ never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). He practiced what He preached. When a young man came to Him to find out what he had to do to have eternal life, Christ told him to keep the commandments (Matthew 19:16–17). He then specifically listed the Fifth Commandment in verse 19. Christ also emphasized in Mark 7:7–13 the continued obligation for children to honor their parents (Compare, too, Ephesians 6:1–3).

Christ NEVER transgressed the Fifth Commandment! When He was twelve years old, He was subject, that is, obedient, to His parents (Luke 2:51). He never dishonored His parents throughout His life.

The potential problem with His statement in John 2:3–4 is caused by the translation of the *Authorized Version*, stating: “And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come.”

First, let us notice that the expression “woman” did not convey disrespect. When Christ hung on the cross, He told John to take care of His mother. Christ was in agonizing pain, knowing that He would soon die. Still, His thoughts and concerns were directed toward the welfare of His mother. Notice that He called Mary “woman” at that critical time as well (John 19:26). *Halley’s Handbook* points out on page 533 that the word “woman” was a title of respect in the usage of the day.

Returning to John 2, we should also notice that Mary did not consider Christ’s answer as one of disrespect. In verse 5, she told the bridegroom’s servants, “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.” The annotation in *Eerdman’s Handbook to the Bible*, page 536 says: “No one, not even his mother, has the right to put pressure on Jesus. But his reply is not as harsh as some translations make it sound. [The rendering in the] New English Bible, ‘Your concern, mother, is not mine,’ is better.”

Other translations agree with the conclusion that the rendering in

the *Authorized Version* is too harsh. The *New King James Bible* translates verse 4 as, “Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?” The *New International Version* states, “Dear woman, why do you involve Me?”

Halley’s Handbook comments further, on page 533: “The point of his remark seems to be, ‘Suppose the wine is gone, what have I to do with it? It is not my affair. My time to work miracles has not yet come.’ Probably he had just told her of the new miraculous powers bestowed on him by the descent of the Holy Spirit at baptism. She saw in the situation an opportunity for him. While he did this miracle at her suggestion, his ‘hour’ for the general use of his miraculous powers came about four months after, at the official beginning of his public ministry in Jerusalem at Passover time (John 2:13).”

Christ also wanted to tell His mother that the main purpose for His coming was not to perform those kinds of miracles. That is why the *New English Bible’s* rendering of verse 5, “Your concern, mother, is not mine,” is quite good. Because of respect for His mother, however, He acquiesced, as the performance of that miracle was not against God’s commandments or His will.

Rather than conveying that Christ disobeyed the Fifth Commandment, John 2:1–4, when correctly understood, shows the deep honor and respect that Christ had for His mother, prompting Him to fulfill her desires that were not against God’s Will.

Christ knew, of course, that His mother did not fully understand why He had come. It is also interesting to note when reading John 2:11, that His disciples believed on Him because of this very sign. Apparently His mother and His brothers did not. They are distinguished from His disciples in verse 12, showing that Christ did not regard His brothers as His disciples at that time.

CHRIST’S RELATIVES CONVERTED AFTER HIS RESURRECTION

Although we do not read that Christ *appeared* to His mother after His resurrection, we DO read something remarkable about Mary and Christ’s brothers *after* His resurrection in Acts 1:13–14: “And when they [the apostles] had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and

Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.”

By this time, Mary and Christ’s brothers WERE counted as Christ’s disciples. We are not specifically told whether *all four* of Christ’s brothers were present, but this is clearly the indication, as it says, “with His brothers.”

Halley makes the following comments, on page 561: “Esteemed and honored as she was as mother of the savior, the apostles gave not the slightest indication of feeling the need of her mediation between them and Christ.”

A change obviously took place that caused Mary and her sons to believe in Christ and the message He preached. 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 gives us some insight: “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas [Peter], then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.”

After His resurrection, Christ appeared to Cephas or Peter, and then to all of the twelve apostles. He also appeared to James. When Paul wrote this letter, James was referred to as an apostle, at least by implication (as verse 7 says: “He was seen by James, then by *all* the apostles.”). Who was this James?

Remember that the names of Christ’s four brothers were James, Joseph, Simeon and Jude (Matthew 13:55). It was this James, the oldest of Christ’s four brothers, who saw Christ after His resurrection and who became one of the most important apostles in the early New Testament Church.

Barclay states in his commentary on the book of Acts, on page 95: “In the East, it would have been the natural thing for the next brother to take on the work of an elder brother who had been killed; but from the gospels we learn that Jesus’ brothers did not believe in him (John 7:5) and that they actually thought him mad (Mark 3: 21).”

So at first, the apostle Peter was in a leading position, even insofar as

the church in Jerusalem was concerned. But James became more and more a predominant apostle, to the extent to which he dedicated his life to Christ, and to which the other apostles began to travel into foreign countries to preach the gospel in all the world. (Compare, as to the prominent role of James, the brother of Christ, Galatians 1:18–19; 2:9, 11–12; Acts 12:16–17; 15:13–20; 21:18).

In regard to the first ministerial conference in Jerusalem described in Acts 15, *Eerdman* explains on page 560: “The final summing-up and verdict given by James, the Lord’s brother and leader of the Jerusalem church, finds general acceptance.”

We see, then, that James, the brother of Christ, had at that time the position of the presiding apostle of the church in Jerusalem. *Barclay* points out, on p. 115: “His leadership was not a formal office; it was a moral leadership conceded to him because he was an outstanding man.”

Finally, James wrote the epistle of James, one of the last letters in the Bible. James was called “the Just,” as *Eusebius* reports. According to historian *Hegesippus* (180 AD), his knees were said to be as hard as a camel’s because he knelt in prayer so often and so long. Tradition has it that James, after he had heard about Christ’s resurrection, made a vow that he would neither eat nor drink until he himself saw Jesus—and we know that Jesus did appear to him.

According to *Josephus*, James was stoned right after he had finished his epistle, around 62 AD, for allegedly having violated the law. If this account is true, then the charge would be in reference to James’ decision in Acts 15 that certain rituals were no longer binding.

Another tradition describes the events of James’ death this way: The Pharisees and the Scribes placed James at the pinnacle of the temple and demanded that he deny Christ. When he refused, they threw him down. Although severely injured, he did not die because of the fall. He prayed for forgiveness of his enemies. Then, he was stoned and beaten to death with clubs. He was buried, according to *Hegesippus*, on the spot by the temple where he was killed.

Also, according to tradition, James was replaced at the time of his death by Christ’s brother Simeon, who became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. Simeon died around 100 AD.

Neither the Bible nor tradition tells us anything specifically about Jesus’ second-oldest brother, Jose or Joseph, but as we pointed out, Acts

1 seems to suggest that he, too, had become one of Christ's disciples. We also read in 1 Corinthians 9:5 that the "brothers of the Lord" had become Christ's disciples. And we are told that they were married and that their wives, who had also become converted, were accompanying them on their travels.

The Bible contains an additional epistle that was written by another of Christ's brothers, Jude, whose epistle bears his name. Apparently, Jude was the youngest of Christ's brothers. He states in verse 1 of the book of Jude that he was the brother of James, the oldest of Christ's brothers. Jude wrote his letter around 65 to 80 AD.

We know from both the Bible and tradition that at least three of Christ's brothers, and in all likelihood all four of them, became converted, although they did not at first believe in Jesus. And the same is true for Mary, the mother of Jesus. Tradition tells us that the apostle John was accompanied on his travels by an older woman, obviously Mary, whom John had taken to his own home, faithfully adhering to Christ's command on the cross to take care of her.

The fact that the resurrected Jesus appeared to James seemed to have started the change. We can visualize how it, perhaps, happened: Now he understood who Christ really was, and he told his experience to his mother and his relatives. Now Mary remembered and comprehended what the angel had told her; what the shepherds had said; what the wise men from the East had done; what the prophet Simeon had proclaimed; and what Jesus had said and done. She realized that Christ had to die, as Simeon had told her, but that the resurrected Christ would come back to rule over all the world. It all made sense to them after Christ appeared to James.

And so, Mary and her sons became influential members of the early New Testament church. They eventually died too and were buried, and they wait in their graves with all the other dead Christians for the resurrection to eternal life. They are not in heaven (compare John 3:13; Acts 2:29, 34; Hebrews 11:39; 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17).

Neither Mary nor any of Christ's disciples were resurrected after they died. Only Christ Himself was resurrected as a Spirit being and ascended to heaven. Mary did not ascend to heaven, and she does not sit next to Christ to mediate between us and Him or God, the Father. This concept is derived from paganism and is totally without any

Biblical foundation. In fact, it contradicts God's revelation that Christ is the ONLY Mediator between all of mankind and God (compare 1 Timothy 2:5). The Assyrians and Babylonians believed in a "queen of heaven" to whom they could pray. But God condemns this practice in the book of Jeremiah (compare Jeremiah 7:18) and other places. We don't need any mediator between us and Christ. Rather, we can pray directly to the Father, with Christ as our Mediator. He is the one who represents us before God because, having lived as a human being, He is well-acquainted with our shortcomings and our struggles, and having died as a human being, He became the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Christ's brothers and presumably His sisters, too, were married. Obviously, they had children. And who knows, maybe Christ's relatives are living on this earth today. But from a spiritual standpoint, we do, in fact, have contact with the direct descendants of Christ—His brethren. Remember Christ's words: "For whosoever shall do the will of the Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

Part 4

THE TRIAL OF JESUS

Christ committed no sin. He never transgressed God's Law. We read that there was no deceit in His mouth. We read that He committed no violence to anyone, and that He was only numbered with the transgressors—regarded as a criminal—for our sakes, so that He even became sin for us. He came into sinful flesh because of us, but it is clear that He never violated God's Law.

But what about man's law? Was He properly sentenced to death according to man's law at the time? There are many legal scholars who have concluded, looking at the Jewish and the Roman law, that Jesus Christ was justly convicted; that He was justly executed; and that He was justly killed in harmony with the law of man.

For instance, law professor and lawyer Richard Wellington Husband claimed in his book, *The Persecution of Jesus*, that Christ's arrest was legal; that the hearing before the Sanhedrin, which was the Jewish High Court at the time, was legal; that the trial before the Roman Pontius Pilate was legal; that Christ's conviction was legal; that the evidence provided was sufficient to substantiate the charges; and that the execution of Jesus was legal. Another law professor, Max Radin, also claimed in his book, *The Trial of Jesus of Nazareth*, that Jesus was legally convicted and legally executed. But not all legal scholars and lawyers share this view.

In 1964, the Hon. James C. McRuer, former Chief Justice of the High Court of Justice in Ontario, Canada, and former President of the Canadian Bar Association, published a little book, entitled, *The Trial of Jesus*. McRuer concluded that Jesus Christ was *not* legally convicted and executed.

To find out whether Christ's arrest, trial, and execution was legal or illegal, we need to look into the pages of the Bible. Let us start our survey with Matthew 26:3–4: "Then the chief priest, the scribes, and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas [the high priest at that time was Caiaphas], and

plotted to take Jesus by trickery [margin: deception] [to] kill Him.”

The *Revised Standard Version* translates the word for “trickery” or “deception” as “stealth.” They adopted a secret and clandestine procedure to arrest Christ.

Continuing with John 18:3, we are told that they came to arrest Christ by sending officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, as well as a detachment of the troops.

Alfred Edersheim, in *Jesus the Messiah*, points out: “But in the fortress of Antonia, close to the Temple and connected with it by two stairs, lay the Roman garrison. During the Feast, the Temple itself was guarded by an armed cohort, consisting of from 400 to 600 men, so as to prevent or quell any tumult among the numerous pilgrims. It was to the captain of this ‘cohort’ that the Chief Priests and leaders of the Pharisees would, in the first place, apply for an armed guard to affect the arrest of Jesus, on the ground that it might lead to some popular tumult. This, without necessarily having to state the charge that was to be brought against Him, which might have led to other complications. . . This Roman detachment, armed with swords and ‘staves’ . . . was accompanied by servants from the High-Priest’s Palace, and other Jewish officers, to direct the arrest of Jesus.”

NO CHARGE AGAINST CHRIST UPON HIS ARREST

No charge was brought against Christ when He was arrested. No charge had been made yet. He was arrested in order to prevent “a potential tumult.” They came by night. Jesus Himself said that they came as against a robber, as if they had to arrest Him right away.

Matthew 26:55 continues: “In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, Have you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me.” Christ was saying that there was really no need to arrest Him in such a way—in today’s terminology, “without a warrant.” Christ had not done anything to justify this kind of a procedure. But Christ knew, of course, that Satan was behind all of this.

Satan had already entered Judas Iscariot to influence him to betray Christ for 30 pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14–15; John 13:2; Luke 22:3). And Satan had, of course, influenced the Pharisees and the Sadducees to have Christ arrested illegally, with the ultimate goal to kill Him.

Luke 22:47–53 continues the story of events: “And while He was still speaking, behold, a multitude; and he who was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them and drew near to Jesus to kiss Him. But Jesus said to him, ‘Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’ When those around Him saw what was going to happen, they said to Him, ‘Lord, shall we strike them with the sword?’ And one of them [Peter, compare John 18:10] struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus answered and said, ‘Permit even this.’ [Matthew 26:52 points out that He also said, “Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.”] And He touched his ear and healed him [He undid what Peter had done. Peter injured this man and Christ healed him.] Then Jesus said to the chief priests, captains of the temple, and the elders who had come to Him, ‘Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not try to seize Me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.’”

Christ knew who was behind this. He knew that Satan was the one who had influenced them to do all these things. That was the hour of Satan. That was the hour of darkness.

When Satan possessed Judas, Judas left Christ and the other disciples. When this happened, John 13:30 tells us that “it was night.” Why is this fact emphasized? Because this was the hour of darkness.

Let us emphasize again that Christ was not arrested based on any formal charge of any crime that He had allegedly committed. There was no legal basis for the arrest. Nobody had presented evidence or even testified before the Sanhedrin, to justify or warrant an arrest.

First, Christ was brought before Annas. During that year, Annas was not the high priest, but Caiaphas. Annas was the father-in-law of the high priest Caiaphas, and he had been the high priest in previous years. The Bible still referred to Annas as high priest, although technically the one who was actually fulfilling the role of the high priest that year was Caiaphas.

ILLEGAL INTERROGATION

Christ’s interrogation before Annas was illegal. First of all, they brought Him to Annas by night. But the Jewish law prohibited all proceedings by night. No session of the court could take place before the

offering of the morning sacrifice. The Sanhedrin only sat in session from the close of the morning sacrifice until the time of the evening sacrifice; that is, they would only sit in session during the day. They would never sit in session during the night.

Acts 4:1–3 confirms this fact: “Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, *for it was already evening.*” They knew that if they wanted to abide by their own law, they couldn’t do anything during the night.

Verse 5 continues: “And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders and scribes, as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.” They got together the next day to start the trial against the apostles—they didn’t do it during the night.

Another example can be found in Acts 5:17: “Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ‘Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.’ And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together [this happened during the day], with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.” They didn’t convene any interrogation or trial during the night. They understood that their own law prohibited that, and so they waited until the next morning. But they did not act this way in the case of Jesus Christ. They went ahead in violation of their own law and began to try Him during the night.

Secondly, the interrogation was conducted by a *former* high priest, Annas, not Caiaphas. It wasn’t even an official interrogation; but rather, it was a private one. Annas had no legal authority to conduct such an interrogation at all. The Jewish law said: “An accused man was never subject to private or secret examination.” But that is exactly what happened in Christ’s case. He was being interrogated by a person who was

no longer in any official capacity. Annas had no authority whatsoever to do it.

Why did they even do it? Why did they bring Christ to Annas and not to the high priest, Caiaphas, right away? Because Christ was brought to Annas to be interrogated by him *privately* for the purpose of gathering evidence *to bring a charge* against Him. They hadn't charged Him with anything yet! They didn't have any evidence for a charge! They didn't know what to charge Him with! So they tried to get evidence through this private and illegal interrogation by Annas. But Christ responded to all of his questions with dignity and with intelligence.

Christ understood the Jewish law very well. Christ was a Jew. He grew up in the Jewish community. He knew what His Jewish rights were. John 18:19–21: “The [former] high priest [Annas] then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine. Jesus answered him, ‘I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have done nothing. Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said.’” Christ didn't answer the question directly. He said, in effect: “Let them bring forth the charges and the evidence which you say are against Me.” That was not the answer that Annas wanted to hear. Annas and his accomplices resorted to violence and torture in order to try to extract a confession from the prisoner.

John 18:22–23 continues: “And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, ‘Do You answer the high priest like that?’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?’” Since nothing further could be gained, Annas sent Christ, bound, to his son-in-law, Caiaphas, the current high priest.

ILLEGAL TRIAL

To quote from McRuer, “*The Trial of Jesus*,” on page 52: “Nothing was to be accomplished by private interrogation. The whole proceeding before Annas was illegal from beginning to end according to the Hebrew law. Every accused had the right to be free from any private or personal interrogation until he was sent for public trial... Annas had Jesus bound and sent him to Caiaphas to stand his trial before the Great Sanhedrin.”

Matthew 26:57–58 reports: “And those who had laid hold of Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter followed Him at a distance to the high priest’s courtyard. And he went in and sat with the servants to see the end.”

Christ was brought to the high priest’s *private* home, and all the scribes and elders were assembled there. But it was still night, and nobody could be tried during the night. In addition, the Sanhedrin was not permitted to meet and conduct a trial of a capital offense before an annual Holy Day.

As will be explained in the next chapter of this booklet, Christ was arrested on Tuesday night, and He was killed on Wednesday, before the evening of an annual Holy Day, the first day of Unleavened Bread. Under Jewish law, this was illegal, because a capital case could not be concluded within just one day, unless there was an acquittal. The law demanded that a trial had to last for at least two *consecutive* days in order to convict someone to death. And because it had to last for at least two consecutive days, a capital case couldn’t start on a Friday or on the day previous to an annual Holy Day, because no proceedings could be held on a weekly Sabbath or an annual Holy Day. The requirement to have a trial of a capital crime last for at least two days was part of an elaborate safeguard procedure in order to make sure that no one could be executed unless it was absolutely certain that the person charged with the capital crime was, in fact, guilty.

To quote from McRuer, *The Trial of Jesus*, on pages 56–57: “When there was a conviction, sentence could not be passed on the same day. The members of the court were required to go in pairs, eating very little and drinking no wine, to discuss the matter all night and come together the following morning. On the following morning commencing with the most junior member of the court lest he be influenced by his seniors, each was required to make his declaration. Those in favour of acquittal would say: ‘I declared him innocent yesterday and I still declare him innocent.’ And those in favour of conviction would say: ‘I declared him guilty yesterday and I still declare him guilty.’ He who favoured conviction might afterwards acquit, but he who favoured acquittal might not retract and favour conviction. It was said, ‘A Sanhedrin that puts one man to death in a week of years is called ‘destructive.’ The

safeguards against the execution of an innocent man did not end with the judgment of the court and with the sentence. The law required the execution which was carried out on the same day as the sentence was passed, to take place outside the walls... A herald led the procession, calling out the name of the condemned man and announcing the offence for which he was convicted and the sentence imposed, adding: ‘If any man knoweth aught in favour of his acquittal let him come and plead it.’ If it came to the attention of the court that anyone, whether a member of the court or not, wished to advance some further argument, the sentry with the towel signalled the horseman, and the latter thereupon halted the procession and returned the prisoner to the court. Even if the prisoner during the procession said: ‘I have somewhat to argue in favour of my acquittal,’ the law required that he be brought back for further trial, be it four or five times, if there was substance in what he had to say.”

As we will recall, the “trial” took place in the house of the high priest, Caiaphas. This was another violation, because it should have taken place at the regular meeting hall of the Sanhedrin. But, it could not, as the court could not officially convene during the night.

In addition, when Christ was brought before the high priest Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, no charge had been made against Him. This is important, because under Jewish law, the Sanhedrin could *not originate* charges. If somebody was brought before the Sanhedrin and there was no charge made against them, they had to let him go. The Sanhedrin violated their own law, as they were not interested in letting Christ go. They tried to originate charges *during the trial*. They attempted to do so by producing witnesses.

In order to convict somebody of a criminal offense, you had to have at least two witnesses who had to agree. The Sanhedrin could not even produce two (false) witnesses who would both make the same (false) accusation.

Let us notice the account in Mark 14:53, 55–59: “And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes... Now the chief priests and all the counsel sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree. Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him,

saying, “We heard him say, “I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.”” But not even then did their testimony agree.”

The testimony of these witnesses, like the testimony of most false witnesses, didn’t agree. Since they failed to agree, their testimony, according to Jewish law, had to be discarded. Any evidence given by them had to be treated as not having been given. In addition, the law did not permit the judges to consider the testimony of just one witness to convict the accused.

Mark 14:60–61 continues: “And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, ‘Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?’ But He kept silent and answered nothing...”

Christ refused to answer. He knew the Jewish law. Since the testimony didn’t agree, there was still no charge. So the high priest’s conduct was, again, in violation of the law. Christ had to answer nothing because there was nothing to answer. And so, Christ kept silent.

McRuer explains, on page 59 (emphasis added): “At this stage, Caiaphas forsook his role as the judge, and violating all the rules of Hebraic procedure, he undertook to accomplish what his minions had failed to do—to get Jesus to make a self-convicting statement... Until the case was established by the evidence of two or three witnesses given publicly, *one standing trial for crime was not only presumed to be innocent but to be unaccused*. It was the evidence of the leading witnesses that constituted the charge. When they spoke and agreed, their evidence constituted the indictment. There being no evidence and hence no charge, Caiaphas stood up and heaped illegality upon illegality by calling upon Jesus to testify against Himself.”

Mark 14:61–64 continues: “...Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?’ Jesus said, ‘I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.’ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, ‘What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?’ And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.”

This conduct of the high priest was an egregious, flagrant violation of Jewish law. The Jewish contemporary scholar Marimonius wrote in his book, *Sanhedrin*: “We have it as a fundamental principle of our

jurisprudence, that no one can bring an accusation against himself. Should a man make a confession of guilt before a legally constituted tribunal, such confession is not to be used against him unless properly attested by two other witnesses.”

Even if an accused made a confession, it had to be disregarded, unless it was corroborated by two additional witnesses. A confession, all by itself, was not sufficient for a conviction.

That fact is also confirmed by Mendelsohn, *Criminal Jurisprudence of the Ancient Hebrews*. He points out, on page 133: “No attempt is ever made to lead a man on to self-incrimination. Moreover, a voluntary confession on his part is not admitted in evidence, and therefore not competent to convict him, unless a legal number of witnesses minutely corroborate his self-accusation.”

The high priest’s conduct, attempting to get Christ to incriminate Himself, and to then use His “confession” as evidence, was blatantly illegal.

In addition, we also read that “all” condemned Him to death. The verdict against Christ was unanimous. But under Jewish law, a unanimous verdict against a criminal, who had been charged with a criminal capital offense, had the effect of an acquittal. Jewish law decreed that at least one of the judges had to defend the accused. Wise writes in *Martyrdom of Jesus*: “If none of the judges defends the culprit, i.e., if all pronounce him guilty, having no defender in the court, the verdict *guilty* was invalid and sentence of death could not be executed.”

Mendelsohn, *Criminal Jurisprudence of the Ancient Hebrews*, adds the following: “A simultaneous and unanimous verdict of guilt rendered on the day of the trial has the effect of an acquittal.”

Christ had to be released. But that was not according to plan. The verdict was predetermined. Nothing Christ could have done would have made a difference, because this was the hour of darkness.

The fact that Christ’s verdict was predetermined by all of His judges poses another problem, since under Jewish law, judges had to be impartial. Nobody could judge over a person who was his enemy. Benny writes in *Criminal Code of the Jews*,” on page 37:

“Not under any circumstance was a man, known to be at enmity with the accused person, committed to occupy a position among the judges.”

All of the judges were, of course, Christ's enemies. This means that *none of them* had any jurisdiction based on procedural rules of the Jewish law, to even try Him.

Their predetermined purpose was clearly revealed in the 11th chapter of the book of John. Beginning with verse 46, we read: "But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things that Jesus did. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, 'What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.' And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.' Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad. Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death."

The high priest prophesied that Christ would die for all of us so that we wouldn't have to die. Nevertheless, from the standpoint of the high priest, he was saying this to bring Christ to death. He did not understand that Christ's death was necessary for us to be forgiven of our sins. He wanted to see Christ killed because he was afraid that the Romans would come and take away the authority they had. They had plotted to kill Christ even before they had arrested Him.

This whole trial is somewhat reminiscent of the People's Court sessions in Nazi Germany under Judge Freisler. In *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, William Schirer reports about the trial of those German officers under Count Stauffenberg who had unsuccessfully attempted to kill Hitler in 1944 (pages 1273–1275, copyright 1960): "Hitler ... himself laid down the procedure for dispatching them. 'This time [he said]... the criminals will be given short shrift. No military tribunals. We'll hail them before the People's Court. No long speeches from them. The court will act with lightning speed. And two hours after the sentence it will be carried out. By hanging—without mercy.' These instructions from on high were carried out literally by Ronald Freisler, the president of the People's Court (Volksgerichtshof), a vile, vituperative

maniac, who as a prisoner of war in Russia during the first war had become a fanatical Bolshevik and who, even after he became, in 1924, an equally fanatical Nazi, remained a warm admirer of Soviet terror and a keen student of his methods... The court-appointed defence lawyers were more than ludicrous. Their cowardice... is almost unbelievable. Witzleben's attorney... outdid the state prosecutor and almost equalled Freisler, in denouncing his client as a 'murderer,' as completely guilty and as deserving the worst punishment... All that summer, autumn and winter and into the new year of 1945 the grisly People's Court sat in session, racing through its macabre trials and grinding out death sentences, until finally an American bomb fell directly on the courthouse on the morning of February 3, 1945... killing Judge Freisler and destroying the records of most of the accused who still survived."

Although terrible convictions of innocent people happened throughout history, nothing can remotely equal anything that Christ had to endure. Quoting from page 62 of McRuer's book, *The Trial of Jesus*: "Jesus was unlawfully arrested and unlawfully interrogated in secret by one of the highest ranking members of the court, one who was to sit among his judges. The court was unlawfully convened by night. No lawful charge supported by the evidence of two witnesses was ever formulated. When he was questioned by Caiaphas Jesus was, according to Hebrew law, innocent. No charge had been laid against Him. As he stood at the bar of justice he was unlawfully sworn as witness against himself. He was unlawfully condemned to death on words from his own mouth. 'Our law,' says Marmonidis, 'condemns no one to death upon his own confession.' 'It is a fundamental principle with us' says Bartenora, 'that no one can damage himself by what he says in judgment.'"

To add insult to injury, let us notice what happened next, in Mark 14:65: "Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, 'Prophesy!' And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands."

To hit a convicted prisoner was against the Jewish law, too. The Jewish law provided that a person condemned to death could not be previously scorned in any way. Following this, the Sanhedrin delivered the bound Jesus Christ to Pontius Pilate to be crucified by him.

Let us notice, in passing, an interesting account in John 18:28: "Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium ["hall of judgment,"

Authorized Version], and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover.”

Within the palace of Pilate were the altars of Roman gods. The Hebrew priests and the scribes wouldn't want to go to such a place during the Passover week, so that they would not be “defiled.” Some have claimed that this passage proves that all the Jews kept the Passover on a different day than Jesus Christ did, because Jesus and His disciples had already taken the Passover the previous night. But this Scripture may or may not actually say that, because, according to some commentators, the reference in John 18:28 to the word “Passover” might be a reference to the goat which had to be sacrificed on the first annual Holy Day, which sacrifice was also called the “Passover.” There was also a dispute at the time between the Pharisees and the Sadducees as to when to slaughter the *Passover lamb*. The Pharisees believed it should be a day later, but the Sadducees believed it should be on the day when Christ and the disciples ate it. The Sadducees, not the Pharisees, were in charge of the temple. Although some Jews, following the Pharisees, kept the Passover one day late, others followed the Sadducees and kept it when Christ and the disciples ate it.

Continuing with John 18:29: “Pilate then went out to them and said, ‘What accusation do you bring against this Man?’” That was a very pointed question. He wanted to know, what they were charging Him with? McRuer points out, on page 67: “The request for the charge made it quite clear that there was to be no formal confirmation of the judgment of the Sanhedrin. It was evident that Pilate intended to do his duty as a dispenser of Roman justice and dispose of the case on its merits. Before the Sanhedrin there had been no accusation. The verdict had determined the charge. The problem that perplexed Jesus’ accusers was this: if they said, ‘We have tried him and found him guilty of blasphemy,’ Pilate would regard the whole matter as a religious dispute which could well be left to the Jewish court. In that case, the Roman governor would not likely ratify any death sentence.”

John 18:30 continues: “They answered and said to [Pilate], ‘If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you.’”

They didn't want to answer Pilate's question. They were calling for a pro-forma confirmation of the judgment of the Sanhedrin. The

Sanhedrists were surprised, though, about Pilate's conduct for another reason. Edersheim points out, on page 590, that "the inquiry would come upon them the more unexpectedly, that Pilate must, on the previous evening, have given his consent to the employment of the Roman guards which effected the arrest of Jesus."

But, apparently, Pilate had not consented to arresting Christ for the purpose of killing Him. And now, Pilate was trying to find out what it was that they charged Christ with.

Continuing in John 18:31: "Then Pilate said to them, 'You take Him and judge Him according to your law.' Therefore the Jews said to him, 'It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.'"

Now they stated plainly what they really wanted to do. McRuer explains, on page 67: "To the members of the Sanhedrin Pilate's conduct of the proceedings was becoming alarming. He was about to do the very thing they didn't want him to do—leave the matter to the Jewish courts. So they changed their strategy. Ceasing to rely on the judgment of the Sanhedrin which found Jesus guilty of blasphemy, they resorted to something which was calculated to stimulate in Pilate a greater interest in the case. With no reference to the offence for which Jesus had been convicted in the Hebrew court, new accusations were put forward."

These new accusations are set forth in Luke 23:2: "And they began to accuse Him, saying, 'We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.'"

McRuer points out, on pages 67 and 68: "The first and second charges were patently false and the third a half-truth presented in such a way as to be entirely false. Taken together, these charges were accusations that Jesus had challenged the authority of the Roman state and attacked its majestic sovereignty."

At one time, the Jews had asked Christ whether they should pay taxes, whether it was lawful to pay taxes, and Christ's answer was, Give to Caesar what is Caesar's. In addition, Christ had never asked the Jews to rebel against the Romans. So all of these new allegations were blatantly false accusations. And they knew it. But they were becoming desperate now because they wanted to get Christ, no matter what.

To continue with the quote from McRuer, on page 68: "This was

majestatis (treason), the greatest crime known to the state... The Roman procedure required that every accusation of treason against a Roman citizen be made by a written charge and the accused, if a Roman citizen, was entitled to all the protection of a properly conducted Roman trial. A Jew, who was not a Roman citizen, [Christ was a Jew, and not a Roman citizen] had no such protection. With Jesus before him, Pilate as Procurator of Caesar, had absolute power limited only by his sense of justice [Pilate could do whatever he wanted. He had absolute total discretion]... The Jews were driven on a course they did not want to take because they well knew there was not the necessary evidence to support the charge. They had tried to get evidence to support the first two allegations but failed. Had not Jesus said: 'Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's'? Pilate must have detected malice in the hearts of the Sanhedrists... Pilate must have discerned that it was from no loyalty to Caesar that the chief priests and elders came with the prisoner at the early hour of the morning, charging that he had been forbidding them to give tribute to Caesar; Pilate well knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. The third accusation—that Jesus had said He was Christ the King—could not pass unnoticed, even though Pilate did know that it was 'out of envy' that he had been brought there. A charge that anyone who had created such an impact on the Jewish people had claimed any rights of temporal power must necessarily be investigated."

Let us turn now to John 18:33–38: "Then Pilate entered the Praetorium [margin: "the governor's headquarters"] again, called Jesus, and said to Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?' [This was the only accusation that Pilate addressed—not the first two]. Jesus answered him, 'Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?' Pilate answered, 'Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.' Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?' Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.' Pilate said to Him, 'What is truth?' And when he had

said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, ‘I find no fault in Him at all.’”

Let us take note of the *legal* significance: Pilate had interrogated the prisoner. He had declared that He was guiltless, that He was innocent. He pronounced the judgment. Christ should have been released right there and then. But Pilate was a weak man. He had been in trouble before with Caesar for having slaughtered some of the Jews. Not that Caesar loved the Jews, but he wanted peace in his empire. Christ had referred to that incident in Luke 13:1, stating that Pilate had mingled the blood of the Galileans with the Jewish sacrifices.

The story continues in Luke 23:5–7: “But they were the more fierce [when Pilate said, “I find no fault in this Man,” verse 4], saying, ‘He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place.’ When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked if the Man were a Galilean. And as soon as he knew that He belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.”

This Herod was Herod Antipas, a cruel, cunning and deceitful individual. He was the one who had beheaded John the Baptist (Matthew 14:9–10), and then thought that Christ might have been John the Baptist rising from the dead (Mark 6:14). Christ knew exactly with whom He was dealing. He had called Herod a fox (Luke 13:32) after He heard that Herod, too, was trying to kill Him.

Herod had come to stay in the old Maccabean palace close to that of the high priest. Luke 23:8 reports: “Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him.” Herod was always willing to talk to John the Baptist, but he did not accept anything John the Baptist was saying. Now, Herod was trying to see whether Christ could do a miracle for him. But Christ didn’t perform any miracle here. Had Christ done it, He would have performed the role of a magician and He would have given into Satan, who had asked Him earlier to perform a miracle by making bread out of stone. Rather, Christ was exercising His elementary legal rights when He remained silent, because He had already been declared innocent by Pilate. What was there to say? His outcome was predetermined. Christ understood that. Whatever He would have said would have made no difference.

While Jesus was brought before Herod Antipas, another interesting event happened. Judas Iscariot, Christ's betrayer, approached the Sanhedrin in defense of Christ. We read in Matthew 27:3–4: "Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' And they said, 'What is that to us? You see to it!'"

Recall that even after the sentence had been issued, the Sanhedrin had the legal duty to reconvene if a new witness in favor of the accused showed up. Judas was that new witness. He said, "I have betrayed **innocent** blood." The Sanhedrin, however, violated that legal duty as well.

McRuer points out on page 76: "Judas said: 'I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.' He probably knew the requirements of the Jewish law in capital cases that the court must hear any witness in favour of an acquittal even after judgment was rendered, as long as the sentence had not been carried out. If Judas didn't know the law, the court most certainly did. Defying it they said: 'What is that to us? See to it yourself.'"

Instead, they went to Herod and accused Christ of additional crimes. Luke 23:10–12 continues to report to us the horrible events: "And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other."

Herod sent Christ back to Pilate without convicting Him of anything. He made a mockery of Christ to please the accusers, but he did not pass judgment and convict Christ to death.

Luke 23:13–15 continues: "Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, said to them, 'You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined Him in your presence, *I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him; no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him [better: "he sent Him back to us," compare margin]; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him.*'"

This was Pilate's *second* declaration of judgment. For the second time, Pilate found Christ innocent! He declared Him to be, "innocent,

not guilty.” He went on to say that his judgment was even confirmed by Herod. Obviously, Pilate should have let Christ go, but Pilate was a weak ruler. He was more interested in what the people felt. He was not at all interested in man’s law, let alone God’s law. And so he compromised and he tampered with justice. First, he stated in Luke 23:16: “I will therefore chastise Him and release Him.” He had just found Him innocent twice! Still, he said, “I will therefore chastise Him and release Him.” Chastise Him for what? Christ had committed no offense! But Pilate wanted to please the people. This sign of weakness was all the Jews needed. Now they knew that they could still win.

Matthew 27:15–17 picks up the story: “Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished. And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, ‘Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?’”

CHRIST WAS LEGALLY INNOCENT

But Christ had already been found to be legally innocent. He should have been released as an innocent man. Pilate, though, proposed His release as a convicted criminal, to whom amnesty might be granted. This additional sign of weakness convinced Christ’s accusers that Pilate would go on compromising until they had accomplished their murderous intent.

Matthew 27:20–23 reports: “But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said to them, ‘Which of the two do you want me to release to you?’ They said, ‘Barabbas!’ Pilate said to them, ‘What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?’ They all said to him, ‘Let Him be crucified!’ Then the governor said, ‘Why, what evil has He done?’ But they cried out all the more, saying, ‘Let Him be crucified!’”

Pilate was still not willing to do that. He had just been told by his wife—probably a Jewish proselyte—not to have anything to do with this just man Jesus since she had been warned in a dream and had suffered many things in that dream because of Him (Matthew 27:19).

John 19:1–4 continues: “So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged

Him. And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. Then they said, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ And they struck Him with their hands. Pilate then went out again, and said to them, ‘Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him.’”

The Revised Standard Version (RSV) translates verse 4 as, “I found no crime in him.” This was the *third* declaration of innocence! And each declaration was delivered with authority and in the name of the emperor of Rome, because Pilate had full legal authority of the Roman emperor.

John 19:6 states: “Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, ‘Crucify Him, crucify Him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him.’” Again the RSV says, “I find no crime in him.” This is the **fourth time** that the Roman governor acquitted Christ of the charges brought against Him! And Herod had acquitted Him, as well. Remember that the Sanhedrin had not even made a charge against Him and still “convicted” this innocent man. Pilate stated again that he did not confirm the “judgment” of the Sanhedrin.

McRuer explains, on page 80: “Having failed to secure a conviction for treason, the accusers fell back on a demand for confirmation of the death sentence passed by the Sanhedrin which was based on a conviction of blasphemy.”

Continuing with John 19:7–9: “The Jews answered him [Pilate], ‘We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God’ [in other words, they resurrect the charge of blasphemy]. Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid [presumably, because the charge that Christ was the “Son of God” struck fear and caution in him, and because he realized how desperate Christ’s accusers were to have Him executed], and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, ‘Where are You from?’ But Jesus gave him no answer.”

McRuer states, on page 80: “No answer was forthcoming from the prisoner. All charges of treason having been disposed of, Jesus relied on His simple legal right to remain silent.”

John 19:10–12 reports: “Then Pilate said to Him, ‘Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and

power to release You?’ Jesus answered, ‘You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.’ From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, ‘If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar’s friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.’”

What did they do now? They went right back to the charge of treason, not because there was any evidence to support it but because they knew how to strike Pilate at his weakest spot. John 19:13–16 says: “When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour [midday]. And he said to the Jews, ‘Behold your King!’ But 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!’ Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led Him away.”

Pilate made it clear one more time that he had repeatedly and consistently rendered the judgment that Christ was innocent. Matthew 27:24–26 records: “When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, ‘I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.’ And all the people answered and said, ‘His blood be on us and on our children.’ Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified.” Based on the accounts of all the four gospel writers, it is possible that Christ was scourged *twice* by Pilate.

Matthew 27:25 has been used by many over the centuries to inflict very anti-Semitic feelings. However, the fact of the matter is that all of the people involved here, except the Romans, were Jewish. Christ Himself was a Jew. The early apostles were Jews, too. This most certainly is not a Scripture that can be used to justify or condone any anti-Semitic feelings; it is simply an historical fact.

McRuer summarizes Christ’s trial on page 82: “The whole catalog of illegality was complete; Jesus Christ, the prisoner, had been betrayed to his enemies for thirty pieces of silver; beaten and tortured by His custodians; illegally tried in the highest court of His nation; illegally

convicted of blasphemy against the God of His people—a conviction never confirmed in the Roman court. Confirmation failing, the prisoner was charged with treason against the Roman emperor and found not guilty; nevertheless, he was ‘handed over to be crucified.’ In all the annals of legal history, it would be difficult to find another case in which the prisoner who had been declared not guilty by a court of competent jurisdiction was delivered to the executioner by the judge who had acquitted him.”

McRuer states on page 83: “As a deterrent to others it was the custom to affix to the cross a board on which was inscribed the offence for which the condemned man had been convicted. . . . In this case Pilate himself prepared the inscription. It was written in Latin, Greek and Aramaic. It read: ‘The King of the Jews.’ . . . The chief priest asked Pilate to change the inscription to read: ‘This man said, “I am the King of the Jews.”’ If Pilate had stated the offense for which Jesus was crucified as the chief priest asked, it would have meant that Jesus had been found guilty of treason. This was a judgment Pilate had persistently refused to pass.”

Let us at this point consider the final verdict, which was issued on that dark hour and dark day of human injustice. Luke 23:47 reports: “So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, ‘Certainly this was a righteous Man!’” The RSV says: “Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, ‘Certainly this man was **innocent**.’”

The Bible confirms that Christ was *murdered*. It was not an execution of a legally charged and legally convicted person. It was a state-approved and state-commanded murder. His disciples were not afraid to say so. They were not afraid to tell the murderers face-to-face what they had done. The following Scriptures will prove this. Again, none of those passages provide any reason for anti-Semitic feelings, because the disciples who said those things were Jews themselves.

In Acts 2:22–23, Peter stated: “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death.”

In Acts 5, beginning in verse 27, the apostles—Peter among them—were brought again before the Sanhedrin. We read: “And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, ‘Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!’ But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you *murdered* by hanging on a tree.’ The *Authorized Version* is more precise here, stating, “... Jesus whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.” The plural noun, “ye,” makes it clear that Peter’s response to the high priest’s question was directed to all the members of the Sanhedrin—not just to the high priest only.

Peter was not mincing any words here. He said to those who were guilty that they had murdered Christ.

Stephen said essentially the same in Acts 7:51–52 when the Sanhedrin had dragged him in front of the court: “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and *murderers*.”

Neither did Paul—a Pharisee of Pharisees before his conversion—mince any words. He said in Acts 13:27–28: “For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him. And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death.”

JESUS CHRIST WAS MURDERED!

The Bible emphasizes time and time again that the **innocent** Jesus Christ was *murdered*. This is very important to understand because Christ died for you and me! **In that sense, we, too, have murdered Him!** All of us are as guilty as those who actually delivered and killed Christ, because if it hadn’t been for the sins that **we** have committed, Christ wouldn’t have had to die. He died for each one of us so that each one of us could obtain forgiveness, providing we repent of our sins and accept His sacrifice.

There is no question that Christ was murdered! Notice 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16: “For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.” This statement also applies to all of us if we don’t repent of our sins and develop a relationship with God that is pleasing to Him.

Christ knew from the very beginning what would happen to Him. He knew He would have to face human injustices, including His illegal arrest and His illegal prosecution. This was no surprise to Him. He made mention, for instance, in Matthew 20:17–19, that they would torture and kill Him. He also knew from the very beginning, as we read in John 6:64, that it would be Judas who would betray Him.

Hebrews 12:1–2 tells us WHY Christ was willing to come to this earth to die for us: “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who **for the joy that was set before Him** endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

What joy is meant here? Jesus rejoiced that you and I can become His brothers and His sisters—His followers—so that we can ultimately become the children of God in His Kingdom. Knowing that His torture and death was necessary for our reconciliation with God, He joyfully endured the shame. Christ was willing to undergo the illegalities that He went through—His illegal arrest, His illegal torture, and His illegal crucifixion—because His sacrifice was necessary to pay the penalty we have earned for our sins, the second death.

Similar injustices might happen to Christ’s present day disciples, too. If it happens to us, we are to act as Christ acted. 1 Peter 2:21–23 summarizes His conduct as follows: “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His

mouth'; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.”

Although Christ had all the angelic and Godly powers at His disposal, He didn't strike back when He was illegally arrested. He actually restrained Peter, healing the ear of the high priest's servant whom Peter injured in a probable attempt to kill him (Luke 22:50–51; John 18:10). Christ didn't revile when He was reviled. He asked God to forgive His accusers and murderers, praying for them on the cross (Isaiah 53:12).

Hebrews 12:3–4 admonishes us to have the same mind that Christ had: “For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin [as Christ has].” When Christ was in the garden, He prayed so hard that His sweat became like great drops of blood (Luke 22:44). Christ was in the flesh. He was fully human. He had to obtain strength from God— not only, when He was in the garden, but throughout His human life—so that He was able to live obediently and godly in the flesh. And we most certainly have to do the same.

Part 5

THE TIME OF CHRIST'S CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION

The Christian world is confused about the time of Christ's birth and death. When was Christ born? How long was He dead and in the grave? When was He crucified? When was He resurrected? Did Christ tell us ahead of His death how long He would be dead? And if so, did He fulfill what He had said?

In this chapter, we are discussing the time of Christ's death and resurrection. For a brief discussion on the time of Christ's birth, please see the accompanying box on the following page.

In Matthew 12:38–40, Christ explains that He would be in the grave for three days and three nights: “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’ But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish [*Authorized Version*: “whale’s belly”; *New Revised Standard Version*: “belly of the sea monster”], so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

Note that Christ talked to the scribes and Pharisees, describing them as an “evil and adulterous generation.” He said that the only sign that would be given to IT was the sign of the prophet Jonah. As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so Christ would be three days and three nights—a full 72 hours—in the grave. Christ's statement goes further, however. He made it clear that He would not stay in the grave for *less* than three days and three nights, and, that He would not stay in the grave *longer* than 72 hours. As the sea monster vomited Jonah alive onto dry land, so Christ would be brought back to life and leave the grave after three days and three nights.

Christ was not speaking about parts or portions of three days. In John 11:9, He defined the daylight portion of a day as lasting 12 hours, and after that, in verse 10, He implied that the night [as the dark portion of the day], lasted another 12 hours. In addition, Jonah was in the

When Was Christ Born?

Professor J.M. Golby, British historian and co-author of the book titled, *"The Making of the Modern Christmas,"* made the following comments during a television interview in 1991:

"The Christian church has always been very clever in incorporating other practices and going along with things and then turning them towards Christianity. And in pagan times you had midwinter festivals, and you had religious festivals which were pagan and very much associated with things like the going down of the sun. And during winter it was going down—would it ever return? And so you had a day in which you celebrated the sun. And the Mithraic religion, which was a very important religion in the later Roman Empire, had a particular day that celebrated this. And it so happens that it coincides with December 25th, which the Christian church then adopted as the day of Christ's birth... There is nothing in the gospels to show that Christ was born on the 25th of December. In fact, it's clear that he wouldn't have been. There wouldn't have been shepherds out in the fields. It's just the wrong time of year..."

In addition to the fact that shepherds would not have been in the fields on December 25, there is an-

other reason why Christ could not have been born around December 25. Dr. Cunningham Geikie discusses this additional reason in *"Holy-Days and Holidays,"* in the article, *"Christmas at Bethlehem."* He writes: "The twenty-fifth day of December... has little in its favor [for the date of the nativity of Christ] beyond the fact that it was the day on which, in antiquity, the return of the sun from its winter absence was kept... It could hardly have been at that season, however, for such a time would surely not have been chosen by the authorities for a public enrollment, which necessitated the population's traveling from all parts to their natal districts, storm and rain making journeys both unsafe and unpleasant in winter..."

The fact that shepherds were living out in the fields (compare Luke 2:8) and that a public enrollment was conducted at the time of Christ's birth (compare Luke 2:1–7) clearly proves that Christ could not have been born anywhere near December 25. Sheep were never in the field during the winter months. From the middle of October until the middle of March, the sheep would be kept inside, in stables or barns. During that time, there was too much rain, wind and even frost and snow.

The newspaper *Wynne Progress* published an article on December 21, 1967, titled, "*The Christmas Story*," in which it pointed out numerous discrepancies between the Biblical record and Christmas traditions. It stated, "As for the date of December 25, that was chosen by the church during the fourth Century A.D.... The choice seems to have been dictated... by a desire to Christianize the Roman revel that marked the winter solstice. The biblical evidence plainly indicates that Jesus was born during the late summer or early fall. *That is the time of year when Palestinian shepherds take their flocks into the field to graze at night*" (emphasis added).

The seventh month of the Israelite year, the month of *Tishri*, in September/October, *ends with the beginning of the rainy season*. During the eighth month, the month of *Marcheswan*, in October/November, the weather is *rainy*. The ninth month, *Chislew*, in November/December, marks the beginning of winter, with rain and snow. Christ made it clear, in Matthew 24:20, that a flight of His Church had better not take place "in winter," as this would be very unpleasant, due to the severe weather conditions. In addition, Song of Solomon 2:11 reads: "...the

winter is past, The rain is over and gone." Note also Ezra 10:9, 13: "It was the ninth month, on the twentieth of the month; and all the people [in Jerusalem were] ...trembling... because of the heavy rain... 'But there are many people; it is the season of the heavy rain, and we are not able to stand outside.'" Finally, the tenth month, *Tebeth*, in December/January, is designated as the *coldest month of the year, with hail and snow*.

There is no way that Christ could have been born at the end of December, while a public enrollment was going on, and while shepherds and sheep were staying overnight in the field. Even if it did not snow at that time, the cold weather and the rain would have made it impossible for both shepherds and sheep to be in the field at night. Further, the Roman authorities would not have chosen that time of year for a public enrollment. Rather than having been born in the winter, it is *most likely*, as was pointed out before, that *Christ was born in late summer or early autumn*.

For more information on this subject, please read our free booklet, "**Don't Keep Christmas.**"

belly of the fish for three entire days and three entire nights, not just a portion of that time period. And Christ said that He would be in the grave for exactly as long a time as Jonah had been in the belly of the fish.

Scripture tells us that Christ did indeed fulfill this sign. The angel of the Lord told the women, “‘He is risen, as He said’” (Matthew 28:6). God the Father resurrected His Son, Jesus Christ, exactly at the preordained time, as had been announced by Jesus. This means that Christ could not have been crucified on a Friday and resurrected on a Sunday, as this would not fulfill the sign of being in the grave for three days and three nights. Rather, Christ was killed on a Wednesday and placed in the grave on Wednesday afternoon, just before sunset. He was brought back to life three days and three nights later, leaving the grave on Saturday afternoon, just before sunset, as He said.

The Romans witnessed the fact that the angel came down from heaven and rolled away the stone from Christ’s grave. They told the chief priests about it, but were bribed with money in order to conceal the truth (Matthew 28:11–15). The chief priests and elders willfully suppressed and denied the only sign for Christ’s Messiahship.

After His resurrection, Christ appeared to many, proving that He was the Messiah. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 the numerous occasions when Christ appeared to His apostles and disciples. In that passage, Paul did not even list all of Christ’s manifestations (compare, for example, Matthew 28:9–10; Luke 24:13–35).

Christ, as a human being, did many signs and wonders. John said that He performed so many miracles that they could not even all be written down (John 21:25). However, do you realize that none of these signs proved that He was the Messiah? The people at that time recognized Him as a prophet who was able to perform miracles, but those miracles did not prove to them that He was THE Christ. His true disciples recognized Him as the Son of God, but this knowledge had to be revealed to them by God the Father (compare Matthew 16:13–17).

The proof of Christ’s Messiahship was in His resurrection from the dead as a glorified God being. The proof lies in the fact that He was DEAD, and that He would come back to (spiritual, eternal) life. He could not raise Himself up or bring Himself back to life. He said that, “I can of Myself do nothing” (John 5:30). Only God the Father could

resurrect Him (compare Acts 2:24; 3:13–15). THAT FACT was the sign of His Messiahship. In other words, Christ said to the people, “If I die and if I am buried for three days and three nights, and afterward come back to life, THEN you will know that I am the Christ.”

We should be able to see clearly that this sign totally negates the false concept that Christ was killed on “Good Friday” and resurrected on “Easter Sunday,” as He would not have been in the grave for 72 hours. This sign also totally disproves the false teaching that Christ, when here on earth, was “fully God and fully man;” that only the “man part” died, but not the “God part;” and that the “God part” resurrected the “man part”—that Christ resurrected Himself. This false teaching of orthodox Christianity (commonly referred to as the “two natures of Christ”) DENIES THE ONLY SIGN that Christ gave to “an evil and adulterous generation,” proving His Messiahship: being dead and buried for 72 hours, and then God, the Father, bringing Him back to life as a glorified God being.

Christ’s supernatural birth was not a sign to the “evil and adulterous generation” of His time, as they did not believe that He had been supernaturally conceived by Mary. They believed that Mary had committed fornication (compare John 8:41). The miraculous events at the time of Christ’s birth were, however, a sign to the shepherds in the field (Luke 2:12), as well as to Mary (Luke 2:19). Mary, of course, had already been prepared for Christ’s supernatural birth by the prior appearance and pronouncements of God’s angel (Luke 1:26–38).

For those of us who believe, Christ’s supernatural birth is a most important fundamental tenet, but to those who don’t believe, it can hardly be considered a sign. It is sad, however, that even many of those calling themselves Christians doubt that Christ was actually conceived as described in Scripture. If they believe, however, that Christ was and is the Messiah, they MUST believe in Christ’s supernatural birth, AND in His existence as a God being, full of glory, PRIOR TO His birth as a human being (compare John 17:5).

Many Scriptures prove that Jesus Christ was dead and in the grave for three days and three nights. In addition to Matthew 12:40, note Christ’s statements in Matthew 27:62–64 and Mark 8:31. Sometimes Christ said that He would be killed and raised again “the third day” (Matthew 16:21; compare Matthew 17:22–23; Luke 9:22). To quote

Did the Thief Go To Paradise on the Day of His Death?

If Christ was dead for three days and three nights, how are we to understand His promise to the repentant thief on the cross that both would be in Paradise on the very day of their death? We read in Luke 23:39–43, in the translation of the *New King James Bible*:

“Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, ‘If you are the Christ, save Yourself and us.’ But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in **Paradise**.’”

The word “Paradise” in Luke 23:43 is derived from the Greek word “*paradeisos*,” which means, “park” or “garden.” The word “*paradeisos*” appears two more times in the New Testament.

One passage is found in 2 Corinthians 12:2–4: “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was **caught up to the third heaven**. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was **caught up into Paradise** and heard inexpressible words, which is not lawful for a man to utter.”

Paul was talking about a human being, obviously himself, who was

transferred, in vision, to the third heaven—the place where God’s throne is. Paul equated that third heaven with “Paradise.”

In addition, Revelation 2:7 states: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the **tree of life**, which is in the midst of the **Paradise** of God.” Right now, the Paradise of God and God’s throne are in fact in heaven.

We also read, however, that the New Jerusalem, a city which God is building for us right now in heaven, will *descend to this earth* (Revelation 3:12). Revelation 22: 1–3 explains:

“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the **tree of life**, which bore twelve fruits... And there shall be no more curse, but the **throne of God and of the Lamb** shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him.”

We saw earlier that both the throne of God and the tree of life are in the **Paradise of God**. Revelation 22:1–3 teaches us that the throne of God and the tree of life will be in the New Jerusalem, when it descends to this earth. This means, then, that the **Paradise of God will be here on earth**.

Jesus Christ was telling the thief on the cross that he would be with Christ in Paradise, AFTER it had been established on this earth. Christ did not promise him to ascend with Him to heaven; rather, He promised him heaven on earth.

Let us recall what the thief

actually asked Christ: "Lord, remember me, when You come INTO Your Kingdom!" The word for "into" ("eis" in Greek) can mean "into" or "in."

The thief asked Christ to remember him when He would come in or into His Kingdom, which He would establish here on earth, upon His return. The context of the conversation was that the Jews rejected Christ as the King of the Kingdom Who would rule over them—by contrast, this thief was telling Christ, in effect: "I believe in you. I believe that you are the King. I believe that you will establish God's Kingdom and government here on earth." And so, Christ assured the thief that he would be there, when the Kingdom of God would be ruling on and over this earth, and when this earth would have become a Paradise.

The thief did not ask Christ to go with him to heaven. Notice, how the *Moffat* translation renders Luke 23:42: "And he added, Jesus, do not forget me *when you come to reign.*"

The *Jerusalem Bible* has the following annotation to this verse: "'Jesus,' he said, 'remember me when you come into your kingdom,' or else, 'in your kingly power,' i.e., to establish your kingdom. Var. 'when you come with (i.e., in possession of) your kingdom.'"

The German-speaking "*Zuercher Bibel*" translates Luke 23:42: "Remember me, when you come with your kingly reign." The *Gute Nachricht* writes: "Remember Me when you are King."

The *Broadman Bible Commentary* states about this verse: "Then the penitent robber turns to Jesus with a

plea to be remembered *when He comes in His kingly power...* [This rendition of the RSV—rather than "in Your Kingdom"] is supported by excellent authorities and fits the context better. "

But, WHY did Christ say that the thief would be with Him in Paradise "**today**"—that is, at the time of their death? Or, *did He* say that?

Let's ask, first, whether *Christ Himself* went to Paradise on the day He died. The Bible tells us that He did NOT. Rather, He was dead and buried for three days and three nights. He said that this would be the only sign that He was the Messiah. He said that as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so He would be three days and three nights in the grave (Matthew 12:40). And even AFTER He was resurrected, after those three days and three nights, He told Mary in John 20:17: "Do not cling to Me, for I have NOT yet ascended to My Father."

So, even after three days and three nights in the grave, He had still not gone to Paradise in heaven. Christ had not gone to Paradise the day He died—and neither did the robber. After all, Christ had promised him, in the rendering of the *New King James Bible*: "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

What, then, DID Christ say—and what DID He mean?

In the original Greek, there are no commas. Notice what the *Lamsa* translation tells us in a footnote to Luke 23:43: "Ancient texts were not punctuated. The comma could come

continued...

before or after today.”

This means, rather than stating, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise,” this passage could also be translated as, “Assuredly, I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise.”

Notice the verbatim or interlinear literal rendition of this passage, as stated in the *Englishman’s Greek New Testament*: “And said to him Jesus: Verily I say to thee today with Me thou shalt be in Paradise.”

The *Companion Bible* states in its appendix, in paragraph 173, that the interpretation of this verse **depends**

exclusively on the punctuation, which is totally dependent on human authority. They explain that until the 9th century, Greek manuscripts had no punctuation at all, and even after that time, they only had a dot separating words from each other. The *Broadman Bible Commentary* admits: “It is **possible** to place the comma after today...”

Christ did not promise the thief that he would be in Paradise the day he died. But since He saw his repentant attitude, He did promise him *on that very day* that he would be in Paradise—here on earth, in the future.

from Milburn Cockrell, “*Three Days and Three Nights*,” in “*Message of the Christian Jew*,” April 1983, the editor of the “*Berea Baptist Banner*”: “Unless we believe that the Bible contains errors, we know that all passages must harmonize. Therefore, ‘after three days’ (Mark 8:31) must mean the same as ‘the third day’ (Matthew 16:21).”

Let us now very carefully examine the Scriptures to see **when, exactly, Jesus Christ was resurrected**. By counting back three days and three nights, we can also determine, then, **when Christ was laid in the grave**.

We read in Matthew 28:1–6 (*Authorized Version*): “In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. . . . And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for HE IS RISEN, AS HE SAID.”

We note from the passage that Christ was already resurrected by the time the women came to the grave. We are told that they appeared “in the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week.” Many commentaries point out that this phrase discusses the END of the SABBATH, that is, Saturday evening or late afternoon, and NOT Sunday morning.

The *Interlinear Literal Translation of the Greek New Testament* renders this verse in this way: “Now late on Sabbath, as it was getting dusk toward (the) first (day) of (the) week, came Mary the Magdalene. . . .”

A.T. Robertson’s *Harmony of the Gospel* comments: “This phrase once gave much trouble, but the usage of the vernacular Koine Greek amply justifies the translation. The visit of the women to inspect the tomb was thus made before the Sabbath was over (before 6 p.m. on Saturday).”

Cockrell states: “When does the Bible say that Jesus rose from the dead? The two Marys came to the tomb ‘in the end of the sabbath’ (Matth. 28:1). The Sabbath always ended at sunset: ‘From even unto even, shall ye celebrate your Sabbath’ (Lev. 23:32). Then they went to the tomb before sunset on Saturday. Jesus had risen from the dead before their arrival (Matth. 28:1–8). . . .”

The *Moffat Bible* translates: “At the close of the Sabbath, when the

first day was dawning...”

The *Elberfelder Bibel* reads: “But late at the Sabbath, in the dawn of the first day.” It comments: “Days started at sunset.”

The *Lamsa Bible* states: “In the evening of the Sabbath, when the first day of the week began to dawn...”

The revised *Luther Bibel* of 1984 translates: “When the Sabbath was over and the first day of the week began...”

The *Menge Bible* renders this verse as follows: “But after the Sabbath, when the first day after the Sabbath was about to begin.”

Finally, the revised *Zürcher Bible* of 1942 states: “After the Sabbath, when it was shining (lightening up) towards the first day of the week...” It adds the following comments: “For the Jews a day began with sunset. The expression [in] Luke 23:54, ‘The Sabbath lightened up...’ [The *King James Bible* states: “The Sabbath drew on” or “drew near”] does not mean that the morning began, but that lights were kindled for the evening... Whether Matthew 28:1 likewise refers to the evening with which the Sabbath ended and the first day of the week began, is not clear.”

However, based on the evidence presented herein, it is very clear that Matthew 28:1 refers to the end of the Sabbath, and NOT to Sunday morning.

For instance, please note the following comments from “*The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa*,” edited by Andreas Spira and Christoph Klock, 1981, pages 265, 266, and 269: “The only testimony about the time of resurrection is produced by Matthew 28:1: ‘Late on the sabbath’... That means, explains Gregory, it was already late in the evening (this evening being the beginning of the night before the first day of the week) when the angel came... Matthew alone remains testifying the hour of resurrection on Saturday evening... The time of resurrection is Saturday evening according to Matthew 28:1... The time of resurrection [was] ‘late on the Sabbath.’”

This fact is also established, when considering the meaning of the Greek word, translated in Matthew 28:1, as “*in the end of the Sabbath*.” The Greek for “*in the end of*” is “*opse*.” It is defined as “late in the evening.” It is not a reference to “early in the morning.” Compare Mark 13:35 and Mark 11:19, where the word “*opse*” is correctly rendered as “even” or “evening.”

Other passages confirm that Christ was resurrected long before

Sunday morning. We read that Mary Magdalene came to the tomb on the first day of the week, when it was still dark, and Jesus was already resurrected by that time (John 20:1). This means, Christ was not resurrected on Sunday morning, at sunrise, but He had already been resurrected, “while it was still dark.” In addition, John 20:1 might not even be talking about events that occurred Sunday morning, “while it was still dark,” but it might be talking about events on Saturday evening, when it was *getting darker*. In the Greek, the word translated as “still” [or “yet” in other translations] is “*eti*.” It can also be translated as “more,” “yet more,” or, “still more,” as was done in Revelation 9:12 (“Behold, *still two more* woes are coming after these things.” Compare *New International Version*: “two other woes are yet to come”; and *New Jerusalem Bible*: “there are *still two more* to come”). In addition, Hebrews 11:32 states: “‘What *more* shall I say?’” This could mean that John’s account is telling us that the women came to the grave when it was getting “even more” dark—or “*darker*,” after they had begun their walk to the grave when it was getting dark, at sunset. This would then also refer to events on Saturday night, not on Sunday morning.

A similar explanation can be given for a passage in Luke 24:1, stating: “Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they and certain other women with them, came to the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared.” This passage may not be talking about events on Sunday morning, but it could refer to events occurring Saturday night. *Word Studies in the New Testament* by Martin Vincent, Volume 1, page 433, explains the correct meaning of the phrase, “very early in the morning”: “Literally, ‘at deep dawn, or the dawn being deep.’... Plutarch says of Alexander that he supped ‘at deep evening,’ i.e. late at night.” In any event, Luke 24:1 does not address the time of the resurrection, but the arrival of certain women at the grave, when the stone was already rolled away from the grave (Luke 24:2).

Some claim that the Bible teaches a Sunday morning resurrection, and use Mark 16:9 as proof. The *New King James Bible* translates: “Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.”

Most commentaries and translators recognize that this is a mistranslation. The original Greek reads, “Now having risen early [the] first [day] of the week he appeared first to Mary the Magdalene...”

(Compare *The Englishman's Greek New Testament, giving the Greek Text of Stephens 1550... together with an Interlinear Literal Translation*).

Mark 16:9 does not say that Christ arose on the first day of the week. This would be in contradiction to the passage in Matthew 28:1, as discussed. The Scripture in Mark 16:9 tells us the time when He appeared to Mary; not, when He rose from the dead. Cockrell points out: "Mark 16:9 tells us Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene early the first day of the week, which was Saturday after sundown. The nearer after sunset this happened, the earlier in the first of the week it was. Mark does not say that she was alone at the time she first saw Jesus, and Matthew tells us that 'the other Mary was with her.' (Matth. 28:1)."

Note that there were no punctuation marks in the original Greek manuscripts. The phrase, "early in the morning" is to be linked with the time of Christ's appearance, not with the time of His resurrection. By simply placing the comma after the word, "risen," this verse reads (compare the literal translation from *The Englishman's Greek New Testament*, as quoted above): "Now having risen, early [the] first [day] of the week he appeared first to Mary Magdalene..." In other words, when the first day of the week began, Jesus had already risen, the resurrection having taken place just before sundown of the last day of the week, the weekly Sabbath.

In addition, we can also understand Mark 16:9 in this way: Suppose you had been sick for awhile, but became healthy again on Monday evening. You visit your friend a few hours later for the first time in several days. One could correctly describe this situation as follows: "When you were healthy early Tuesday morning, you visited your friend." This statement does not say that you *became* healthy Tuesday morning, but when you visited your friend on Tuesday morning, you *were* healthy. Likewise, Mark 16:9 does not say that Christ was raised on the first day of the week, but rather, when He appeared to Mary on the first day of the week, He was already risen.

At this point, let us quote from another commentary that recognizes the fact that Jesus Christ was resurrected Saturday afternoon, just before sunset. George Carlow, *A Defense of the Sabbath*, published his book in 1847. He wrote on pages 103 and 111: "Jesus must needs rise in the evening to complete the time prefixed for his laying dead, which time was what Christ had solemnly declared: 'As Jonahs [sic] was three days

and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the son [sic] of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.' Matth. 12:40. It is then reasonable to believe, that seeing Christ died before the day was ended in the time of his crucifixion, he did rise before the third day was quite ended in the time of his resurrection. . . . Jesus Christ rose from the dead in the even when the Sabbath ended."

However, there is one Scripture, Mark 16:2, which clearly talks about events that took place on Sunday morning, at sunrise. It does not address the time of the resurrection, but rather the time of the women's arrival at the grave. We read: "Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen."

Since we know from other passages that some of the women visited the grave Saturday evening, and we know that Mark 16:2 describes the arrival of some women at the grave early Sunday morning, we must conclude that these Biblical accounts describe several different trips to the grave by various women. In other words, they did not all happen at the same time. This is also supported by the fact that the purposes of the trips to the grave were different. Matthew 28:1 tells us that women came to see the grave. Mark 16:1 and Luke 24:1 tell us that certain women came to anoint Christ. We also note that it is not always the same women that are mentioned. While Matthew 28:1 mentions Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, Mark 16:1 mentions the two Marys and Salome. Luke 24:1 does not identify the women, but implies that quite a number of women went, at certain times, to the grave (compare Luke 23:55). John 20:1 and Mark 16:9 only mention Mary Magdalene.

Some, in a last ditch effort to preach a Sunday morning resurrection, point out an apparent *discrepancy* between Matthew 28:9 and John 20:17. While Christ does not allow Mary to touch Him in the book of John, as He had not yet ascended to heaven, He is touched by certain women in Matthew's account. The rationale given is that in the meantime, He had ascended to heaven and returned to earth, and could now be touched. Therefore, so the argument goes, the account in Matthew must follow the account in John.

But as we saw, John's account may not be talking about events that occurred on Sunday morning, but on Saturday evening, when it was getting darker. In this case, there would be no contradiction between the two accounts. In addition, we might want to note that Matthew

How Did Christ Die?

This question might perhaps surprise some. Isn't it obvious that Christ died by crucifixion? This is true, of course, but the question still needs to be asked and answered, How—exactly—did He die?

Christ died by shedding His blood (Mark 14:24), and it is through His precious shed blood that we can be saved (1 Peter 1:18–19).

When we read Matthew's account, in the *New King James Bible*, we will not find exactly how Christ died. The reason is that this translation omits a crucial verse, at the end of Matthew 27:49. Several translations, as well as many old manuscripts, have retained this missing verse. For instance, verses 49 and 50 read in the *Moffat* translation: "But the others said, 'Stop, let us see if Elijah does come to save him!' (Seizing a lance, another pricked [better, pierced] his side, and out came water and blood.) Jesus again uttered a loud scream, and gave up his spirit."

The *Fenton Bible* translates the missing verse as follows: "But an-

other taking a spear pierced His side, when blood and water came out."

A.T. Robertson, *Harmony of the Gospels*, states in a footnote to Matthew 27:49: "Many ancient authorities add: *And another took a spear and pierced his side, and there came out water and blood.*"

The *Revised Standard Version*, and the *New Revised Standard Version*, add the following footnote: "Other ancient authorities insert *And another took a spear and pierced his side, and out came water and blood.*"

The *Vaticanus*—a Greek New Testament written in the 300's A.D., contains the missing verse as well. It reads: "And another took a spear and pierced his side and there came forth water and blood." The *Sinaiticus Codex* also contains the verse, and so does the *Codex Ephraemi*. According to *The Testament in Greek*, by Wescott and Hort, published in 1896, the missing verse also appears in most Syrian, Egyptian, Armenian, Gothic, and Ethiopic translations. It also appears in

Origen's work [around 200 A.D.]. Walton's *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta*, published in 1657, claims, in Vol. VI, on page 6 of the appendix, that this missing verse was still a marginal reading of the Greek text when the *King James Version* was made.

We need to take note of an additional passage in John's account. We read in John 19:32–34: "Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out."

This Scripture, the way it is rendered, seems to say that the soldier pierced Christ's side after He had already died. However, the word "pierced" is in the *aorist* tense in the original Greek, designating a kind of action, not the time of action. It describes an action done at a single moment, and not continuously, but it does not tell us when the action takes place. Only the context can

make this clear. Therefore, in John 19:34, the passage could also be correctly translated as, "But one of the soldiers HAD PIERCED His side with a spear." From the missing verse in Matthew 27:49, we know that John 19:34 has to be translated, in fact, in the *past* tense.

Christ shed His blood and died when a soldier pierced His side. Revelation 1:7 testifies: "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who *pierced* Him." Compare, too, Zechariah 12:10. We also read, in Luke 2:34–35: "Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, 'Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul **also**), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.'" Finally, Isaiah 53:5 prophesied about Christ: "But He was wounded [margin, *pierced through*] for our transgressions." The New Testament record confirms that this is how Christ died.

and John are using different words in referring to “touching” Christ. In Matthew 28:9, we are told that they held Him by the feet and worshipped Him. In John’s account, the concept is conveyed that the women, in their joy, were trying to seize Him. The *Ryrie Study Bible* comments: “Touch Me not—More accurately the command was, ‘Do not continue holding or clinging to Me’ (in order to restrain Him).” The *NIV* translates: “Do not hold on to me.” The *New King James Bible* says: “Do not cling to Me.” The *RSV* says: “Do not hold me.”

The difference in Christ’s reaction toward certain ones of the women was this: Mary Magdalene wanted to cling on to Him, refusing to let Him go (John 20:17). The women in Matthew’s account were afraid (Matthew 28:8, 10). They needed to touch Him to be given comfort and reassurance that it was He (compare Luke 24:36–39; John 20:25). In any event, John’s account cannot be used to support a Sunday morning resurrection!

Since Christ was resurrected on Saturday afternoon—three days and three nights after lying dead in the grave—He would have had to be killed and buried on Wednesday afternoon, exactly 72 hours earlier. But how can this be? **How could Christ have been killed and buried on a Wednesday?**

Those who have never heard this truth before might be quite astonished to learn that the Bible, indeed, teaches that Christ was killed and buried on Wednesday. *Cockrell* points out: “According to the Bible, Jesus Christ arose before sunset on Saturday... Having shown from Matthew 28:1 that Jesus rose from the grave as the Sabbath ended at sunset and the first day of the week began, this would put the crucifixion on Wednesday at sunset... According to the gospel writers, Jesus died at the ninth hour (3:00 p.m. our time) and was buried about sunset that same day... If Jesus was buried at sunset on Wednesday and arose at sunset on Saturday, He fulfilled the sign of Jonah. He would have been in the grave Wednesday night, Thursday night, and Friday night—a full ‘three nights.’ He would have been in the grave during the daylight of Thursday, Friday and Saturday—a full ‘three days.’ All together a full ‘three days and three nights.’ Thus we have a literal fulfillment of the words of Christ in Matthew 12:40.”

Numerous commentators have confirmed and agree with the historical and Biblical fact that Jesus Christ died and was buried on a

WEDNESDAY. Please note the following selection:

Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Eternity*, June 1958: "... in ancient Christian traditions, attested to by the Didascalia Apostolorum as well as by Epiphanius and Victorinus of Petau (who died in 304 A.D.), gives Tuesday evening as the date of the Last Supper and prescribes a fast for Wednesday to commemorate the capture [and subsequent trial and crucifixion] of Christ."

W.L. Pettingill, *Bible Questions Answered*, p. 182: "To us it is perfectly obvious that crucifixion was on Wednesday."

Finis Dake, *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible*, page 13, note on Matthew 12:40: "Christ was dead for three full days and three full nights. He was put in the grave Wednesday just before sunset and was resurrected at the end of Saturday at sunset."

R. A. Torrey, *Difficulties and Alleged Errors and Contradictions in the Bible*, 1907, pp. 104–109: "... the day on which Jesus Christ was crucified was Wednesday... everything in Scripture is perfectly harmonized by Wednesday crucifixion. It is remarkable how many prophetic and typical passages of the Old Testament are fulfilled and how many seeming discrepancies in the gospel narratives are straightened out when we once come to understand that Jesus died on Wednesday, and not on Friday."

George Carlow, *A Defense of the Sabbath*, states on page 109: "Christ was crucified and died... Wednesday, at the end of which day our blessed Jesus was buried, from which time to the end of the seventh-day Sabbath was three days and three nights, the term of time that our Lord foretold he should lie in the grave. Matt. 12:40."

James A. Walther, *The Chronology of Passion Week*, in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, June 1958: "References in the Didascalia, in Epiphanius, in Victorinus of Petau... support the Tuesday [night] Passover dating and the subsequent arrest of Jesus in the morning hours of Wednesday."

Finally, the *Companion Bible*, published by Oxford University Press, explains in its Appendix 156 that Christ was crucified on a Wednesday.

But again, we ask, How could it be that Christ was crucified on a Wednesday? **Isn't it obvious from John 19:30–42 that Christ was crucified on the "preparation day before the Sabbath," that is, on Friday?**

Again, let us carefully review the passage in the 19th chapter of John. We read: "So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is

finished!’ And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. Therefore, because it was **THE PREPARATION DAY** that the bodies should not remain on the cross **ON THE SABBATH (FOR THAT SABBATH WAS A HIGH DAY)**, the Jews asked Pilate... that they might be taken away... After this, Joseph of Arimathea... asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus... So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus... also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus and bound it in strips of linen with the spices... Now in the place where He was crucified there was... a new tomb... So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews’ **PREPARATION DAY**, for the tomb was **NEARBY**” (verses 30–31, 38–42).

From this, some claim that the “preparation day” refers to the day *before* the weekly Sabbath, and so they teach that Christ was crucified on Friday. If this were true, then Christ was not our Messiah, as He would have **FAILED TO FULFILL THE ONLY SIGN** that He gave as **PROOF** of His Messiahship! If He was crucified on Friday, then He did **NOT** lie in the grave for three days and three nights! Therefore, Jesus Christ would have been an **IMPOSTER**, and **YOU** and **I** would not have our sins forgiven.

Those who claim that the preparation day refers to the day before the *weekly* Sabbath overlook the fact that the word “Sabbath” can refer to the weekly Sabbath, as well as to the seven annual Holy Days, which are also called Sabbaths in the Bible (compare Leviticus 16:29–31; 23:24, 26–32, 34–35, 39). Annual Sabbaths can fall on any day in a given week. The *Elberfelder* Bible explains that the preparation day was “a weekday before the Sabbath or a Festival.” For a thorough discussion of this fact, please read our free booklet, “**God’s Commanded Holy Days.**”

In John 19, the reference is to the Preparation Day of an *annual* Holy Day, **NOT** of the *weekly* Sabbath. It was the Preparation Day of the Passover (John 19:14), which, by the way, refers to the *entire Passover season* and, in particular, the First Day of Unleavened Bread—the first annual Holy Day of the year—according to the Hebrew calendar. The Bible says that “that” particular Sabbath was a “high day”—an annual Holy Day. In the crucifixion year, that particular annual Holy Day or **HIGH Sabbath** fell on Thursday.

Cockrell points out: “The first day of the Passover week, no matter

on what day of the week it came, was always an annual Sabbath... The Bible makes it plain, Jesus was crucified and buried on ‘...the preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath (Mark 15:42). John tells us: ‘And it was the preparation of the Passover’ (John 19:14)... It was the preparation to keep the Passover Sabbath—the annual Sabbath which always came on the 15th day of the first ecclesiastical month. John 19:31 adds: ‘for that Sabbath day was an high day...’ Its greatness was due to the fact that it was the annual Sabbath of the Passover Festival.”

The *Menge Bible* includes the following annotation to John 19:31: “This Sabbath day was a high Feast day.”

In addition, Matthew 28:1 also reveals—correctly translated—that **there were actually two “Sabbaths” during the crucifixion week**, a weekly Sabbath and an annual Sabbath. Cockrell points out: “Matthew makes it plain that two Sabbaths had passed since Jesus was crucified. The KJV [*Authorized Version*] has this rendering: ‘In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre’ (Matth. 28:1). On this verse nearly all translators have allowed tradition to control their translation. It is not ‘Sabbath’ but ‘Sabbaths’ in the Greek text (the genitive case and the plural number). The verse properly translated would read: ‘In the end of the Sabbaths...’ This allows for an annual Sabbath on Thursday and a regular Sabbath on Saturday.”

The *Fenton Bible* renders this verse correctly as, “after the Sabbaths,” and it includes the following footnote: “The Greek original is in the plural, ‘Sabbaths,’ which is retained.”

Alfred Marshall’s Parallel New Testament in Greek and English likewise translate the clause as, “after the Sabbaths.”

In the Greek, the word for “Sabbath” in the clause, “after the Sabbath,” is “*sabbata*.” This is the plural form of “*sabbaton*,” and it is translated elsewhere many times (but unfortunately, not always, and not consistently) in the plural.

For instance, we read in Matthew 12:5 (*Authorized Version*): “... how that on the sabbath days [in Greek, “*sabbata*”] the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath [Greek, “*sabbaton*”].”

Matthew 12:10 (AV) states: “Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days?” The Greek is, “*sabbata*.”

Luke 4:31 (AV) reads: “... and taught them on the sabbath days

[Greek, “*sabbata*.”].” The *New King James Bible* translates this word quite accurately here as, “Sabbaths.”

Further examples can be found in Luke 6:2, 9; Colossians 2:16; and Acts 17:2.

An interesting example can be gleaned from Acts 16:13. The AV translates, quite *in*accurately, “And on the sabbath we went out to the city by a river side...” In the Greek, the word for Sabbath” is “*sabbata*”—the plural form—and should be translated as Sabbath days, or Sabbaths. Commentaries point out that this happened on the day of Pentecost. So the Sabbaths referred to here, describe the weekly Sabbath and the following annual Holy Day of Pentecost, which always falls on a Sunday. The word “*sabbata*” describes the time period of two Sabbaths. The same concept is conveyed in Matthew 28:1. Here, too, the Greek word is “*sabbata*,” so it should read: “In the end of the Sabbaths,” or “...Sabbath days.”

There is additional proof that there had to be two Sabbaths during the crucifixion week. We read in Mark 16:1: “Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him.” [Note that the *Authorized Version* incorrectly translates, “had bought sweet spices.” This rendering is blatantly false. The Greek text is clear that the tense is past, not past perfect. It reads correctly, as rendered by virtually all other translations, “... bought spices.”]

But, we read in Luke 23:54–56: “... the Sabbath drew near... They observed the tomb and how the body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.”

Do you notice the apparent contradiction if one holds on to the idea that there was only one Sabbath—the weekly Sabbath—during the crucifixion week? Mark 16:1 tells us that the women bought the spices after the Sabbath. Luke 23:56 tells us that they prepared the spices before the Sabbath. Obviously, before one can prepare the spices, one must have first bought them. This means, then, unless one wants to claim that the Bible contains contradictions (but if it does, it is worthless), that there must have been two Sabbaths that week: The women bought the spices and prepared them after the *annual* Sabbath on Thursday (compare Mark 16:1), then they rested on the weekly Sabbath on

Saturday (compare Luke 23:54–56), and then they came, after the weekly Sabbath, to anoint Christ.

Cockrell points out: “The traditional interpretation makes Mark and Luke contradict each other. In Mark 16:1 we are informed that the Sabbath was past when the spices were purchased. ‘Had’ is inserted [in the *Authorized Version*] without any authority from the Greek text. ‘No reason can be given for the variation—bought sweet spices. Not had bought’ (*An American Commentary on the New Testament*, Vol. 11, p. 251). In Luke 23:56 we are told that the women prepared the spices and ointments, and rested on the Sabbath day. If Jesus lay in the grave on Sabbath only, Mark and Luke contradict each other. But if He lay there two Sabbaths having a work day between them, then Mark and Luke harmonize to perfection.”

Some claim that Luke 24:21 denies the fact that Christ was crucified on Wednesday and that He was resurrected Saturday afternoon, just before sunset. They say that this passage negates the fact that Christ was dead in the grave for three days and three nights. Luke reports about the two disciples on the road to the village on Emmaus. They are traveling *Sunday morning* and say that “*today is the third day since these things happened.*” However, this claim is ludicrous.

As *Cockrell* explains: “Some make much over the ‘third day’ in Luke 24:21, and they affirm that if the crucifixion took place on Wednesday, Sunday would be the fourth day since these things were done. But the answer is simple. These things were done [including the setting of the seal and the watch over the tomb the following day, or Thursday] just as Thursday was beginning at sunset on Wednesday. They were thereby completed on Thursday, and the first day since Thursday would be Friday, the second day since Thursday would be Saturday, and the ‘third day since’ Thursday would be Sunday, the first day of the week. So the supposed objection in reality supports the Wednesday crucifixion. But if the crucifixion took place on Friday, by no manner of reckoning could Sunday be made ‘the third day since’ these things were done” (Emphasis added).

Jesus Christ is our Messiah. He fulfilled the sign of His Messiahship just as He had said. He was dead, and in the grave for three days and three nights. But He is not dead anymore. He is alive today! He serves as our High Priest, and we are waiting for His Coming!

Chronology of Events During Crucifixion Week

Tuesday evening until Wednesday evening*

- Jesus and His disciples eat the Passover on Tuesday evening, after sunset.
- Jesus is betrayed and arrested Tuesday night (Matthew 26:47)
- Jesus is brought before Annas and Caiaphas Tuesday night and Wednesday morning, after midnight (John 18:13, 24)
- Jesus is mocked and beaten in the early dark hours of Wednesday morning (Luke 22:63)
- Jesus is scourged and crucified during the daylight hours on Wednesday. He dies Wednesday afternoon about 3 p.m. (Matthew 27:46–50). This is the Preparation Day before the annual Holy Day or Sabbath of the First Day of Unleavened Bread (Luke 23:54; Mark 15:42; John 19:31)
- Jesus is buried by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus on Wednesday, at sunset (Matthew 27:57–66)

Thursday

- First Day of Unleavened Bread, the High Day, an annual Sabbath.
- The women rest on this annual Sabbath (Mark 16:1)
- This is the *first 24 hours day* during which Jesus is in the grave.

Friday

- The women buy and prepare spices (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56)
- This is the *second 24 hours day* during which Jesus is in the grave.

Saturday

- Weekly Sabbath, on which women rest, who had purchased and prepared the spices (Luke 23:56)
- This is the *third 24 hours day* during which Jesus is in the grave.
- Christ rises Saturday evening, at the end of the weekly Sabbath, around sunset, exactly three days and three nights after He has been buried and placed in the grave (Matthew 28:1)
- Women come to see the grave, *in the end* of the weekly Sabbath (Matthew 28:1).

Saturday evening, after sunset

- Mary Magdalene visits the grave, when it is *getting darker* (John 20:1)
- Women visit the grave at “*deep dawn,*” or *late at night* (Luke 24:1)

Sunday morning

- Women visit the grave Sunday morning, at sunrise (Mark 16:2)
- Two disciples walk to Emmaus and discuss the events that took place, beginning with Thursday (Luke 24:13–21)

* Remember that days start and end with sunset, in accordance with the Hebrew Calendar

Part 6

THE NEED FOR CHRIST'S SACRIFICE

We have all heard it said that “Christ died for our sins.” What does this mean for mankind? What does it mean to *you* as an individual? Why is it important that *you* understand this statement? Or is it important at all? Have you given any thought as to *why it should make a difference to you*?

In this chapter, we will help you understand why it was ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY that Jesus Christ die for you and me! AND *what* consequences Christ's death should have in the way we live our lives! You will then be able to answer the question: What does it really mean when we say that “Christ died for our sins”?

WE ALL HAVE SINNED!

To begin with, it is foundational that you understand that every human being is a sinner—EVERYONE SINS! Only one human being did not, and that was Jesus Christ. But you and I are not that person. We cannot say of ourselves that we have not sinned and that we will not sin anymore. 1 Kings 8:46 tells us that there is no one who does not sin. Ecclesiastes 7:20 says: “there is not a just man on earth who...does not sin.” 1 John 1:8–10 explains that if we say we *have no sin*, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us, and that if we say we *have not sinned*, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

Job deceived himself because he thought he was without sin (Job 10:6–7). Do we sometimes believe that too? If we do, we make God a liar, because it is God who says that we ALL have sinned and still DO sin. Every human being needs constant forgiveness of his or her sins, because every human being has sinned, and still does sin.

Romans 5:12 also tells us that all human beings have sinned, and consequently, all are guilty and are condemned to death. Romans 6:23 says that “the wages of sin is death.” Wages are something we earn for our work. If we sin, we are paid for that: our wages for sin is death—eternal death—from which there is NO RESURRECTION to life.

Romans 3:9, 23 explains that we are all under sin and have fallen short of God's glory. Being under sin means that sin rules over us. We are slaves of sin. And as sinners, we cannot attain to God's glory. God wants us to have His glory—eternal life—but we will not acquire it as long as we are “sinners”—as long as we practice the way of sin.

The **ONLY** way to attain the glory that God wants to give us through a resurrection, is by realizing and accepting what **CHRIST** did for us, and by acting accordingly in our daily living.

In order to fully appreciate that it is **ONLY** through the death and resurrection and the life of Jesus Christ that we can be spared from eternal death and attain eternal life, we need to first comprehend that there is **NOTHING** you and I can do in this life to eradicate the death penalty that we have already incurred through our sins. For example, penance—voluntary self-punishment in order to “atone” for some wrongdoing—is a concept not taught at all in Scripture.

We are, in essence, convicted criminals who wait for our execution, which would surely be carried out unless someone pardons us—unless we somehow obtain mercy so that our execution will not be carried out. Romans 3:19–20 makes it clear that keeping the law today does not, and would not, justify or nullify our past sins. Proverbs 20:9 asks the rhetorical question: “Who can say, ‘I have made my heart clean? I am pure from my sin?’” It is a rhetorical question, as no human being can say that. **NOTHING** we can do now can save us from the death penalty that we have already earned because of violating God's law. We cannot dismiss our sins!

CHRIST NEVER SINNED!

As alluded to before, there is only **ONE** human being who has never sinned. That human being was Jesus Christ. As we fully covered in Part II, He gave up His divinity to become a human being. But He had God's Holy Spirit within Him from the day of His conception, without measure or limit (John 3:34), and it was this Spirit within Him that gave Him the power to resist and overcome sin. **Christ never sinned!** He asked in John 8:46: “Which of you convicts Me of sin?”

1 Peter 2:21–22 confirms that Christ committed no sin. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that He was without sin, although He was tempted in all points just as we are tempted today.

But to remain sinless was not an easy task for Christ. **As a human being, He faced the same temptations that you and I face, AND it WAS POSSIBLE** for Christ to sin! Why else would Satan have tried to tempt Him to sin? Why else did Christ have to pray to God to give Him the power and strength to resist sin? Why else did He ask God to give Him the ability to submit His will to the Father's will?

Hebrews 5:7–9 explains that Christ prayed to God with vehement cries and tears in order to be saved from the second death—the eternal death. Luke 12:49–50; 22:44 show that He was *DISTRESSED* about His death. As a human being, He did not want to die such a terrible death. Luke 22:39–44 reports that God, the Father, sent an angel to Christ to strengthen Him, so that He could go through His preordained trial and crucifixion. Matthew 26:36–39 tells us that Christ prayed to the Father to obtain the help needed to submit His will to the Father's will.

And so we see that, although it was humanly POSSIBLE for Christ to sin, He did not sin! Christ conquered sin! He was victorious over sin! He NEVER gave in to temptation! This is important for us to understand because by, and through His death, our sins can be paid for and forgiven. WHY is this the case? Because Christ's life was more valuable than the lives of all of mankind combined, because it was He who created mankind (compare Colossians 1:17). The value of the Creator is undeniably far more than the total value of everything He creates.

CHRIST PAID FOR OUR SINS

Again, Christ became a human being to free us from sin and from the penalty for sinning. Do we fully understand and appreciate what this means and what it includes?

John 1:29 identifies Christ as a lamb upon which the sins of the world were placed—like a burden under which the world is suffering. He carried those sins away. Isaiah 53:6, 11, confirms that God the Father laid our sins on Christ. He bore OUR iniquity! Jesus was, throughout His human life, the lamb that would have to die, thereby carrying our sins away (Isaiah 53:7).

As the Lamb of God, He was made the “propitiation” by His blood for those who have “faith in Jesus,” as Romans 3:25–26 explains. The margin of the *New King James Bible* explains that the word “propitiation” has the meaning of “mercy seat.” In Hebrews 9:5 it is translated as

“mercy seat.” The *NIV* renders it as “sacrifice for atonement.” The meaning conveyed then, is that Jesus Christ paid for our sins through His blood.

God the Father passes over our sins when He sees Christ’s blood covering them, just as the death angel passed over the ancient Israelites when he saw the blood on the doorposts of the houses. The death angel would not kill the Israelites where there was the blood of the Passover lamb. Our sins will not kill us either, because of what Christ—the true Passover Lamb—did for us. **HOWEVER**, Christ’s blood covers only those sins that we **PREVIOUSLY** committed. That means, once we repent of our sins and turn to God and accept forgiveness for our sins by claiming Christ’s sacrifice, we are **NOT** to turn back and start sinning again. We have no **LICENSE** to sin after our previous sins have been forgiven (compare Romans 6:1–2).

Just as Christ died a human death, so **WE** are to die to sin. That means we are to “sin no more!” Christ removed our sins from each of us and placed them on Himself, like a sheep carries a load, and He died with them. **WE** are not to resurrect those sins for which, and with which, Christ died!

But, we read earlier that we **WILL** sin from time to time. Even now, there is **NO ONE** who does not sin. This happens because we are weak and because we still have bad habits that sometimes come to the surface. We might easily just give in to them, perhaps because we are not as close to God as we should be. In any event, we sin because we are still flesh and blood, but we don’t like it. We try to get rid of it. We don’t want to do it. When it happens, however, and when we come to our senses and repent and try desperately not to continue in it, God will forgive us even then—because of Christ’s death. 1 John 2:1–2 tells us: “... And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” Christ came to die for us, to pay the death penalty on our behalf, so that we—you and I—don’t have to die the **SECOND** death.

PERFECT SACRIFICE

In order to come to the point of **DYING** for our **SINS**—to be a perfect sacrifice that the Father would accept—Christ had to fulfill

certain requirements, as follows:

1. **He had to become a human being.** Galatians 4:4–5 explains that He had to be born of a woman; that is, He had to become flesh and blood, a human being. Spirit beings do not and cannot die.
2. **He had to become sin for us,** as 2 Corinthians 5: 21 explains. This does not mean that He sinned while He was human. But it does mean that He BECAME sin, that He personified sin in the Father’s eyes, so that His shed blood could COVER sin and wipe it away. He—the Lamb of God—placed our sins on Himself, and He, in that sense, BECAME THOSE SINS. In God’s eyes, when Christ was killed, all those sins were eradicated with Him.
3. **He had to become a curse for us,** as Galatians 3:13 points out. He became a curse for us when He was crucified. In becoming a curse for us, He freed us from the curse that we were under. When we violated God’s law and sinned, the curse of the law—the death penalty—was upon us. Notice that when we sin, we are placed under the curse of the law. Galatians 3:10 tells us: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” James 2:10 adds: “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.” When we break one of God’s commandments, we are guilty of transgressing God’s law, and the curse of God’s law—the death penalty for sin—is upon us. If this curse were not removed, we would die the second death—eternal death. Notice this in the sobering example given by Christ in Matthew 25:41–46 where Christ is referring to people who have sinned, because when they had the ability to help others in need, they actually held back and refused to extend the needed help. They apparently sinned willfully and maliciously, so that their penalty—their curse—was eternal death in *gehenna* fire. But Christ became that curse for us so that the curse CAN be removed from us, IF, and WHEN we repent and claim His perfect sacrifice.
4. **He had to come in the form of sinful flesh,** as Romans 8:3 explains: “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh [humans were too weak to keep it], God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh.” Christ was a human being, like you

and I. He was exposed to the same human temptations that confront us. He had the same human nature that we have. He was in the form of sinful flesh. He did not sin, but His sinful flesh tempted Him many times to sin. However, Christ overcame His sinful desires, and by doing so, He “condemned sin in His flesh,” that is, He showed that man, with the help of God’s Spirit within him, *can* overcome sin. He came, as a human being, “on account of sin.” He had to, and did, overcome sin IN THE FLESH.

5. ***Christ had to experience being separated from God the Father.***

Matthew 27:45–46 records that just prior to Christ’s death, while hanging on the cross, He asked the Father: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” Yes, indeed, WHY?

WHY did God forsake Him? Before we answer that, we need to understand what sin does to us. Isaiah 59:1–2 explains that our sins, unrepented of, separate us from God. God will not hear our prayers if we live in sin. It can be compared with a wall between God and us.

Habakuk 1:13 adds that God cannot look on, or accept, wickedness. Good and evil are not compatible, and God, who is good, cannot and will not accept evil. So, God does not regard the prayers of an unrepentant sinner. Deuteronomy 23:12–14 explains the principle that God does not want to see something unclean in a person. If the uncleanness is not taken care of, He will turn away from us and forsake us. Finally, Psalm 5:5 points out that God will not allow a boastful evil person to stand before Him. God will not hear somebody who is proud about his or her sins and who is not willing to repent of them.

But why did God forsake Christ who never sinned, who was never boastful or unclean or wicked or evil?

We know already that Christ had become sin for us, that the curse of the law for our sins was upon Him when He was crucified. We also read that at the time of His crucifixion, just prior to His death, something remarkable happened. We are told that it *became DARK* over all the land from the sixth to the ninth hour. What is the significance of this period of darkness?

Darkness symbolizes sin, as many Scriptures reveal (Compare Romans 13:12; Ephesians 5:8–14). When Christ had all the sins of mankind placed upon Him, thereby having “become” sin, in that sense, He

had to experience separation from God, the Father! God, the Father saw all of the sins of man placed on His Son and He could not look at them. His eyes were “purer than to behold” those sins. Remember, those sins included mass murders, rapes, terrible wars, tortures, sorceries, demonic idolatries, holocausts, martyrdom of the saints—all of the wicked, evil, rotten, despicable and deplorable abominations man has done, and continues to do—and all of these were placed on Christ!

Christ was *WILLING* to offer Himself as this sacrifice for us. And the Father was *WILLING* to have His Son go through this ordeal, knowing that He would have to withdraw from Him at the time of Christ’s death.

And what a sacrifice it was! Christ, who had been forsaken by everybody, had always found comfort in the fact that God, the Father, would never forsake Him (compare John 16:32). But at that moment in time, God, the Father, would *HAVE TO FORSAKE HIM*, not because of anything that Christ had done, but because of what *WE* had done and would still do.

CHRIST DIED SO WE COULD BE RECONCILED TO THE FATHER

We have seen that Christ’s death and sacrifice were necessary to make it possible for us to obtain God’s *forgiveness* for our sins. What else did Christ’s death accomplish?

Christ died for us, so that *we could gain personal access to God, the Father*. We were cut off from God—separated from God—because of our sins. We could not get through to God in a personal way. But, when Christ died, something happened. Matthew 27:50–51 reports that the veil of the temple in Jerusalem was torn in two from top to bottom. This temple in Jerusalem symbolized the temple of God in heaven. The veil was torn from top to bottom, showing that God in heaven did it, not anyone on the earth. This event depicted the fact that from that point on, man’s prayers could reach God in His heavenly temple, because our sins, which previously separated us from God, had been forgiven. We now had personal access to God, as Revelation 8:3–4 describes. Compare, too, Hebrews 10:19–22: “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest [God’s throne in heaven] by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, *through the veil, that is, His flesh*, and having a High Priest over the house of God [the Church],

let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

The veil that prevented our prayers from reaching God, the Father, was torn by God Himself, showing that God accepted Christ’s sacrifice as sufficient payment for our sins! It also showed that our prayers could now come before God and that they would be accepted. We have this special access to God, the Father, as long as we are in a state of purity from sin, that is sinless, and as long as we are sincerely repentant if and when we do sin, so that He can “forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Christ died for us so that *we could be reconciled to God the Father*.

We read in Romans 5:10: “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son...” Colossians 1:21–22 adds: “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death...”

Christ reconciled us to God the Father. We became God’s friends. The animosity ceased. Reconciliation means, “to bring back to friendship after an estrangement.” But more is involved. In German, the word for “reconciliation” is “Versöhnung.” This word includes the word, “Sohn” [in English, “son”]. Reconciliation with God describes a process of becoming His literal sons and daughters. Without Christ’s death, we would still be God’s enemies and could never become His friends, let alone His sons and daughters.

CHRIST DIED SO WE COULD BE SET FREE

Christ died so that *we could be released*. Matthew 20:28 tells us that Christ came to give His life as a “ransom” for many. To give something as a ransom for a person means to “secure the release of a person for a required price, as from captivity or detention.”

From what, exactly, did Christ release us?

Christ released us—set us free—from transgressions, sins, iniquity and our sinful nature. Hebrews 9:12 tells us that we have obtained “eternal redemption.” “Redemption” means, “to regain possession of by paying a price; to pay off, to set free.” We have been set free, eternally, from transgressions or sins (compare Hebrews 9:15). Titus 2:14 adds:

“... who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” We have been freed from “every lawless deed.” Sin is not supposed to RULE over us anymore. Rather, we are now supposed to rule over sin.

In addition, *Christ released us from Satan, the devil*. We read in Colossians 1:13–14 that we are delivered from the power of darkness and that we have redemption through Christ’s blood, the forgiveness of sins. We have been set free or delivered from Satan through the forgiveness of our sins! Originally, Satan had power over us, because through our sins, we were his slaves and, at the same time, we were God’s enemies. But as we are told in Hebrews 2:14–15: “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power over death, that is, the devil, and *release those* who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

Christ released us from the devil and his power. The devil was a mankiller or murderer from the beginning. He deceived mankind to sin. Since death is the penalty of sin, Satan was ruling over them. We were not God’s children, but Satan’s. Notice John 8:44: “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning...”

Mankind had become captured by the devil and was subsequently enslaved to his ways of rebellion, competition, hatred, murder, and deceitfulness. Christ came to release man from his spiritual captivity by paying the required ransom price. He set us free from sin and Satan. BUT, if we continue sinning, we come again under Satan’s rule, and unless we repent, Satan will have enslaved us again—he will have WON! Notice 2 Timothy 2:24–26: “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and *escape the snare of the devil*, having been taken captive by him to do his will.”

We have seen, then, that Christ died to release us from our sinful nature, from sin itself, and from the devil and his power. Christ bought us through His death! We became the property of Christ and God, the

Father. The ransom price that Christ paid was His very own blood (compare Acts 20:28; 2 Peter 2:1, 18–20; 1 Corinthians 7:23; Revelation 5:9). We were redeemed or purchased by God, to become His property. God gained possession of us! As God’s property, we are to follow and live the way we are told by our owner, God, the Father, and Jesus Christ. Romans 6:11, 13, 22, tells us: “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord... present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God... But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.”

We saw that Christ’s death redeemed us. Our redemption BEGAN with His death. But our ultimate redemption—being born again—is still in the future. We read in Ephesians 4:30: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom [better, which] you were *sealed for the day of redemption*.” Note, too, Ephesians 1:13–14: “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who [better, which] is the guarantee [margin: down payment, earnest] of our inheritance *until the redemption of the purchased possession*, to the praise of His glory.”

What, then, is our ultimate redemption? From what are we to be set free ultimately?

Romans 8:23 explains: “Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption [better, sonship], the redemption of our body.” Our ultimate redemption is to be free from this mortal, temporary body of flesh and blood, and to obtain a glorious, immortal, eternal spiritual body. If we are alive at the return of Christ, we will be changed instantly to spirit, or, if we died before His return, we will be resurrected to immortality (compare 1 Corinthians 15:51–54).

CHRIST DIED SO WE COULD BECOME JUSTIFIED

Finally, Christ died so that *we could become justified*. Romans 5:9 points out: “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” But justification does not mean that we can now continue to live in sin. Rather, we read in the

very next verse: “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, **we shall be saved by His life.**” Christ’s life brings about our salvation, after His death justified us and reconciled us with God. But how?

Romans 8:3–4 explains: “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

The righteous requirements of God’s law will be fulfilled IN us. This is only possible when Christ lives IN us, through the Holy Spirit! This is how we can be saved and live *through His life*. Christ lives IN US His life of overcoming and conquering sin. He IS COMING again, in the flesh (2 John 7), to live His life in the flesh—OUR flesh. He lives in us through the Holy Spirit and we must follow the lead of the Holy Spirit as we go about our daily lives (compare Romans 8:14: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”). We must *allow* Christ to live His life in us.

We are not just or righteous because of our own selves. God alone is just and righteous. We have to look for, search, and try to attain God’s righteousness. God has to give us His righteousness as a gift (compare Romans 5:17). We have to replace whatever righteousness we may think we have on our own with God’s righteousness. That is something Job, who did not want to give up “his” righteousness, had to learn. Once we receive that gift of God’s righteousness, we have to allow the righteous Christ to live, and to continue to live, *His life* in us. Paul said about himself, in Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but *Christ lives in me*; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in [better: of] the Son of God.”

We are asked to find out to what extent Christ lives His life in us (compare 2 Corinthians 13:5). We are asked to find out to what extent we are willing to let Christ in us overcome and conquer sin and our sinful nature.

It all starts with our **acceptance of Jesus Christ as our personal Savior**. Some have wondered whether we should use the expression, “We must accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior.” The reason for their concern is that this expression is used by many Protestant churches

to say that Christ accepts us as we are, without any need on our part to change. This concept of not needing to change is, of course, entirely false. The Bible teaches that we *MUST CHANGE*, and that Jesus Christ does not accept us “as we are.” Our booklet, “Baptism—a Requirement for Salvation?” explains in detail that we must repent *BEFORE* Christ will accept us, and, before we can even properly “accept” the sacrifice He made for us.

The mere fact that some misuse and misapply a certain Biblical term or concept is not reason enough for us to not use it. For instance, many preach a wrong gospel message (compare Galatians 1:6–9), or even a false “Jesus” (compare 2 Corinthians 11:4). This does not mean, however, that God’s Church should therefore refrain from using the terms “gospel” or “Jesus.”

In regard to the expression, “accepting Jesus Christ as our personal Savior,” the Church has used similar language for a long time (as it has used, of course, the terms “gospel” or “Jesus” for a very long time). As early as 1948, Mr. Armstrong wrote about “our acceptance of [Christ’s] death, burial and resurrection,” and our belief “on Jesus Christ as personal Savior.” (Compare the Worldwide Church of God’s old booklet on water baptism, copyrighted 1948, 1954, and 1972, pp. 11 and 15.)

These expressions are Biblical. We understand, of course, that believing on Christ (compare Acts 19:4; Romans 10:14; Philippians 1:29; 1 Timothy 1:16) includes *obeying* Him (compare Matthew 7:21–23; Luke 6:46; John 15:14). We must indeed accept Christ’s sacrifice and Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. At the same time, we must also accept God, the Father, as our personal Savior, as *BOTH* deserve that title. Remember, we read in John 3:16 that “God [the Father] so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

We are told in several Scriptures that Jesus Christ is our personal Savior. Isaiah 43:3 reads, quoting the “LORD” of the Old Testament, generally a reference to Jesus Christ: “For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, YOUR SAVIOR.” Also, we are told in Luke 1:47 that God the Father is our personal Savior. When Mary was told by the angel that she would give birth to Jesus, she stated, “And my spirit has rejoiced in God MY SAVIOR.”

Christ was recognized by the Samaritans as the “Savior of the World”

(John 4:42). At the same time, God, the Father, is called “the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe” (1 Timothy 4:10).

In 2 Timothy 1:10, Christ is called “OUR Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” In Titus 1:4, Paul is wishing Titus “Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ OUR Savior.”

WE MUST ACCEPT JESUS CHRIST

The Bible conveys the concept that we must ACCEPT Jesus Christ—and what He did and still does for us—as our personal Savior. That is, we must accept Christ as the One who died for us individually and personally, and who, thereby, made possible a way for us to escape death and obtain salvation. Christ died for you and me! The amazing and mind-boggling truth is that if you had been the only person on the face of the earth, and if you had only sinned once, Christ still would have had to die for you, to offer you salvation. His death is to be understood quite personally. Paul understood it that way. Although he explained that Christ died for all of us, he also emphasized the very personal sacrifice that Christ brought for him. He stated in Galatians 2:20 that Christ, the Son of God, “loved ME and gave Himself for ME.”

We read in Colossians 2:6 that “as you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.” The *Revised English Bible*, as well as the *Luther Bible* and the *Menge Bible*, render this phrase in this way, “Since you have ACCEPTED Christ Jesus AS Lord, live in union with him.”

Before baptism, we must accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, the one who was willing, through His sacrifice, to pay on our behalf the death penalty for our sins (compare Romans 6:23). We must also accept Jesus Christ as the One who is now living His life in us. After all, as we saw already, we *WILL BE SAVED BY CHRIST LIVING IN US*. Romans 5:8–10 reads: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we *SHALL BE SAVED* from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son [by accepting Christ’s sacrifice, the process of our salvation began], much more, having been reconciled, we *SHALL BE SAVED BY HIS LIFE*.” Christ is willing to live

His life in us, but we must follow and be submissive to His lead. Our ultimate salvation will come when we will be changed into Spirit beings.

We read that we “shall be saved” by Christ’s LIFE. Paul said in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...” Both God, the Father, and Jesus Christ live in a converted person, through the Holy Spirit. Christ told us in John 14:23, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make OUR home with him.” (To learn more about the Biblical teaching that BOTH the Father and the Son live in a converted person, please read our free booklet, *“Is God a Trinity?”*)

Christ, who was God, became man. He died for us. God the Father resurrected Him and restored Him to His former glory as a God being. He is *ALIVE!* He is the Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5). He is our High Priest, intervening on our behalf before God, the Father. He helps us in time of need, having experienced how it is to live in the flesh. And most importantly, He is living His life in us now, through the Holy Spirit of God, to help us to become more and more perfect, so that we, too, can become glorified God beings in the Family and Kingdom of God.

Paul explains this process, and the awesome task and function of Jesus Christ, in Ephesians 5:25–27: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water [baptism] by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”

In letting Christ live His life in us, the Church will have made herself ready when the time of ultimate redemption arrives (compare Revelation 19:7–8). The question is, Will you be ready?

Part 7

THE DAY OF CHRIST'S RETURN

Christ promised that He would return to this earth—at the end of this age—to establish the Kingdom of God.

In Matthew 24:3, the disciples asked Christ three questions: “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the SIGN of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” Christ had just spoken about the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (vv. 1–2). The disciples wanted to know more about the destruction of the temple, erroneously believing that that event would coincide with Christ’s return. As it turned out, the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., but Christ’s return would not occur for quite some time. Christ explained to them that numerous significant events would have to happen before He would return.

In Mark 13:4, the disciples are quoted as asking, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the SIGN when all these things will be fulfilled?”

In the accounts of both Matthew and Mark, Christ pointed out that the preaching of the gospel in all the world to all nations must precede His coming and the end of the age. He said in Matthew 24:14, “And this gospel of the kingdom WILL BE preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” He is quoted as saying in Mark 13:10, “And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.” The fact that the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom of God in all the world was given as a SIGN for Christ’s return, shows that this gospel had NOT been preached to the world for a long time. Of course, “a” gospel was preached—the gospel “about” Christ—but not the gospel OF Christ—the very same message that **Christ brought. Christ was a messenger with a message from God the Father, and He brought** and proclaimed the gospel or good news *about* the Kingdom of God (compare Mark 1:1, 14–15). The Church of God has the commission—the obligation and responsibility—to proclaim this very same gospel message today.

THE SIGN OF CHRIST'S RETURN

As stated above, the disciples asked Christ for the “SIGN” of His coming. The Greek word for “SIGN” is “*semeion*.” It conveys the meaning of a “signal” (*Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible*) or an “indication” (*W.E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*). It can also convey the meaning of “miracle” or “wonder”” (*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*).

For instance, the unbelieving Jews at Christ’s time—called by Christ a “wicked and adulterous generation” (Matthew 16:4)—were only given the “SIGN” of Jonah to confirm that Christ was the Messiah. As Jonah became a “SIGN” to the Ninevites (Luke 11:30)—being three days and three nights in the belly of the whale—so Christ would become a “SIGN” to the Jews of His time—being three days and three nights (72 hours) in the grave (Matthew 12:39–40). Tragically, orthodox Christianity has rejected the ONLY sign that Christ gave to the Jews, proving His Messiahship. Many professing Christians falsely claim that Christ was only in the grave from Friday evening to Sunday morning, much less than the prophesied 72 hours. They have, thereby, rejected Jesus Christ—the only name through which man can be saved (Acts 4:12).

In addition, an angel gave the shepherds in the field a SIGN that Christ had been born, the sign of “a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12).

These SIGNS were to prove to the people at the time of Christ that the Messiah was born, that Christ was the long-awaited Messiah. In the same way, the fact that the true gospel of the KINGDOM OF GOD is being preached in all the world as a witness or testimony—for instance through the tools of the printing press and the Internet—is a SIGN today, to those with understanding (Daniel 12:10), that Christ’s return is imminent.

It is an undeniable fact that the true gospel of the Kingdom of God was being preached to the world during the lifetime of Herbert W. Armstrong, the late human leader of the Church of God. Consider this quote from those who strongly opposed what was taught: “But for the modest size of his movement, Herbert W. Armstrong was a well-known figure in religious circles for most of half a century. It was hard to find anyone who had not seen an issue of *The Plain Truth* magazine or heard *The World Tomorrow* radio and television broadcasts”

(*Christianity Today*, June 10, 2002, Vol. 46, No. 7, article titled, “From the Fringe to the Fold”).

It is likewise an undeniable fact that Mr. Armstrong died in 1986, and that Christ has not yet returned. This means, then, that God’s Church has the *continuing obligation* to preach the gospel in all the world as a witness. Christ made it very clear that the gospel would still be preached at the time of His return. He told His disciples in Matthew 28:19–20 that He would be with them “always, even to the END of the age,” while they were “making disciples of all the nations” (a logical consequence of the Church’s preaching the gospel in all the world, compare Romans 10:14–15). Christ also said that those who would be doing God’s Work of preaching His gospel would not have finished it, even in the cities of Israel, when He returns (Matthew 10:23).

Christ told His servants that they must not be unprofitable, but that they must be found DOING the Work of God when Christ returns (Matthew 24:46; James 1:25). If they were to refuse to preach the gospel, although possessing the means to do so, and if they were falsely believing and proclaiming the Work to be over, they would be held accountable by Christ. There are those today who have different ideas that don’t correspond with Scripture, thinking that they know better. If that is the case and they have an egotistical and self-centered attitude, they certainly WILL NOT BE counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass (Luke 21:36)!

In addition to the SIGN of seeing the true gospel being preached in all the world, Christ spoke about “great SIGNS from heaven” (Luke 21:11). This is a reference to the “heavenly signs” mentioned in Revelation 6:12–17, following the Great Tribulation and immediately preceding the Day of the Lord (which will begin one year before Christ’s return). The Great Tribulation, spoken of in many Biblical passages, describes national captivity of the modern houses of Israel and Judah (the Commonwealth nations and the USA, as well as the modern Jews) and a martyrdom of many of the saints (Revelation 6:9–11).

Christ mentioned that at that time, there would be “SIGNS in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Luke 21:25–26).

Notice the immediate context of these events: “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because *your redemption* draws near” (vv. 27–28).

We see, then, that the “heavenly signs” are also an indication of the imminence of Christ’s return, as they signal the beginning of the Day of the Lord—God’s rule over man. Christ elaborated in Matthew 24:29–30: “Immediately after the [great] tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the SIGN of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

If this SIGN is different from the “heavenly signs” mentioned earlier, then what is it? It might be referred to in Revelation 15:1: “Then I saw another SIGN in heaven, great and marvelous.” This sign points at the pouring out of the seven last plagues—after the Day of the Lord has begun—which complete the wrath of God. Some of these plagues will be poured out immediately FOLLOWING Christ’s return. However, the Bible does not say what exactly the “SIGN of the Son of Man” of Matthew 24:30 is. Some have suggested that it may refer to Christ Himself appearing in heaven. The *Broadman Bible Commentary* states, “The sign of the Son of man is of unknown meaning, although it is more directly related to Jesus than are the astronomical signs. The Greek genitive allows for the idea that the Son of man is himself the sign, i.e., “the sign, which is the Son of man.”

If so, this would prove that Christ returns visibly, not in secret. On the other hand, this SIGN of the Son of Man could not be the one given in answer to the disciples’ question of what the SIGN of His return and the end of the age would be. Christ obviously did not say, “The sign of My return is My return.” Rather, He clearly gave as the sign of His immediate return the ongoing preaching of His true gospel in all the world, while additional recognizable global events would occur (including, for example, the rise of a political/military/economic/religious power bloc in Europe, as the tenth and last resurrection of the ancient Holy Roman Empire; a war in the Middle East; a military attack on the United States of America, Great Britain, and the state of

Israel; and cosmic signs or disturbances).

Referring to that very time, Christ warned His disciples not to be deceived by false SIGNS or miracles and wonders. He said that during the time of the Great Tribulation, beginning perhaps just before that time, “false christs and false prophets will rise and show great SIGNS and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24). One of their deceptions will include the false teaching that Christ has returned, waiting to meet His disciples “in the desert” (v. 26). In other words, they will preach a version of the well-known “secret rapture” theory, claiming that Christ will return twice—firstly, to take His disciples to Himself, and secondly, to restore God’s Kingdom on this earth. “False,” Christ said. “Don’t believe those false teachings,” He warned. Rather, “... as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, SO ALSO WILL THE COMING of the Son of Man be” (verse 27).

Christ warned that just prior to His return, “the man of sin” would be revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:3). This person is elsewhere identified as the “false prophet.” He will be alive at Christ’s return, and Christ will “consume [him] with the breath of His mouth” (v. 8). This man of sin—also called the “lawless one”—will be given Satan’s powers, “with all... SIGNS, and lying wonders” (v. 9). The book of Revelation tells us that this “false prophet” will deceive people with his signs. We read in Revelation 13:14: “And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those SIGNS which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast.” We are told, too, in Revelation 19:20 that “the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked SIGNS in his presence, by which he deceived...”

We see, then, that the power to work SIGNS or miracles is NOT necessarily proof that God is with that person. Some want desperately to receive power to work signs and miracles, like Simon Magus, who offered Peter money to receive the power to bestow the Holy Spirit on others through the laying on of his hands (Acts 8:18–19). Peter told him, though, that his “heart” was not “right in the sight of God” (verse 21), and that he needed to repent (verse 22). The historical record shows that he did not repent, but that he continued to perform his sorceries (verse 9), thereby deceiving many people. Christ warned that in the end time, just preceding His coming, “false prophets” or “preachers” (not just THE false prophet) would appear, deceiving “many” with

false signs and wonders. If possible, Christ said, they would even deceive the “elect.”

Christ told us not to fall asleep or to give up. He said that only those who endure until the end shall be saved (Matthew 24:13). Rather than concentrating on signs and wonders, we must make sure that we will be **READY** when Christ returns, for He will come at an hour we do not expect (compare Matthew 24:44).

The fact that Jesus Christ will return to this earth is important. Equally important, and perhaps even more so, is the question of **WHY** Jesus Christ will return.

WHY JESUS CHRIST WILL RETURN

As was already mentioned, the return of Jesus Christ is one of the most fundamental and foundational teachings and doctrines in the Bible. It is perhaps **THE** most critical teaching in true Christianity insofar as our future is concerned. **WITHOUT** the return of Christ, you and I would have **NO** future.

Some have tried to spiritualize away the return of Christ, by saying that Christ already returned on the day of Pentecost when He poured out His Spirit on the early disciples. But this is **NOT** what the Bible teaches. Rather, according to the Word of our Savior, Christ will come back quite literally, in person. There are dozens, if not hundreds of passages, which make this truth abundantly clear. When reviewing some of those Scriptures, we will plainly see **WHY** Christ is going to come back to this earth.

Acts 1:9–11 informs us: “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, *will so come in like manner* as you saw Him go into heaven.’”

Christ will come back in the same manner as the disciples saw Him go into heaven. He will not come secretly, and He will not come figuratively, that is, only through His Holy Spirit. He departed from the Mount of Olives, fully visible to man, and He will return, fully visible to man, to the Mount of Olives (compare Zechariah 14:4).

John 14:1–3 tells us *one of the reasons* why Christ will return. We read: “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions [or, positions]; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, *I will come again* and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

Christ is presently preparing mansions or dwellings or positions for us, and then He will return or come again, so that we will ALWAYS be with Him wherever He is going to be.

This shows the tremendous desire of Christ to have US close to Him. Notice John 17:24: “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.”

At the same time, Christ expects that WE have that same desire, to BE with Christ, as John 12:26 points out: “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also.”

Christ wants us to have the same intimate relationship with Him that He has with the Father. We read in John 1:18 that He is “in the bosom of the Father.” And so, we are to be “in the bosom of Christ”; that is, we are to have a very close relationship with Christ. Christ’s return to this earth will make it possible for us to always be with Him.

A *second reason* for Christ’s return is stated in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17: “For the Lord Himself *will descend from heaven* with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

Here we see an additional aspect associated with Christ’s return—our resurrection and change to immortal or eternal life, so that we CAN always be with Christ.

To put it differently, Christ will return *in order to* resurrect or change us, to GIVE us eternal life! John 5:25 states: “Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming... when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.” Those who are now dead will HEAR the voice of the returning Jesus Christ.

John 5:28–29 adds: “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in

which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation [better, judgment].”

Those who have already died in Christ will be resurrected to eternal life. They will hear the voice of Christ calling them to come out of their graves. The others—those who died without having known and understood the true gospel message that Christ brought—will not hear Christ’s voice then. They will hear it later, as the book of Revelation, chapter 20, and other passages teach us.

1 Corinthians 15:51–52 reveals to us the same truth—that the dead in Christ will be raised to incorruptibility when they hear the voice of the returning Jesus Christ at the time of the last trumpet. Some who are in Christ, will still be alive when Christ returns. These will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, when the last trumpet sounds.

Matthew 24:31 tells us that the returning Christ will send out His angels, who come with Him, to gather together His elect from the four winds. The angels will bring all of His elect to Christ, to meet Him in the air, when He returns to this earth. Christ will return “as *the lightning* comes from the east and flashes to the west,” (verse 27) before He sets foot on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4). (This description points to the glory He will have when He returns. Recall that Jesus said in Luke 10:18 that He saw Satan fall *like lightning* from heaven.)

A *third reason* for Christ’s return is revealed in Hebrews 9:27–28. We read: “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him *He will appear* a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.”

Christ will appear for our salvation. He comes to bring us our salvation—to resurrect us or change us to immortality—to place us into the very Family of God as born-again members. Note 1 John 3:1–2: “Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that *when He is revealed*, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

We shall be like He is, a *glorious God being*! Colossians 3:4 explains: “When Christ who is our life appears, then you will also appear with

Him in glory.” However, we will not be equal in authority to Christ—just as Christ is not equal in authority to the Father. We will be kings and priests *under* Christ.

A *fourth reason* why Christ will return to this earth is to give man **FREEDOM!** When all the terrible events described in Matthew 24 and Luke 21 take place, we are encouraged to think of our immediate future. Luke 21:27–28 states: “Then they will see the Son of Man *coming in a cloud* with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.” At that time, our redemption or liberation or release is near. *Philips* translates this last verse as, “For you will soon be free.”

Mankind has spent the entirety of his existence wanting to be free, and even using war as an excuse to bring freedom. Yet freedom is globally elusive. So what is this “freedom” that Christ will bring us?

Christ will free us **from death** (compare 1 Corinthians 15:54–55). We will never die again. We cannot die again. Death will no longer be a reality for us when we are changed to spirit.

Christ will free us **from sin**, which leads to death (compare Romans 7:22–25). We will never sin again. As God beings, we cannot sin again (1 John 3:9). Sin will no longer be a reality for us when we are changed.

Christ will free us **from the Satanic influences** which, to a large extent, motivate and inspire us today to sin (compare Romans 16:20; 2 Timothy 2:26). When Christ returns, He will displace Satan’s rule over this world in which we live, and Satan will be bound for 1,000 years, unable to deceive anyone.

Christ will free us **from war**, by giving us peace (compare Psalm 2:1–9; 46:9; Isaiah 2:4; Isaiah 9:5–7). When Christ returns, this world will be in turmoil. Armies will be fighting each other to the extent that, if Christ were not to come back to stop this madness, no person would survive. Christ will come back in order to STOP WAR! He does NOT come back IN ORDER to start a war. Do we see the difference? Of course, when Christ comes back, He will initially fight against those who turn against Him. But His desire and motivation is to bring peace, not war.

Christ will free the modern houses of Israel and Judah **from literal slavery** (compare Isaiah 27:13). Christ comes back to make war cease on this planet; to reveal Himself as God to the nations of Israel; to bring

them out of slavery and to lead them to the Promised Land (Jeremiah 16:14–15; 23:7–8); and to ultimately give them the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 37:11–14). This will happen when the great trumpet sounds. It will happen at the time of the first resurrection—which will include, of course, the resurrection of king David (compare Jeremiah 30:8–9).

One of the *most important reasons* why Christ will return to this earth can be found in Acts 3:19–23. Christ—the Prophet—will return to *restore ALL THINGS*. He will restore what had been taken away from this planet—the kingdom or government or rule of God over this earth. Satan took it away and replaced it with his rule of greed, pride, selfishness, competition, vainglory, hate and war. But Christ will return to replace Satan. He will set up the Kingdom or government of God on this earth.

The conversion of the Gentiles—in addition to the conversion of the houses of Israel and Judah—is *another reason* WHY Christ will return to this earth. When Christ returns and begins to rule—sitting on the throne of David—the Gentiles will begin to listen (compare Acts 15:16–17).

Another important reason why Christ will return to this earth is that He will give His elect rulership—with and under Him—on and over this earth, as it is clearly stated in Revelation 2:26–27; 3:21; and 20:4, 6. Christ will return in order to REWARD us in accordance with our works—how we did live in this life. If we did very well, we will receive higher rulership positions than if we did not do so well.

However, He will come, not only to reward the just, but also, to punish the unjust (compare Malachi 3:2, 5). We read in Jude 14–15 that God comes with His saints “to execute judgment.”

WILL WE BE READY FOR HIS RETURN?

We have seen, in this booklet, who Jesus Christ was, and who and what He is and does today. It is critical that we understand and believe the *great mystery of Jesus Christ*, for there is no salvation in any other, and there is “no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). We have seen that Jesus Christ, our great God and Savior, *will return* to establish the Kingdom of God on this earth.

We must make sure that we are preparing ourselves to be *ready* for Christ’s return. Christ utters this warning in Revelation 3:20: “Behold,

I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”

Christ promised us that He would return. He tells us—those of us who are living in the last generation, in the “end times”: “Behold, *I am coming quickly!* Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book... And behold, *I am coming quickly*, and My reward is with Me... He who testifies to these things, says, ‘*Surely I am coming quickly!*’” (Revelation 22:7, 12, 20).

Let us answer Christ in the same way that John did in Revelation 22:20: “Amen. *Even so, come*, Lord Jesus!”

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