

Bible Study Series
(Volume 1)



Frequently

Asks

Questions



Frequently Asked Questions



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CHAPTER ONE

IS THERE A GOD?

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** God is an unseen God (Exodus 33:20; John 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:16; 1 John 4:12, 20).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Coming to God requires faith (Hebrews 11:6; Romans 10:17).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** The Universe was created by a powerful and wise God (Jeremiah 10:10-13; Jeremiah 51:14-16).
- ❑ **Thursday:** God promises those who search for Him will find Him (Deuteronomy 4:29; Proverbs 8:17).
- ❑ **Friday:** Search for God through Bible reading (John 20:31; Romans 15:4).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Search for God through prayer (Psalm 145:18; Psalm 55:16-17).

The Unseen God

Have you ever wondered if God is real? Have you ever seen God? Is there evidence that He actually exists? How do you know if there truly is a God or not? Perhaps the children of Israel thought these very same questions. The other nations around them had gods that were visible. Baal, Ashtoreth, and Molech were some of the gods of the heathen nations, and the people had statues of those gods. Yet, the God of Israel was an *invisible* God (Colossians 1:15). When the Israelites were tempted to worship other gods (gods that could be seen), the true God reminded them that those gods were "the work of men's hands, wood and stone" (2 Kings 19:18). They could not "see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell" (Deuteronomy 4:28).

Like the Israelites hundreds of years ago, many people today still struggle with believing there is one true God. They are not convinced that He is real. They refuse to put their trust in something they cannot see or touch. That would require *faith*. Hebrews 11:6 tells us, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." When you search for Him "with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13), you will find evidence of an unseen God.

Is There a GOD?

Unseen Elements Are Real

Have you ever seen the wind? Do you have any doubts that the wind is real? How do you know the wind is blowing if you cannot see it? When the trees are moving back and forth and the leaves are blowing around and someone asks, "What is causing all that?" you answer, "It's the wind!" How do you know that? You can *feel* the wind, you can *see the effects* of the wind, and you can *hear* the wind. The Bible compares the wind to the way God's Spirit works in the Christian's life (John 3:8).

Can you see the air around you? Take a deep breath. Did you see it or taste it or hear it? How do you know you breathed in air (oxygen)? What would happen if all the air was removed? How long could you survive without air? Air cannot be seen, but we must have it to live. Have you ever for some reason felt like you could not breathe? When that happened, you were more aware of your need for air. Often, the reality of something unseen is proved by its removal!

The Earth and the Human Body Prove God's Existence

Psalm 19:1 tells us, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork." Everywhere we look, nature declares to us, "There is a God!" Did you know that Earth's atmosphere is just right to sustain life? Other planets have atmospheres without the right amount of oxygen, gravity, water, and other elements needed for plants, animals, and

people to live. Earth's atmosphere is perfectly designed! It is also exactly the right distance from the Sun—not too close (too hot) or too far away (too cold). God knew exactly where to place our planet when He created the Universe.

If you were to study the human body, you might discover there are at least 60,000 miles of blood vessels in your body, you have more than 600 muscles that all work perfectly together, and your ear is so sensitive that it can pick up hundreds of thousands of different sounds. The human ear and eye are so complex that they must have been created by a Master Designer. Proverbs 20:12 tells us who that is: "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them." It is no wonder that the psalmist wrote, "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well" (Psalm 139:14).

Doubters

With so much "proof" all around us, why do so many people doubt the very existence of God? God wants to have a personal relationship with you, but for that to happen you must first believe that God exists (Hebrews 11:6). To prevent this special relationship from happening, the devil uses one of his most successful tools—doubt. He has "blinded their eyes" so that they cannot see, understand, and be saved (John 12:40). What does the Bible call people who have allowed the devil to deceive them into saying, "There is no God"? (Read Psalm 14:1a.)

Another reason the devil has for wanting you to doubt is he does not want you to obey God's laws. Just as God knew the Universe needs laws to operate correctly (such as, laws of gravity, planetary motion, and cause and effect), God also knew that men and women would need moral laws to live right. These laws are found in God's Word. God did not give these laws to make your life restrictive and difficult. He has wonderful plans for you (Jeremiah 29:11). He wants to see you live a blessed life, but that only comes through obedience to His Word (Luke 11:28).

Consider this: what if you did not believe in the law of gravity? What would happen if you jumped off of a cliff? Would your not believing in the law of gravity prevent you from falling and being hurt? What should you have done about your doubts concerning gravity? These same questions could be asked about not believing or doubting the existence of God.



Believers

As you give consideration to the solar system, the human body, plants, and animals, ask yourself questions, such as: "Do such complexly designed systems require a Master Designer? Who could have the wisdom and power to create and maintain the Universe?" In Psalm 8:3-4a the psalmist wrote, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" If we realize that all "the things that are made" were created by God, then we can begin to understand "the invisible things of him" (Romans 1:20). If something was created, then there must have been a Creator. God's handiwork can be seen all around us.



How can you find out if God is real? You must search and find the answer for yourself. God promised that He will be found "when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). How do you search? Read what God has to say (the Bible). Listen for His voice speaking to you. Sometimes He speaks through Godly people and spiritual leaders, and other times He speaks directly to you in a "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:11-12). Talk to God. Ask Him to help you with any questions or doubts you might be having (Mark 9:24). As you begin this journey of discovery, you will find that Jesus is the key to knowing more about God (John 14:6). Jesus said, "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30); "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). Do you have doubts and questions about God? You can KNOW that He is real. It is up to you. What are you going to do about it?



THOUGHTS TO PONDER

1. Many people have accepted God's existence because they have been told that He is real. Is that enough? Why or why not? How can you KNOW God is real?
2. In 1963 the United States Supreme Court ruled that school-led prayer and Bible reading are unconstitutional. Can you think of other areas in our society where God and the Bible are being removed? What effect is this having on the children of America?

The Barbershop

A man went to a barbershop to have his hair cut and his beard trimmed. As the barber began to work, they began to have a good conversation. They talked about so many things and various subjects.

When they eventually touched on the subject of God, the barber said, "I don't believe that God exists." "Why do you say that?" asked the customer.

"Well, you just have to go out in the street to realize that God doesn't exist. Tell me, if God exists, would there be so many sick people? Would there be abandoned children? If God exists, there would be neither suffering nor pain. I can't imagine a loving a God who would allow all of these things."

The customer thought for a moment but did not respond because he did not want to start an argument.

The barber finished his job, and the customer left the shop. Just after he left the barbershop, he saw a man in the street with long, stringy, dirty hair and an untrimmed beard. He looked dirty and unkempt.

The customer turned back and entered the barbershop again and he said to the barber: "You know what? Barbers do not exist." "How can you say that?" asked the surprised barber. "I am here, and I am a barber. And I just worked on you!"

"No!" the customer exclaimed. "Barbers don't exist because if they did, there would be no people with dirty, long hair and untrimmed beards, like that man outside." "Ah, but barbers DO exist!" answered the barber. "What happens is, people do not come to me."

"Exactly!" affirmed the customer. "That's the point! God, too, DOES exist! What happens is, people don't go to Him and do not look for Him. That's why there's so much pain and suffering in the world."

CHAPTER TWO

WHO IS GOD?

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** God is the Creator (Genesis 1:1-5; Isaiah 40:25-26; 44:24).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** God is everlasting and eternal (Deuteronomy 33:27; Isaiah 9:6-7).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** God is omnipresent (Psalm 139:7-10; Jeremiah 23:23-24).
- ❑ **Thursday:** God is omnipotent (Isaiah 40:28-29; Revelation 19:6).
- ❑ **Friday:** God is omniscient (Psalm 139:1-6; 1 John 3:20).
- ❑ **Saturday:** We know God through His Son (John 14:5-13).

God Is Eternal

It has been said that there are four basic questions of life. They are: (1) Who am I? (2) Where did I come from? (3) Why am I here? and (4) What will happen to me when I die? Have you ever asked any of these questions? There is a question that is more important than all these questions, and it is, Who is God? As you search for the answer to this question, you will also begin to learn the answers to the fundamental questions of life.

Throughout history you can read of people from different cultures, races, and locations who have believed in a god of some sort. There is something within every one of us that "crieth out for the living God" (Psalm 84:2). God made us in His image, capable of having a relationship with Him. However, the devil knows this and has created many false gods, hoping to keep us from the very purpose for which we were created. It is not God's will that we be confused (1 Corinthians 14:33); thus He preserved His words (the Bible) so that we can discover who He really is.

The very first verse in the Bible tells us something important about God: He was there "in the beginning." The rest of that chapter lists all that God created. If God is the Creator of the Universe (and everything within it), who created God? God has no beginning and no end; He is eternal. Although everything within time has a beginning and an end, God does not. He is "The everlasting Father" (Isaiah 9:6), and He dwells in eternity (Isaiah 57:15), a place of continuous existence. Our human mind has a hard time grasping the concept of eternity being unending. Perhaps, it is one of the "secret things [which] belong unto the LORD our God" (Deuteronomy 29:29).

God Is Omnipresent, Omnipotent, and Omniscient

Omnipresent: this means that God is everywhere at the same time. God is not limited by time or location. He is not limited by a human body, as we are, because He is a Spirit (John 4:24). King David said regardless of where he went, God's presence was there (Psalm 139:7-10). Jonah tried to flee from God's presence (Jonah 1:3), but he soon learned that God is everywhere, including in the belly of a fish. There are no "secret places" where you can hide from God (Jeremiah 23:24). "The eyes of the LORD are in every place . . ." (Proverbs 15:3).

Omnipotent: this means that God's power has no limits. Revelation 19:6 describes Him as "the Lord God omnipotent." The Bible uses the title *God Almighty* 37 times. God's power is what we must depend on. When our problems seem impossible, we read in the Bible that "with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). God has power over sin (Mark 2:10), sickness (Mark 3:15), unclean spirits (Mark 6:7), death and the grave (1 Corinthians 15:55-57). When you are saved, God gives you His power and strength to live a holy life.

Omniscient: this means that God has unlimited knowledge or understanding. First John 3:20 tells us that God "knoweth all things." He knows our thoughts (Psalm 94:11); He knows everything that has happened and everything that will happen (Isaiah 46:9-10); He also knows small details, such as the number of hairs on your head (Matthew 10:30). It should not be hard to place your trust in the One who has all the answers. He has a perfect plan for your life (Jeremiah 29:11).

God Introduces Himself

God is "not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:27). He is not hiding or making Himself difficult to be found. From the

beginning of time when He created the first man and woman, God has desired a relationship with people. He walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and He walked with Enoch and Noah. He desires to "walk" with all of His children (Micah 6:8). What does it mean to walk with God? It means that your life is lined up with God's will. You are going in the same direction. You are in agreement with God.

God knew that in himself man could not find God (Psalm 14:2-3). People's thoughts and ideas about who God is are often wrong (Psalm 50:21). God would have to tell men and women who He really is. He told Abraham that He is "the Almighty God" (Genesis 17:1); He told Moses that He is the "I AM" (Exodus 3:14). Other times God introduced Himself as the God of deliverance or the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet, people still struggled to fully understand and truly walk with God.



So, God sent His Son to become a man (John 1:1, 14). Jesus told Philip that "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). The way to having a relationship with God is through Jesus (John 14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5). Sin created a gulf between God and man, but Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross has bridged that gap.

God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit

God is made up of three Persons: God the Father (John 14:9), God the Son (Matthew 16:16), and God the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 4:8). First John 5:7 says that "these three are one." All three have an important part. They all work together perfectly in the plan of salvation. This is often called the Trinity or the Godhead (God in three Persons).

When God created man, He said, "Let *us* make man in *our* image . . ." (Genesis 1:26). Who was with God in the beginning during Creation? John 1:1, 14-17 tells us "the Word" was there "in the beginning" and that the Word is Jesus. In Genesis 1:2 we find that the "Spirit of God" was also there in the beginning. We read of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit together in several places in the Bible (Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14). When discovering who God is, it is vital that you learn about Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

"There Is None Else"

As you begin to search for the true God, in time you will learn that "there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me" (Isaiah 46:9). David wrote, "For who is God, save the LORD?" (2 Samuel 22:32a). Salvation cannot be found anywhere or in anyone else (Acts 4:12). He is the Creator, our Father, our Savior, our Guide, and our Friend. He has all power, knowledge, and wisdom. He is everywhere. The best news is that God made it possible for you to have a personal relationship with Him. Because of Jesus' sacrifice, you can have your sins forgiven. Then, the Holy Spirit will begin working in your life, revealing to you who you are, why you are here, and where you are going.

WHO IS GOD TO YOU?

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Who is God to others (Exodus 5:1-2; Acts 9:1-5; John 3:1-2; Luke 18:18)?
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Jesus asked His disciples an important question (Matthew 16:13-14; Mark 8:27-28).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** "Whom say ye that I am?" (Matthew 16:15-17; Mark 8:29).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Satan's purpose is to deceive (Genesis 3:1-5; John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 11:14).
- ❑ **Friday:** The truth is revealed to the Samaritan woman (John 4:7-29).
- ❑ **Saturday:** It is a blessing to truly know God (Jeremiah 9:23-24; 31:33-34).

Perception and Reality



The sixteenth President of the United States (Abraham Lincoln) has been considered by many to be the greatest President our country has ever had. Words used to describe him have included: *honest, humble, good communicator, patient, determined, and intelligent*. Some of his nicknames were "Honest Abe" and "The Great Emancipator." Yet, this man who was so loved by many people was hated by others. Those people often used words like *fool, coward, idiot, and weak* when describing Abraham Lincoln. He was so despised that some newspapers went so far as to suggest that he should be assassinated (and eventually he was). How could such different perceptions be of the same man?

If you were to take a survey and ask people "Who is God to you?" perhaps you would be surprised at the variety of answers. Some people believe God is like a loving but indulgent grandfather (very little discipline and lots of gifts). Others see God as a Santa Claus (if you are good, you will be rewarded; if you are bad, you will get nothing). Still others believe God is like a harsh taskmaster (nothing you do is good enough). Some feel God is like an absentee father (not around much, expects you to make it on your own).

There is only one God, so why is there such a large variety of ideas concerning who God is? Also, why is your perception of God so important? Some people say it is not important what you believe about God as long as you are sincere. Is that true? Your understanding of who God is will determine the spiritual path you take. Consider it like this: perception is the lenses of your eyeglasses and reality is what you are looking at. If your lenses are dirty or cracked or if you have the wrong prescription, how is your vision of the things in front of you? No doubt, you will see things blurry and distorted, or you may even see things that are not there. You will be more likely to misstep, fall down, and perhaps even go in the wrong direction. The problem is not with reality but with your perception.

Whom Do Others Say God Is?

Throughout the Bible you can read of many examples of people not realizing who God truly is. When Moses told Pharaoh the words of God, Pharaoh said: "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go" (Exodus 5:2). On the road to Damascus, Saul asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" (Acts 9:5). Nicodemus called Jesus "Rabbi . . . a teacher come from God" (John 3:2), and the rich young ruler called Him, "Good Master" (Luke 18:18).

In Matthew 16:13 Jesus asked His disciples, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" This question was asked when they were on the "coasts of Caesarea Philippi," an area filled with many temples and gods. Jesus' disciples answered the question, "Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias [Elijah]; and others, Jeremias [Jeremiah], or one of the prophets." Although all of these were great men, the people had failed to see Jesus as He truly was.

It was one thing for the disciples to tell Jesus what others thought of Him, but then Jesus made the question more personal: "But whom say ye that I am?" (verse 15). The disciples had traveled with Jesus, heard Him teach, and saw

the miracles. Whom did they think Jesus really was? Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." This was a bold statement, for the Jews believed to say such a thing was to claim Jesus was God Himself.

The Devil Will Try to Confuse You

Do not trust your human perception. Some people have had terrible things happen to them. The devil will use those situations to try and distort their vision of who God is. He will say things like, "If God really loved you, that would not have happened" or "What kind of a God would let bad things happen to good people?" or "Where was God when things went wrong?" It is the devil's purpose to keep you from God in any way that he can. If he can convince you to believe his lies about God, he will keep you from having a beautiful relationship with God, from becoming a Christian, and from someday making Heaven your home.

Knowing God Is More than a Perception or Belief

When Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well, she said, "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet" (John 4:19). However, by the time she returned to the city, she was telling people, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (verse 29). What changed her understanding of who Jesus truly is? She had *spent time* with Jesus. When Peter boldly declared Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus told him, "Blessed art thou . . . for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17).

It is important that you have more than just a belief or knowledge concerning who God is. Evil spirits and devils "believe [in God], and tremble" (James 2:19). When in the synagogue in Capernaum, a man with an unclean spirit cried out: "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24). Simply believing is not enough. You must put actions to your belief.

There are some things you can do to truly discover who God is. One thing you can do is talk to people who know Him. Ask them questions, like "How do you know God is real?" and "What does God mean to you?" When the Queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's God-given wisdom, she traveled perhaps as far as 1500 miles to the city of Jerusalem, where Solomon lived, to see if what she had heard was true (1 Kings, Chapter 10). The afflicted woman in Mark, Chapter 5, "heard of Jesus" (verse 27), and she believed she could be healed. Then she put actions to her belief and pressed through the crowd to touch Jesus' garment. These two women first heard about God; then, they did something about it. This also shows the power of a personal testimony. Listen to what people who truly know God have to say about Him, and in time you can also be a light to people who are searching for God.

Something else you will need to do as you search for God is talk to Him. Just as Saul did in Acts 9:5, ask God to tell you who He is. Begin to earnestly search for Him. He has promised that "when ye shall search for me with all your heart. . . . I will be found of you" (Jeremiah 29:13-14). God has promised that when you seek Him, you will find that "he [is] not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:27). In the busy, noisy world in which we live, find a quiet place to seek God. "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).





"Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" (Matthew 16:13).

**"Whom say ye that I am?"
(Matthew 16:15).**

"When ye shall search for me with all your heart. . . . I will be found of you" (Jeremiah 29:13-14).

**"Be still, and know that I am God"
(Psalm 46:10).**

WHO IS THE DEVIL?

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** All things were created by Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:9; John 1:1-5).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Just as God is a Spirit, the devil is also a spirit (John 4:24; Ephesians 2:2).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** The devil mixes truth with lies to be more deceptive (Genesis 3:1-5; 2 Corinthians 11:12-14).
- ❑ **Thursday:** The devil was a murderer and a liar from his beginning (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8).
- ❑ **Friday:** The devil has many names and descriptions (Job 1:6; Matthew 12:24; 1 Peter 5:8).
- ❑ **Saturday:** God warns us about the devil (1 Peter 5:8; Ephesians 6:11-20).

Who Created the Devil?

Have you ever had questions about the devil—who is he, what does he look like, or where did he come from? There are many beliefs and perceptions today about the devil, and many of them are wrong. Some ministers tell people that the devil was once an angel living in Heaven, but he became proud and was kicked out. Some people (even some professing Christians) do not believe the devil exists at all. Yet others believe the devil is worthy of being worshiped. What is the truth? The only way to know for sure is to read what God has to say about the devil in His Word—the Bible!

Genesis (the Book of Beginnings) tells the story of Creation. God created everything—people, plants, animals, the world, and even the devil—through "Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 3:9). "All things were made by him [the Word—Jesus]; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3). God told us in Isaiah 45:7 exactly who created good and evil: "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things." It was God who placed the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:9) in the Garden of Eden.

What Does the Devil Look Like?

If you were to sketch what you thought the devil looked like, you might draw a red creature with horns, a pitchfork, and a long tail. Many artists have painted pictures of the devil in just this way. But what does he really look like? Again, the best source of information is the Bible. Just as God is a Spirit (John 4:24), the devil is also a spirit (Ephesians 2:2). He does not have a physical body, as we do, but he can take on many appearances and disguises.

If the devil does not have a recognizable body, how does he speak to people? In the Garden of Eden, the devil spoke to Eve through a serpent. Many times he speaks through people ("a certain damsel" in Acts 16:16-17). But the most common method he uses to speak to you is through your mind. He will put thoughts in there, trying to tempt you and confuse you.

When the devil speaks, he mixes in just enough truth to sound very convincing. He will twist ("wrest"; 2 Peter 3:16) Scriptures to change their meanings. This is how he changes himself into a (false) "angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). Many times he disguises himself as a spiritual leader. Jesus warned of this in Matthew 7:15 when He said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing."



What Is the Devil's Nature?

Although the devil portrays himself in various disguises, the Bible tells us exactly what his nature is. From the beginning (when God created him), the devil was a murderer and a liar (John 8:44). There are many names and descriptions of the devil in the Bible, and these names reveal much about the devil's nature.

Some of the names are:

- "Satan" (Job 1:6).
- "adversary" (1 Peter 5:8).
- "enemy of all righteousness" (Acts 13:10).
- "Beelzebub the prince of the devils" (Matthew 12:24).
- "Belial" (2 Corinthians 6:15).
- "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

The devil has been described as a "roaring lion" (1 Peter 5:8), a (false) "angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14), and a "fowler" (Psalm 91:3). Each of these word pictures helps us to better understand and beware of how the devil works.

False Pictures of the Devil

If you were to ask people who the devil is and where he came from, quite possibly you will hear a story about how the devil was once a beautiful angel in Heaven whose name was Lucifer. He became proud and jealous, and he caused a third of the other angels to join him in his rebellion. God had to kick Lucifer and all of those angels out of Heaven, and now his name is Satan. He and his angels work to tempt people to sin against God.

If you have heard this story, you have probably been told some of the Scriptures that (supposedly) prove this is true. (This is an example of how the devil works in a little truth—Bible verses—to make something seem to be true.) It is God's will that you know the true origin of the devil. Paul wrote to the pastor Titus of the importance of teaching things that are "sound" (free from a mixture of truth and error). When you know the "truth," you will be "free" from the confusion of false doctrine (John 8:32).

Look at the context of the Scriptures referenced when people tell this false story of the devil's beginning. For example, look up the name "Lucifer." It is only used once in the Bible: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" (Isaiah 14:12a). Verse 4 of this chapter tells us who this is really talking about—"take up this proverb against the *king of Babylon*" (Nebuchadnezzar). Then verse 16 shows that this is about a "*man*" (not the devil).

Also, it is important to understand where this "heaven" is that the king fell from. There are at least three heavens spoken of in the Bible: the sky (Genesis 1:8), God's dwelling place (Matthew 6:9), and an exalted position (Ephesians 2:6). Which "heaven" did Nebuchadnezzar fall from? Did he fall from the literal sky or from God's dwelling place? Of course not! If you read the story of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:28-37, you will learn that because of Nebuchadnezzar's pride, God removed him from an exalted position (king) to become like a beast in the field.

What Does God Say About the Devil?

Because the devil is sly and crafty, we could easily be deceived. God's Word has much to tell us about who the devil is, how to recognize him, and how to resist him. The Bible is referred to as a sword (Hebrews 4:12). It is the weapon we should use against the devil! The best way to use this sword (our Bible) is to read it, know what it says, and obey it. Look at the many warnings God has given concerning the devil: he seeks to "devour" (1 Peter 5:8); he is deceptive (2 Corinthians 11:14); he causes blindness (2 Corinthians 4:4); he is everywhere (Job 1:7); and his children act just like him (1 John 3:10; John 8:44). God does not want us to be "ignorant of [Satan's] devices" (2 Corinthians 2:11). He has provided a "way to escape" (1 Corinthians 10:13) and a way for us to resist the devil (Ephesians 6:11-20).

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

If the devil was once an angel in Heaven,
who or what tempted him
to become proud and jealous?

If sin entered Heaven
(supposedly through an angel named Lucifer)
in the beginning,
how do we know sin cannot enter Heaven again?

If the devil was cast out of Heaven,
how do we know that people
who die and go to Heaven couldn't sin and be cast out?

If no one can leave Heaven or hell (Luke 16:26),
how was the devil cast out?

If God's will is always done in Heaven (Matthew 6:10),
how did the devil
(while supposedly in Heaven)
go against God's will?

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE DEVIL?

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** God gives a choice between good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17; Deuteronomy 30:19; Jeremiah 21:8).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** God is pleased when people make the right choices (Genesis 6:9; Job 2:3; Acts 13:22).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** The devil works to tempt, accuse, and deceive (Genesis 3:4-5; Revelation 12:10; 2 Corinthians 11:14).
- ❑ **Thursday:** The devil is described as a "roaring lion" and a "fowler" (1 Peter 5:8; Psalm 91:1-3).
- ❑ **Friday:** The devil deceives people through false or vain religion (James 1:26; Matthew 7:21-23).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Jesus is the perfect example of how to resist the devil (Matthew 4:1-10).

The Devil Was Created to Provide a Choice

Why would God create the devil? It seems like life would be much easier without him. When God created people, He put within them something different from all other creatures (including the angels)—God made people creatures of choice. We can choose to do what is right or we can choose to do what is wrong. God did not want robots serving Him. He wanted people to choose good and serve Him out of love, not because they had no other choice.

The first example of this choice is found in Genesis 2:16-17. God planted a garden with many trees. Adam was told he could eat of every tree in the garden except for "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Adam had a choice: he could obey or disobey God's command. Without this tree and God's commandment, Adam would not have had a choice. Throughout the Bible, you can read of God presenting a choice between good and evil (Deuteronomy 30:19; Jeremiah 21:8). You can also read that God pleaded with His people to "choose life." It greatly pleases God when He finds people who choose to walk with Him and serve Him (Genesis 6:9; Job 2:3; Acts 13:22).



The Devil Is a Tempter

If Adam and Eve (and the rest of the human race) were given the ability to reason and make a choice, there must be more than one choice. The first choice is God; He is good, and He has always existed (Psalm 90:2). The second choice is the devil. The first time we read of the devil in the Bible is in the Garden of Eden. God had given Adam and Eve a commandment concerning the tree of knowledge of good and evil. To test their obedience, the devil spoke through a serpent, tempting Eve to disobey God's commandment.

Whenever you are tempted to do something that is wrong, remember that it is the devil who is trying to persuade you to sin, not God (James 1:13). The devil is doing exactly what God created him to do. Although God will not tempt you, He knows that temptations can make you a stronger and wiser Christian. With God's help, you can recognize and learn to avoid certain temptations. Each time God helps you to "Resist the devil" (James 4:7), it brings encouragement for future temptations.

The Devil Is an Accuser

The devil is very good at quickly changing his methods of operating. He often works as an "accuser of the brethren" (Revelation 12:10), trying to discourage the Christian. First, he might put a thought of temptation into your mind. Then, he will accuse you for having that thought. The Reformer Martin Luther had some good advice about this. He said, "I cannot stop the birds flying over my head, but I can stop them from building their nests in my hair." Temptations in your thoughts will come, but do not let the accuser tell you they are sin. Temptation only becomes sin when you give in to it.

The Devil Is a Deceiver

Which do you think is more deceptive—a roaring lion or a hidden trap, placed under leaves and branches? The Bible compares the devil to both the roaring lion and a fowler (one who sets traps). When the devil sees that one way does not cause people to sin, he will change his approach. One of his most successful methods has been to transform himself into an "angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:13-14). When the devil does this, he is pretending to be the true "light of the world [Jesus]" (John 8:12). No doubt, with this false appearance, he has deceived millions of people into thinking they were doing what is right, while actually they are following the devil. Jesus spoke of just such people in Matthew 7:21-23.

How does the devil deceive so many people? Most people realize that sins like murder and stealing are wrong. So, the devil tempts them with less obvious (secretive) sins like gossiping, telling "white lies" or half-truths, and being envious or bitter. However, Psalm 90:8 tells us that all "secret sins" are seen by God. The devil realizes the great opportunity of working through religion to deceive people. James 1:27 speaks of "Pure religion." Therefore, there must be religion that is not pure. You might hear it referred to as *false religion*. The devil deceives through false religion. He convinces people they can get to Heaven in ways other than what God has said in the Bible.

How to Resist the Devil

When God created men and women with the power of choice, He also created a law of sowing and reaping from which no one can escape (Galatians 6:7). Choices have consequences—this is why God wants everyone to choose the good! It is not His will that anyone should "perish" (2 Peter 3:9).

Jesus has given us the best example for resisting any temptation or accusation the devil brings to us. Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness in Matthew, Chapter 4. Look at Jesus' answer to everything the devil said: "It is written" (verses 4, 7, 10). What was Jesus talking about? The Word! He used the Word of God to overcome all the devil's temptations. That is what you should do as well. Read your Bible every day, for you do not know when or where the devil will be working to try to deceive you. Hide God's Word in your heart. It is your weapon ("sword"; Ephesians 6:17).

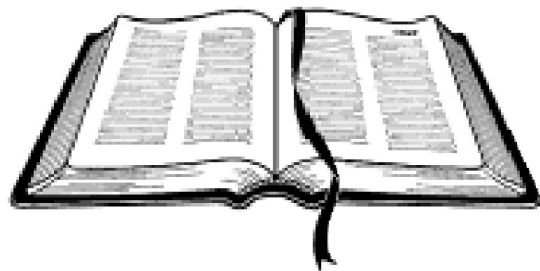
Just as military leaders realize the importance of understanding their enemies when fighting literal battles and wars, so through Bible reading, the Christian can be victorious over the devil by learning his tactics and methods. The Christian's armor (Ephesians 6:11-18) provides all the protection needed against the attacks of the devil.

SCRIPTURE CONTEXT

It is important to understand what is meant when words such as "devil" and "Satan" are used in the Bible. "Devil" means *accuser*, and "Satan" means *adversary*.

Sometimes these words were used in the Bible to describe the actions of people. For example, Jesus called Peter *Satan* in Matthew 16:23, and He called Judas a *devil* in John 6:70-71.

Many false doctrines have started from misunderstanding the Scripture context.



WHAT IS SIN?

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** The Bible definition of sin (1 John 3:4; James 4:17).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1-2; Ephesians 5:5; 1 John 3:6).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** God requires His people to be holy (Leviticus 11:45; Leviticus 20:7; 1 Peter 1:14-16).
- ❑ **Thursday:** All have sinned, or missed the mark (Romans 3:23; Psalm 14:2-3; 1 John 1:8).
- ❑ **Friday:** The story of King Joash shooting his arrows (2 Kings 13:14-20).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Sin has consequences (Genesis 3:9-24; James 1:15; Romans 6:23).

The Importance of Understanding What Sin Truly Is

The story has been told of a young boy who returned home from church one Sunday morning and was asked, "What did the preacher preach on today?" He answered that the preacher had talked a lot about sin. When asked what exactly the preacher had said about sin, the young boy replied, "I do not remember, but I could surely tell that he did not like it!" Like this young boy, many people realize sin is something bad, yet they do not understand what it really is. There are many doctrines being taught in the religious world about sin. One doctrine is that the devil was once an angel in Heaven who committed sin and was cast out. Another doctrine teaches that babies are born with sin and must be baptized so that they will not go to hell. Yet others teach that all Christians sin every day, often not even realizing they are sinning. Are any of these doctrines true? The Bible has the answer to what sin truly is and what God has to say about it.

A "**doctrine**" is a set of ideas or beliefs that is taught or believed to be true.

Why is it important to understand what sin is? God is a holy God, and He requires His people to also be holy. Sin is the opposite of holiness. It is against God. It will prevent you from having a relationship with God, and it will also keep you out of Heaven (Revelation 21:27). God has a perfect plan for your life, and "every good gift" comes from God (James 1:17). However, if you allow sin to remain in your heart, it will prevent you from having all the good things God has for you (Jeremiah 5:25). Sin will destroy your life. This is why it is vital you understand what sin is and how to keep it out of your life.

The Bible Definition of Sin

In 1 John 3:4 we read the definition of sin: ". . . sin is the transgression of the law." The word *transgression* means "to break or disregard." When you break (disobey) or disregard (ignore) God's laws, you have committed sin. To commit sin you must first understand what God's commands or laws are. *The World Book Dictionary* says sin is "breaking the law of God on purpose." Sin is a willful transgression. In other words, you must exercise your will in breaking God's laws. You choose to overstep God's commands to go your own way.



Secondly, sin is not doing what you know you should do. James 4:17 tells us that "to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Once you understand what God's will is but you refuse to do it, it becomes sin.

When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He presented them with a choice (Genesis 2:16-17). Choices have consequences, and God made it clear what the consequence of disobedience would be: "for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." This same consequence is defined in the New Testament as well: ". . . sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:15). Is this talking about a physical death? No! Adam lived many years after his sin in the Garden of Eden. He was 930 years old when he died physically. Disobedience brought about a spiritual death, a separation from God. Because of their sin, Adam and Eve had to leave their beautiful home in the

Garden of Eden, the place where they had walked and talked with God (Genesis 3:8, 23).

Sin, no matter how great or small, separates us from God. Everyone has sinned, and God cannot have fellowship with sinners. God knew we would need a way to be cleansed of our sins. Sin prevented us from having the right relationship with God. We could not have His presence (living within us), we could not talk to Him (through prayer), and we could not live a life pleasing to Him (free from sin). He sent His Son Jesus to die for the sins of the whole world. Why? Because of His great love for us (John 3:16).

What Sin Is Not

Hundreds of years ago, men in positions of church leadership have often been called "Church Fathers." Some of these men were Polycarp, Ignatius, Jerome, Augustine, and Tertullian. Many of the Church Fathers wrote long documents that explained their understanding of the Scriptures. Over time many of their opinions became church doctrines, but not all of these writings were inspired by God. Thus, many false doctrines were formed.

Two of the false definitions of sin are (1) unconscious sins (sinning without knowledge) and (2) inherited sins (being born with the sinful nature of your parents). Because sinning requires knowledge (Romans 7:7-8) and your will, the doctrine of involuntary or unconscious sins cannot be true. Also, the doctrine of inherited sin could not be true either, for babies do not have an understanding of right and wrong (Isaiah 7:16; Romans 9:11). God holds each person accountable for their own sins, not for the sins of their fathers (Ezekiel 18:19-20). When we understand the definition of sin (to disobey or ignore God's laws) requires our will and knowledge of those laws, we can see that these definitions of sin do not come from the Bible.

There is another "false definition of sin." This one is very deceiving. Have you ever had a wrong thought come into your mind? Then, did you feel like you had sinned for having that thought? That is a trick of the devil. When a wrong thought comes, it is called temptation. Temptation is NOT sin. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Every Christian will have wrong thoughts come into his or her mind; what is done with that wrong thought determines whether he or she sins.

To Miss the Mark

In the original languages of the Bible (Hebrew and Greek), one of the words for *sin* was an archery term that meant "to miss the mark [or target]." The mark was obeying God's commandments. Yet, no matter how hard the people in the Old Testament tried, they could not obey all of God's laws all the time. God knew people would need someone to help them. Just as the Prophet Elisha laid his hands on King Joash's hands to guide him as he shot an arrow through an open window (2 Kings 13:14-17), we need Christ living in our heart, guiding us and enabling us to hit God's mark. Without Him, we will miss the mark every time!

*"Whatever weakens
your reason, impairs
the tenderness of
your conscience,
obscures your sense of
God, takes off your
relish for spiritual
things, whatever
increases the
authority of the body
over the mind, that
thing is sin to you,
however innocent it
may seem in itself."*

—Susannah Wesley



Defining Sin and Its Consequences

What would it be like if sin was defined by people (instead of by God)? What would the definition of sin look like? Would it be a long list of Do's and Don'ts? In ancient times many people looked forward to cloudy days as they believed God could not see them because of the clouds. If they committed sins on a cloudy day, they considered it a free day because God would not see it.

A recent US survey showed that 87 percent of the people surveyed believed in the existence of sin. However, in that same survey only .05 percent believed they were going to hell. Are that many people truly hitting the target? Jesus let us know that few would find "the way, which leadeth unto life" (Matthew 7:14). Could it be that people are redefining sin and its consequences, or in other words, moving the target?

Moving the Target

One day, a young man entered the barn of a friend to look for something he wanted to borrow. Wandering around the barn, he noticed that his friend was clearly an expert archer—every arrow that had been shot throughout the barn had made a perfect bull's-eye. Hundreds of arrows were perfectly, beautifully, in the exact center of the bull's-eye of every target he saw! The young man set off to find his friend. When he found him, he excitedly asked: "How do you make a perfect shot every time? It's amazing!" The friend answered him, "It's quite easy—I shoot my arrow, and wherever it lands—that's where I draw the target!"



WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

DAILY READINGS:

- Monday:** The Philippian jailer asked an important question (Acts 16:16-34).
- Tuesday:** You must hear the Word of God (Romans 10:13-17; Luke 5:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 2:13).
- Wednesday:** You must realize and admit you need to be saved (Romans 3:23; Isaiah 64:6; Romans 6:23).
- Thursday:** What does it mean to believe on Jesus? (John 14:11-12; John 8:30-31).
- Friday:** You must confess your sins to God (Psalm 32:5; Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:9).
- Saturday:** Repentance is turning away from sin (Isaiah 55:6-7; Romans 6:1-2).

The Most Important Question

Many people consider the four basic questions of life to be: Who am I? Where do I come from? What is my purpose? and What happens when I die? Yet, the most important question you could ever ask is, What must I do to be saved? When you realize why this question is important and when you learn the answer to this question, the other basic questions will be answered as well. Just as with all important questions about life, the Bible is the best source for answers. This exact question can be found in Acts, Chapter 16. To understand how this question came to be asked and what the answer is, we must look at the story of Paul and Silas.

Hear the Gospel

God wanted the Gospel (the Good News) taken to the province of Macedonia. God knew there were people there who had honest hearts and would believe, but they must first hear the Gospel. Just as God had sent Philip to explain the Gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts, Chapter 8), God let Paul know through a vision that he must go and preach the Gospel to people in Macedonia.

After casting an evil spirit out of a young girl, Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison. God was taking them to where the Gospel needed to be shared. Although Paul and Silas were suffering much pain, they "prayed, and sang praises unto God." Their joy in the midst of suffering was noticed: "and the prisoners heard them." This must have greatly affected the prisoners for even though an earthquake opened the prison doors and loosed all of their bands, not one of the prisoners escaped. They had heard the Gospel through the actions of Paul and Silas.

Acknowledge Your Need of Salvation

When the jailer realized all the prison doors were opened, he thought the prisoners had escaped and knew his punishment for this would be severe. (After Peter's escape, his guards were put to death; Acts 12:19a.) Paul stopped the jailer from killing himself by saying, "Do thyself no harm: for we are all here." The jailer came to Paul and Silas, trembling, and fell down before them. Here we see conviction working. This is what prompted the jailer's question: "What must I do to be saved?" What did he need to be saved from? He was not in danger from the magistrates (the prisoners had not fled). No doubt, the jailer had heard the prayers and songs of Paul and Silas. Also, he probably knew what had happened to bring these men to his prison (Paul's preaching the Gospel and casting out an evil spirit). The jailer had been hearing the Word of God, and it convicted him of his spiritual condition. He realized that he needed to be saved.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ

Paul's answer to the jailer's question was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Then verse 32 tells us, "And they spake unto him the word of the Lord . . ." Paul and Silas explained to the jailer what it means to "believe." Believing is not just acknowledgment. James 2:19 says that the devils also "believe, and tremble." True belief brings action. (If

you truly believed a house you were in was on fire, what action would you take?) To believe on Jesus is to believe that everything He said and did is true. Your words, actions, and life will reflect your belief in Him.

To believe on Jesus also requires an understanding of who He is and why He came to earth. Jesus is God who became a man (John 1:1, 14). Why did He do this? Sin separated people from God. Sin's penalty is death. When Jesus died on the Cross, He paid that penalty and made a way for men and women to have a right relationship with God (John 14:6; Romans 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:21). He took the punishment of sin for us.

Confess and Forsake Your Sins

Too often when people have sinned, they would rather say, *I made a mistake, it was an accident, or I messed up.* In other words, they want to minimize what they have done wrong. However, Romans 3:23 says that "*all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*" If you want to have forgiveness from Christ, you must confess (own up to) your sins. Your sins were against God (2 Samuel 12:13; Psalm 51:4), and it is He to whom you are held accountable. If you will confess your sins, the Bible promises that Jesus will "forgive [your] sins, and cleanse [you] from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

What would you think if someone stole something from you, came to you and confessed their theft, and then soon after stole something else that belonged to you? Would you believe that their confession was heartfelt? It is the same when we confess our sins to God. Solomon wrote in Proverbs 28:13 that we must confess AND forsake our sins. When we see sin as God sees it (He hates it), we will want to forsake it. We will change our minds about sin. Another way of saying this is to repent of our sins. The definition of *repentance* is found in Isaiah 55:7. It says the wicked must "forsake his way" and "return unto the LORD." Repentance is turning FROM what is wrong (sin) TO what is right (God).

"How Do I Get Saved?"

If someone asked you this question, what would you say? Would you know how to lead them to Christ? Sometimes people think they need to know many Bible Scriptures before they can talk to others about God. Is that true? The plan of salvation is simple. You can begin by using the "ABCs of Salvation" (acknowledge, believe, confess/forsake) to help you remember.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE BORN AGAIN?

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Nicodemus asked an important question (John 3:1-8).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Being born again begins with a cleansing from sin by the Word (John 15:3; Psalm 119:9, 11).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Being born again brings a new heart and a new Spirit (Ezekiel 36:24-28; Ezekiel 11:17-20; Jeremiah 24:7).
- ❑ **Thursday:** There are two types of sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:9-10; 1 Samuel 15:20-25; Luke 18:13-14).
- ❑ **Friday:** Being born again makes you a new person (2 Corinthians 5:17; Acts 9:1-22).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Being born again does not include returning to the old life (Matthew 6:24; John 5:14; John 8:11).

Nicodemus' Question



Throughout the world, many people celebrate their birthdays by having parties, receiving presents, and having a birthday cake. Although this occasion is called a *birthday*, it is actually a celebration of the day they were born. You are physically only born once. Can you imagine what Nicodemus must have thought when Jesus told him, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"?

Nicodemus asked Jesus, "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" But Jesus was not speaking of being born physically. He told Nicodemus, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." Jesus explained, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." This new birth Jesus was talking about was a spiritual birth.

Jesus often used illustrations and parables to explain a spiritual lesson. When He told Nicodemus he must be born again, Jesus was using something physical (a birth) to explain something spiritual (being a part of the Kingdom of God). To be alive physically, Nicodemus had to be born of his earthly mother. Jesus called this being "born of the flesh." Likewise, to be alive spiritually (saved), Nicodemus needed to be born from above. (The words *born again* in the original Greek language actually mean "born from above.") Jesus called this being "born of the Spirit."

What Happens When You Are Born Again?

When you are born again, you begin a brand new life. All of your sins have been forgiven. The Bible calls this having our sins washed away. Ezekiel used the illustration of receiving a new heart and a new Spirit (God's Spirit). What brings about this cleansing, this spiritual heart transplant? It is God's Word that cleans you up. This new heart and new Spirit bring new desires into your life. You do not want to live as you did before (the life of a sinner), and God's Spirit within you makes you able to live differently (the life of a Christian).

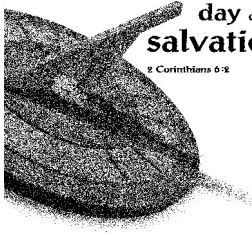
When God brings conviction concerning one's sins, many people are sorry. Yet, there are two types of sorrow: worldly sorrow and Godly sorrow. Worldly sorrow is being sorry you got caught or sorry because of the consequences of sin; worldly sorrow is a selfish sorrow. However, Godly sorrow is being sorry you hurt God. Only Godly sorrow can lead to being born again. Being born again will bring about changes in one's behavior and language. Worldly sorrow does not bring about these changes; it only hopes for mercy concerning sin's consequences. It soon becomes apparent which type of sorrow the sinner is experiencing, because "godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Nicodemus was an important religious leader; he was a ruler of the Jews and a member of the Sanhedrin (the supreme council of the Jewish people in the time of Christ). He was believed to be very rich and had great influence. He had everything one might desire. Yet, Nicodemus was searching for something more. That is why he sought out Jesus. All his "righteousnesses" (or his accomplishments) were "as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). Jesus let Nicodemus know

that in spite of all his riches, position, and influence, he needed to be born again. He needed his nature (his desires and his actions) changed.

Just as a leopard cannot change his spots (Jeremiah 13:23), neither could Nicodemus change his nature. He needed God's Spirit to come and live in his heart, making him a "new creature" in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17). As a new creature, "old things are passed away" and "all things are become new." In other words, Nicodemus would not live the same way he had lived before. Once he was born again, he would live a Christian life by sinning "no more" (John 5:14).

Behold, now is
the **acceptable**
time;
behold, **now is the**
day of
salvation.



Now Is the Day of Salvation

After speaking with Jesus, was Nicodemus born again? Although he came to Jesus at night (perhaps secretly for fear of being seen), later we read in the Bible that he spoke up for Jesus before the Sanhedrin (John 7:50-51) and of his bringing "myrrh and aloes" (perfumes and herbs) to prepare Jesus' body for burial (John 19:38-40). Christian tradition says Nicodemus was killed for his faith sometime in the first century. No doubt, none of that would have happened if Nicodemus had rejected the words of Jesus (as did the rich young ruler who "went away sorrowful"; Matthew 19:22). When Jesus spoke the words of eternal life to Nicodemus, that was his opportunity to be saved. He might not have had another chance to accept Jesus and be born again.

When you feel that Jesus is talking to you, knocking on your heart's door, wanting you to be born again (saved), do not put it off until another day. Do not say "I'm too young" or "I'll wait until later." You do not know if you will ever have another opportunity. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 6:2 that "now is the day of salvation." Right now (today) is all you can be sure about. Isaiah 55:6 says, "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." There is a possibility that later God will not be speaking to your heart, that you will not be able to hear His voice or find Him. In Genesis 6:3 God warned, "My spirit shall not always strive with man." Have you been born again? Have you asked God to forgive you of your sins? Have you repented and also forsaken your sins? This is the most important decision you will ever make!

How to Know You Have Been Born Again

Salvation is not based on people's opinions nor is it based on your feelings. These things can change. However, you can KNOW you have been born again. How? First, you must follow the plan of salvation: acknowledge you are a sinner, truly believe what Jesus said and did is true, and confess and forsake your sins. When you are saved, you become a Christian. You are born into the family of God. You are no longer a child of the devil. Your life, actions, and language will change. You will begin to act like your Father (God) because His Spirit is now living in you. In time it will become obvious to your family and friends that you are born again.

In Luke, Chapter 15, when the prodigal son returned to his father's house and asked forgiveness, he was restored to his father's family. After this, did he return to his previous way of living ("riotous" or immoral, sinful)? Did he leave his father's house again and return to the pigpen (a symbol of sin)? No! He could not be in his father's house and in the pigpen at the same time. Likewise, when you are born into God's family, you do not return to your previous life of sin. You are living a new life. The old sinful you is gone (Colossians 3:9), and now you are living a life of "righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:24). Isaiah 35:8 calls it "The way of holiness." If you have been saved and are obeying everything God has showed you to do, you can KNOW that you are born again!

DID YOU KNOW?

The more respected an individual was, the greater the quantity of spices used in preparing their body for burial. Nicodemus brought "about an hundred pound weight" to prepare Jesus' body for burial, the amount often used for a king.

HOW CAN I HEAR GOD'S VOICE?

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Samuel heard God's voice at a young age (1 Samuel 3:1-19).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Jesus said His sheep recognize His voice (John 10:1-14).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Ways that God speaks to us (Romans 10:13-17; Hebrews 1:1-2).
- ❑ **Thursday:** It is important to have "ears to hear" (Zechariah 7:11-12; Luke 8:5-8).
- ❑ **Friday:** God speaks in times of depression, fear, and sadness (1 Kings 19:18; Exodus 3:12; 2 Kings 20:5).
- ❑ **Saturday:** A story of listening to the wrong advice (1 Kings 13:1-30).

God Desires to Talk to You



Have you ever wondered what it would be like to have God talk to you? Perhaps you have heard His voice. What was it like? When God created the very first man and woman, He desired to have a relationship with them. Not only did God want Adam and Eve to talk to Him, but He wanted to talk to them as well. Communication is the key to good relationships, and it is the same concerning our relationship with God. Since we cannot see God with our physical eyes or hear Him with our physical ears, how do we know when He is talking to us and how do we know what He is saying? Once again, the Bible is our best source for answers.

In the Old Testament, Samuel was a child when God first spoke to him. Samuel thought it was Eli, the high priest, calling him. After three times, Eli realized God was trying to talk to Samuel, and he told Samuel to answer, "Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth." Because Samuel "did not yet know the LORD," Eli helped him to understand what he was hearing was the voice of God. God continued to talk to Samuel throughout his life. Samuel grew up to become a priest and a prophet who was mightily used of God. Samuel learned at a very young age how to recognize God's voice and the importance of obeying what God told him to do.

Developing Good Spiritual Hearing

Have you ever heard someone speak to you and knew without even looking who it was? How did you know? It was because you recognized the voice. Studies have shown that often babies know their mother's voice at birth. They have been hearing her voice for weeks before they were born. Did you know that sheep recognize their shepherd's voice? Many strangers can call to the sheep, but they will not follow them. However, when the shepherd calls, the sheep will come because they know his voice. Jesus was referring to this when He said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).

The first time God talks to you, you might be like Samuel, not understanding what you are hearing. Just as Samuel told Eli what he heard, you should talk to a spiritual leader. Ask him or her to help you. They have been hearing God's voice for some time and can help you to recognize His voice. As you learn who God is, what He likes and dislikes, and what makes up His character, you will find it easier to hear Him when He speaks to you.

You must put forth effort to hear God's voice. Often, His voice is like a whisper. In 1 Kings 19:11-12 God was not found in a strong wind or in an earthquake or in a fire. It was in "a sound of gentle stillness" (Amplified Bible) that Elijah heard God's voice. To hear God's voice often requires us to be quiet. Psalm 46:10 tells us we need to "Be still, and know that I am God." Just as it can be difficult to hear someone talking to you in a noisy, crowded room, too many times a noisy, busy life makes hearing God's voice a difficult challenge. Have you ever "tuned into" a favorite radio station? The station was broadcasting continually, but it was not until you "tuned in" that you could hear what was being said. It is the same with God. He is trying to talk to you, but you must have "ears to hear" (Luke 8:8).

Sometimes difficult circumstances of life (such as the death of a friend or loved one or a serious accident) can cause

you to be more conscious of your need for God's help. God's voice will be a comfort to you in these dark times. Perhaps it is because you need Him more that you become more aware of His love and His presence.

What Does God's Voice Sound Like?

There are stories in the Bible of times when people could audibly hear God's voice. (Moses at the burning bush, Israel at Mount Sinai, and Jesus' baptism are a few examples.) While Jesus was here on earth, God said, "This is my beloved Son: hear him" (Luke 9:35). When Jesus returned to Heaven, He promised to send the "Comforter." That happened on the Day of Pentecost—God sent His Holy Spirit to live in the hearts of men and women who are saved. Today God speaks to us through His Word, His Spirit, and His ministry.

Some people describe God's voice as a strong thought or impression. Others have heard God speak to them by bringing a Scripture or hymn to their minds. Yet others realize that God is speaking through the words of a pastor or minister or Sunday school teacher. It is a learning process. It might seem difficult at first, but the longer you live for the Lord, the more opportunities you will have to hear God speaking to you. If you obey what God is telling you to do, He will continue speaking to you, and in time it will become easier to recognize His voice.

What Does God Say?

Learning who God is will greatly help you to understand what God is trying to say to you. First, God will never tell you something that contradicts the Bible. "God is not the author of confusion" (1 Corinthians 14:33). When He speaks, it is truth! Second, God speaks in specific terms. He will not tell you that you MIGHT have done something wrong or that MAYBE you should do this or that. God will make His will clear and plain to you.

Have you ever had a thought that you need to read your Bible or that you have not prayed today? That is God's voice, gently reminding you to read His Word or talk to Him. Have you ever been about to say an unkind word about someone and had a thought come into your mind that says, "You shouldn't say that"? That was God's voice, trying to keep you from saying something you should not say.

Have you ever had a bad day and it made you feel depressed? These are the times when God will send encouragement your way through the thought of a Bible verse or a song. It is helpful to read what God said to men in the Bible during their times of fear, sadness, or depression. God spoke to Elijah when he was depressed (1 Kings 19:18), to Moses when he was fearful (Exodus 3:12), and to Hezekiah when he was sad (2 Kings 20:5).



Spiritual Deafness

There are many things that can prevent you from hearing God's voice. Are you too busy? The devil will tempt you to fill your time with activities and things that are not always sinful yet are time consuming, leaving little or no room for personal time with God. Is there sin in your life? Have you failed to obey God's voice in the past and not made it right with God? Sin is a barrier between you and God. Are you listening to the wrong people? An Old Testament prophet paid a terrible price for taking advice that contradicted God's words (1 Kings 13:11-30). Do you have an "ear to hear" or are you spiritually deaf? Are you neglecting to read your Bible and pray? If you cannot hear God's voice, it is important that you search out the reason why and remove the hindrance.

Are You Really Listening?

The story is told of a famous man who decided to find out whether anybody was really listening to what he had to say. One evening while in a long receiving line, as each person came up to him and extended a hand, he smiled and said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning." People would say to him, "How lovely!" or "Just continue your great work!" No one was actually listening to him. Finally, a foreign diplomat shook his hand. When the famous man said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning," the diplomat responded quietly, "I'm SURE she had it coming."

Too many people listen to God in the same way. They ask, "Is this the one I should marry?" or "Is this where I should go to college?" or "Is this the right job for me?" But they do not truly hear what God says. They hear only what they want to hear.

"Can You Hear Me Now?"

Today with the abundance of cell phones, a common catchphrase is often heard: "Can you hear me now?" This is said when there is a bad connection between the two phones. To avoid a dropped call, it might be necessary to move to an area where the signal is stronger. Could it be that many people have a "bad connection" between them and God because they are in a weak place, spiritually speaking? Could moving to a better spiritual position increase the signal strength, making it easier to hear what God is saying?



WHAT IS MY CONSCIENCE?

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** There are different kinds of conscience (1 Timothy 1:5; Hebrews 10:22; 1 Corinthians 8:12).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** The conscience works to convict (John 8:1-11).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** A conscience must be exercised, or educated (Acts 24:16; Hebrews 5:14; Hebrews 12:11).
- ❑ **Thursday:** What is the opposite of an educated conscience? (Judges 21:25; Jeremiah 17:9).
- ❑ **Friday:** A conscience that is ignored can become "seared" (1 Timothy 4:1-4).
- ❑ **Saturday:** It is important to live with a "good conscience" (Acts 23:1; Hebrews 13:18; 1 Timothy 1:18-19).

Questions to Consider

Have you ever heard the saying, "Let your conscience be your guide"? These words have been used in popular songs and Hollywood movies, but are they in the Bible? Can your conscience be trusted? Some artists have depicted the conscience as an angel, whispering into one's ear to counter the advice being given by the devil who is whispering into the opposite ear. Is this an accurate picture?

What is your conscience? How does it work? Does everyone have a conscience? The Bible speaks of having a "good conscience" (1 Timothy 1:5) and a "pure conscience" (1 Timothy 3:9), but it also speaks of an "evil conscience" (Hebrews 10:22). Why might some people have a good conscience or even a tender conscience while others have an evil conscience or seemingly have no conscience? Sometimes when one has done wrong, you might hear the words, "He acted in good conscience." What does that mean? These are good questions, and we can find the answers in God's Word.

Biblical Examples

The first time the word *conscience* is found in the Bible is in John, Chapter 8. The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman "taken in adultery" to Jesus, trying to tempt (or test) Jesus to say something they could use against Him. Jesus "with his finger wrote on the ground." Then He said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." After Jesus wrote on the ground a second time, verse 9 tells us, "And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one . . ." Something in Jesus' words or perhaps what He wrote on the ground pricked their conscience (or made them feel guilty). Here we see conscience working to convict people of their own wrongdoing.

The second time the word *conscience* is found in the Bible is in Acts 23:1. Paul said, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." Yet, before his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul had "persecuted the church of God, and wasted it" (Galatians 1:13). In Acts 26:9 Paul said that he "was [once] persuaded that it was my duty to do many things contrary to and in defiance of the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Amplified Bible). How could Paul say this was done in "good conscience"? From this we see that the conscience can be wrong.

What determines if our conscience is working as God wants it to? Hebrews 5:14 and Hebrews 12:11 both tell us the secret to having a pure or good conscience. The conscience must be "exercised." In other words, it must be educated and trained. How does one train his or her conscience? We read that Paul exercised himself "to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16). Acts 24:14 tells us how he did this: "believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets." For Paul to believe "all things" in the Old Testament, he had to KNOW what those things were. Paul had a "good conscience" because he had educated his conscience in the Word of God.

The Bible must be the standard used in determining whether something is right or wrong. In the days of the judges, we read that "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). The Israelites rejected God's standard and determined right or wrong based on their own feelings. However, we cannot trust our feelings or our heart to guide us, because Jeremiah 17:9 says that "The heart is deceitful above all things." This emphasizes the great need of letting the Bible be our standard for good and evil. Bible reading and Bible study are vital if you are going to have a good and pure conscience.

An Uninformed Conscience

One definition of *conscience* is "an internal compass that gives moral guidance when properly educated in Biblical truth." An untrained or uninformed conscience can cause people to say they have a "clear conscience." In other words, they do not feel bad for what they are doing. Their conscience is uneducated and insensitive. Will God hold people accountable for their actions if they do not feel those actions are wrong? Does not knowing that you were speeding while driving your car on the highway spare you from a speeding ticket? Just as getting your driver's license requires you to know the laws of the highway, God has a manual that He expects you to read as well. God will be patient with you, but you must put forth the effort to read His Word and know what it says.

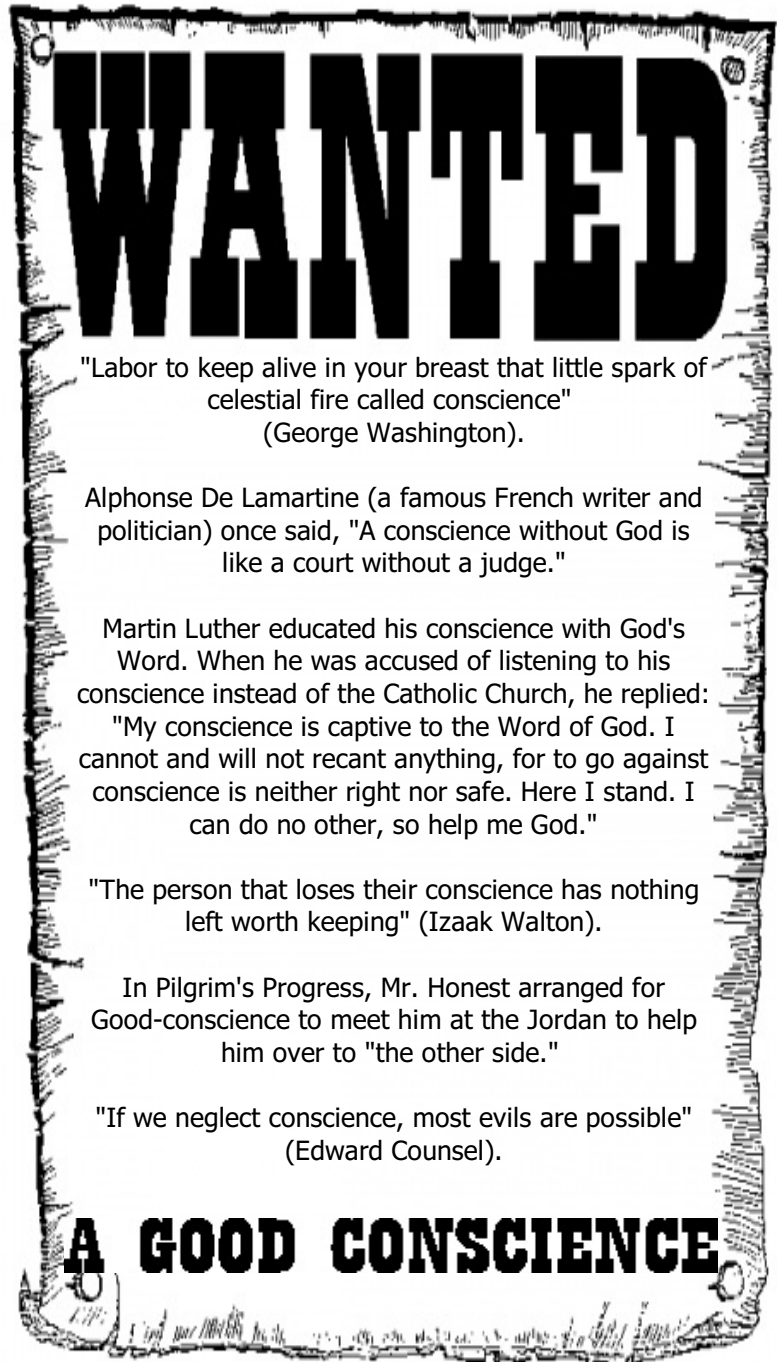
Another result that is often seen from an uninformed conscience is an overly-sensitive conscience. For instance, some people who have made the decision to be saved and live for God continually feel condemned over the smallest things. They often feel like they have done something wrong when they have not. The Bible describes this as a "weak conscience" (1 Corinthians 8:12). A tender-hearted person is usually more likely to experience this. One of the best ways to overcome a physical weakness is to exercise. So it is spiritually. The best way to strengthen your conscience is to educate it in God's Word.

What Kind of Conscience Do You Have?

When writing to the young pastor Timothy, Paul warned about people who would "depart from the faith . . . having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:1-2). It is believed that Paul was referring to the practice of branding criminals on the forehead. Another word for "seared" is *cauterized*, and the definition is "to make insensible, or unaware of something." How does someone sear their conscience? By refusing to obey what God has shown them to do, by ignoring their conscience. Each time it becomes easier and easier until a spiritual callus forms. Right and wrong will become a matter of opinion instead of what God says.

There is another type of conscience spoken of in the Bible. Paul wrote to the saints in the city of Corinth of having a "conscience [that] testifies that we have conducted ourselves . . . not in fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God" (2 Corinthians 1:12 Amplified Bible). When you continually exercise your conscience by hearing, reading, and obeying God's Word, it will testify to others of your walk with God.

What are you doing with your conscience? Are you exercising it as you should? Are you listening to it when it "pricks" you? Or do you ignore it and override it? Do you have a good conscience or has it become hardened?



WHAT IS MY PURPOSE IN LIFE?

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** You were carefully and thoughtfully created (Psalm 139:13; Jeremiah 1:5; Ephesians 2:10).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** God wants to have a special relationship with you (Exodus 33:11; James 2:23; John 15:15-16).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Jesus told of a rich man who made his own plans for his future (Luke 12:16-21).
- ❑ **Thursday:** You were created to bring glory to God (Psalm 147:11; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11).
- ❑ **Friday:** God has a general purpose for everyone (John 3:16-17; 2 Peter 3:9; 2 Corinthians 6:2).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Seek God's will for your individual purpose (Proverbs 3:1-6; Jeremiah 29:11-13).

You Are God's Masterpiece

If you were to write the lesson title on a piece of paper, how would you go about answering this question? Would you consult a dictionary or perhaps look up information on the internet? Could these sources help you discover *your* purpose in life? If you have a purpose (and you do), who determined what that purpose is? If you were created for a special purpose (and you were), who created you? How can you find out what that purpose is and how are you to go about doing what you were created to do? All these questions can seem to be confusing. So, let us go to the beginning. In fact, we should start with the Book of Beginnings—Genesis. Verse 1 tells us who did the creating and thus who determined the purpose for everyone and everything—including you: "In the beginning God . . ."

Suppose you took some yarn and knitting needles and began to knit. You would be creating something. At first, only you would know what it should look like when you are finished. You might be knitting a blanket or a hat or a scarf; only you know the purpose of that creation. If people want to know what you are knitting, whom should they ask? Should they ask others who are nearby? Their best answer would only be a guess. To find out the truth, they would have to ask you, because you are the one who is doing the knitting (creating).

In Psalm 139:13 we read that God "did knit me together in my mother's womb" (Amplified Bible). Knitting takes time, effort, and thought. During Creation, God *spoke* things into existence, but when He created man, Genesis 2:7 tells us that God "*formed*" man. Just as a potter carefully works with clay to make a beautiful vessel, so God carefully, lovingly created you. You are not a mistake or an accident. Before God "formed you in the womb" (Jeremiah 1:5 Amplified Bible), God said He knew you. Ephesians 2:10 tells us that we are God's "workmanship" (handiwork or masterpiece).

God Wants a Relationship With You

With all the careful planning and forming that went into making you, there must be a purpose to your life. Just as with the knitting project, to discover what your purpose is requires communicating with your Creator. He is the only One who fully knows why you are here and what you are supposed to do with your life.

While God was creating you, He must have thought about what you would look like, your personality, your abilities, and your talents. God had special plans for your life, "to give you an expected end" (Jeremiah 29:11). In other words, a future filled with hope. Perhaps God was thinking about the time when you would begin to realize who God is and that He wants a relationship with you. Can you imagine God's thoughts? He might have been thinking: "I look forward to talking to him or her! We're going to have a beautiful friendship!"

God wants a relationship with you. Exodus 33:11 tells us of the special relationship God had with Moses: "And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." God is not a "respector of persons" (Acts 10:34). He desires that same relationship with each one of His creations. When you have a close friendship with God, it brings glory to God.

You Were Created for God

When determining their purpose and life goals, too many people have the same attitude as the rich man in Luke, Chapter 12. As he thought about his future, in essence, he said, "I am going to do this" and "I am going to do that." Sadly, no consideration was given to what God wanted him to do. His plans were all centered around himself. This man did not realize it, but he would not live long enough to build greater barns or to "eat, drink, and be merry" (verse 19). When determining your purpose in life, you must acknowledge that you were created by God and for God (Colossians 1:16).



In Genesis 1:27 you can read that "God created man in his own image." Because you were created in God's image, your purpose in life cannot be fulfilled without God. You must look to Him for your answers. Why did God make you? First, you were created to give glory and praise to God and to please Him (Revelation 4:11). What does that mean and how is it accomplished? God is not pleased or glorified by a sinful life. A life of sin is described in Romans 3:23 as coming "short of the glory of God." When you acknowledge, confess, and forsake your sins, you enter into a right relationship with God. A life lived in obedience to God's commandments pleases God and brings glory to Him. In Exodus 19:5 God calls people who do this "a peculiar treasure" (or a valued possession).

Do You Have More Than One Purpose in Life?

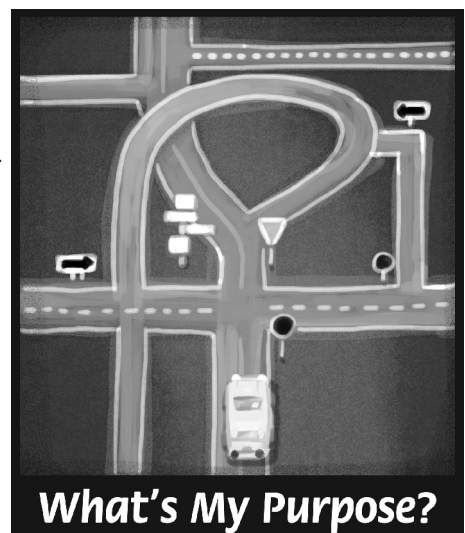
The wise man spoke of "a season, and a time to *every purpose* under the heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). The plan of salvation (living in a right relationship with God) is God's purpose for every man and woman, boy and girl who has ever lived (2 Peter 3:9). This could be called a *general purpose*. When is the season or time for this purpose? Paul wrote that "*now* is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). As soon as you understand that you are a sinner and you need a Savior, that is the time (or the season).

Once you become a Christian, you are part of God's family. Another way of describing it is that you become part of the spiritual "body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:27), or the Church of God. Just as your physical body has many parts (arms, legs, eyes, heart, etc.), the body of Christ has many parts (or "members"; 1 Corinthians 12:12) as well. Just as your physical body parts have different functions (or purposes), so the members in the body of Christ (the church) have different purposes. These could be called *individual purposes*.

There are no two people exactly alike. You have qualities and abilities that make you unique. God has a special purpose for your life now and in the future. How can you discover what that is? Proverbs 3:6 says, "In all thy ways acknowledge him [in other words, in everything you do, put God first], and he shall direct thy paths." God's plan for your future is not a big secret that He is keeping from you. He wants you to know what it is. He is just waiting for you to seek Him "with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

Failing to Fulfill Your Purpose

When you spend your life focusing on what you think will make you happy, there will always be something missing. Solomon spent his life pursuing the things that he thought would make him happy, but in the end he said that "all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 12:8). In other words, it is a waste of time to find life's purpose in things and people. Solomon had the best that life had to offer, but he came to realize it was all meaningless. Why? Because God's purpose is far greater than earthly relationships, achievements, wealth, or careers.



CAN A CHRISTIAN BACKSLIDE?

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** The Bible talks about "backsliding" Israel (Jeremiah 3:6-15).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** God was greatly displeased with Israel's backsliding (Jeremiah 2:13, 19-20).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** New Testament descriptions of backsliding (Luke 8:13; 2 Peter 2:20-22; 1 Timothy 4:1).
- ❑ **Thursday:** God's plea to the backslider (Jeremiah 3:22; Revelation 2:4-5).
- ❑ **Friday:** The backslider becomes spiritually dead (Ezekiel 18:20-24).
- ❑ **Saturday:** God requires faithfulness in His people (Matthew 25:21-23; Revelation 14:12; Revelation 17:14).

What Does It Mean to Backslide?

Several times in the Old Testament, the Israelites were warned of the dangers of backsliding. What did it mean to backslide, and why was it such a danger to God's people? Is it still a possibility for the Christian today? Is backsliding just a temporary loss of faith or is it much more serious? By studying God's Word, we can find the answers to these questions.

The first time the word *backslidings* is found in the Bible is in Jeremiah 2:19. The Prophet Jeremiah told the people of Israel that a time of trouble was coming because they continually turned away from God to idol worship. The word *backsliding* is defined as "turning back, to turn away, to be rebellious and stubborn." By looking at the key words in Jeremiah 2:19, you can understand what God thought about backsliding in the Old Testament. He described it as an "evil thing" and "bitter." Why did God speak so strongly concerning backsliding?

When God chose Israel to be His people, He had a special purpose for them. God wanted them to tell the rest of the world about the one true God. Also, from this nation would come the Savior of the world—Jesus Christ. God made many promises to the people of Israel. Those promises included God's protection and providing for all of Israel's needs. What did God require in return? We find the answer in Deuteronomy 10:12, which says, "And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul."

Sadly, time after time Israel failed to fear and love God and serve Him with all their heart. Many stories in the Old Testament are about the people of Israel worshiping false gods, such as Baal, Molech, and Chemosh. When they did this, they broke the first commandment (Exodus 20:3). They turned away from God and replaced Him with false gods. Second Kings 17:7 says that by doing this, they "sinned against the LORD their God." Sin put a separation between Israel and God (Isaiah 59:2). Many times God pleaded with the people of Israel to "return" to Him and He would "heal [their] backslidings" (Jeremiah 3:22).

Backsliding Today

Although the actual word *backsliding* is not found in the New Testament, we can find other similar terms that describe the same spiritual condition. These terms include: "fall away" (Luke 8:13); "looking back" (Luke 9:62); "to turn from" (2 Peter 2:20-22); letting things "slip" (Hebrews 2:1); and "depart from the faith" (1 Timothy 4:1). People who backslide are described as leaving "thy first love" (Revelation 2:4); trying to "serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24); having "turned aside" (1 Timothy 5:15); and growing "cold" (Matthew 24:12). These terms describe someone who was saved, following Christ, living the life of a Christian, but for some reason, he or she changed direction, no longer moving forward in a walk with Christ.

The life of a Christian is to be a forward, ongoing spiritual walk. What does that mean? Before you were saved, God convicted you of your sins. You realized that you were a sinner. That was understanding. What did you do with that light, or understanding? If you acknowledged your sins, believed on the Lord Jesus, confessed and forsook your sins, you moved forward; you accepted the light, or understanding; you began your walk with Christ. But the walk does



“Thou shalt
have no
other gods
before me.”

not stop there. God continually shows you things in your life to work on—things to add and things to remove. He also will give you understanding about other important things, such as verses in the Bible and how a Christian should talk and act. It is your responsibility to accept that light from God and make the changes in your spiritual life.

What Causes Backsliding?

If you are paddling a canoe against the current, what happens if you stop paddling? Do you stay in the same place? It is the same way in your Christian walk. Too many times, people start the Christian walk well, but after a time they do not move forward as they should. Failing to move forward spiritually does not result in staying in the same place, but it causes one to drift, fall away, and grow cold. In time, the man or woman who once was saved and living for God is in a backslidden spiritual condition.

It is important to recognize the dangers of backsliding or drifting away from God so that you do not make the same mistakes many other people have made. Often it is not obvious to others when one has accepted Christ into their heart (salvation) or when one has begun a spiritual drifting away (backsliding). That is because it begins in the heart. It is a gradual process. That is why it is so deceiving. However, what is working in your heart (good or bad), in time, will become apparent to your family and friends.

To understand what some of the causes of backsliding are, think of what can cause the Christian to grow cold in his or her walk with God. Not reading the Bible and praying are the two most common causes of backsliding. Other dangers are having the wrong friends, failure to attend church, and listening to or watching things that are not good. Another danger is failing to obey what God's Spirit tells you to do. These signs of carelessness and neglect warn that you are growing cold and drifting away. It does not always happen immediately. The farther you drift away from God, the harder it becomes to hear His voice. That is why you must be careful and watchful for the signs of backsliding.

What Does God Say About Backsliding?

There are several verses in the Bible that tell us God's opinion concerning backsliding. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, God pleaded with people who had backslidden to "return" (Jeremiah 3:12) or "repent" (Revelation 2:5). Is the backslider still a Christian? Ezekiel 18:24 (AMP) asks, "But if the righteous man turns away from his righteousness, and commits iniquity [sin] . . . shall he live?" The same verse answers that question: ". . . in his sin that he has sinned, in them shall he die [spiritually]." God requires His people to be faithful. When speaking to people who had grown cold spiritually in Revelation 2:4, God said, "I have somewhat against thee." (It is important to

understand the word *somewhat* is not in the original Greek manuscripts. It was added by the translators to help the reader understand.) You can see what God truly thought about this in Revelation 2:5, when He said, "Repent . . . or else." One cannot stay in a backslidden condition and continue to be a Christian.

God has provided a remedy, or a cure, for backsliding. Just as the prodigal son had to come to himself and return to his father's house, so the backslider must awaken to his spiritual condition and return to God. Returning to God is a change in direction. Once that happens, God has promised to forgive and restore. The return of the prodigal son and his father's love toward him is a beautiful example of what God desires to do for every backslider.

The old shepherd who offered prayer in a Welsh revival meeting put it exactly right when he expressed grief for his backsliding in these words: "Lord, I got among the thorns and briars, and was scratched and torn and bleeding; but Lord, it is only fair to say that it was not on Thy ground. I had wandered out of Thy pasture."

WHERE WILL I GO WHEN I DIE?

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** All have an appointment with death (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Hebrews 9:27).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Sin causes spiritual death, but Christ makes us alive (Ephesians 2:1-5; Colossians 2:13).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Life is too short to put off spiritual preparations (Job 14:1; James 4:14; 2 Corinthians 6:2).
- ❑ **Thursday:** A certain rich man failed to make spiritual preparations (Luke 12:16-21).
- ❑ **Friday:** Jesus told a true story about a rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).
- ❑ **Saturday:** The names of overcomers are recorded (Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; Revelation 20:11-13).

Is There Life After Death?

Have you ever wondered what happens after you die? Is there life after death? If so, where will you go? The answers to these important questions will help determine how you live your life before death. That is why it is important to know what happens after you die. There are many beliefs and opinions concerning what happens after death. Some people say the grave is the end, that there is nothing after death. Other people believe everyone is going to Heaven. Still others say that there is no place called hell; it is just a scare tactic to make people do what is right. Most important, what does the Bible say? That is what we must consider, for the Bible is the Ultimate Authority.

Job asked a very important question in Job 14:14, when he said, "If a man die, shall he live again?" The Book of Job asks many questions whose answers can only be found in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Who better to answer this question about life after death than Jesus? At the grave of Lazarus, Jesus told Martha, "I am the resurrection, and the life . . . whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26). Yet, Lazarus was dead. What did Jesus mean when He spoke of never dying?

It is important to realize there are different kinds of death described in the Bible. One is physical death. This occurs when there is a separation of the soul and spirit from the body (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Every one of us has an appointment with physical death (Hebrews 9:27). Solomon wrote, "To everything there is a season [or an appointed time] . . . A time to be born, and a time to die" (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2). We do not know when death will take place, but we must prepare for it. What happens to us after this is determined by whether or not we are alive spiritually. When one sins against God, that sin causes a separation. This is described as being "dead in sins" (Ephesians 2:5). Only by accepting Christ as your Savior can you be "quickened" (Ephesians 2:1), or made alive spiritually.

Making Preparations for Death

For most people, the thought of dying is frightening. Psalm 23:4 tells us that we do not need to be afraid of the "valley of the shadow of death" if God is with us. What does that mean? Before we face death, we must prepare. We must have God within us, not beside us or close by, but we must have His Spirit living in our heart. Sometime in our life we will be given a choice: to serve God or not serve God. If we accept Jesus as our Savior, we will have His Spirit in us all through life; and He will also be with us when we die. Would you go to an important financial appointment without gathering all the needed papers first? Would you leave for a lengthy trip without packing and getting directions? Many people realize the importance of preparing for these events, yet they do nothing to prepare for the most important appointment of all. Today's spiritual preparation determines tomorrow's eternal destination.

Some people put off preparing for death, hoping that at the end of their life they will have enough time to get right with God. This is similar to preparing for retirement by waiting until the last few months of your career to put money aside and hoping it will be enough. Many people would consider that foolish, yet they continually put off making preparations for life after death. When should you start making your spiritual preparations? Second Corinthians 6:2 says that "now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Yesterday is gone, tomorrow may never come, today is all you have for sure. Today is the best time to begin making preparations.

James wrote that life is "a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away"



(James 4:14). Job described life as being "of few days" (Job 14:1). Yet, too often people live their life as if they will live forever, giving little or no thought to their eternal home. In Luke, Chapter 12, the "certain rich man" made plans for building bigger barns to hold his wealth. He was planning on enjoying his "goods" for many years, but he did not plan for life after death. God called him a "fool." His treasures were all on earth, not in Heaven (Luke 12:21; Matthew 6:20). We must make preparations for what Solomon called our "long home" (Ecclesiastes 12:5).

Your Eternal Home

If you are traveling to a place you have never been before, a map can be very helpful. Your life can be described as a journey. Where are you headed? What is your final destination? It is not God's will for anyone to "perish," but He desires all to "have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezekiel 33:11), but Psalm 116:15 tells us, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints." Because it is so important to God that you make the right choice concerning your final destination and He knows that "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23), God has provided a roadmap—the Bible. Everything you need can be found in this wonderful Book!

Sadly, many people reject God's plan of salvation. They decide to travel their own way (Proverbs 16:25). This has been called the broad way. Many people are traveling this way, and Matthew 7:13 says it "leadeth to destruction," a place of "everlasting punishment" (Matthew 25:46). There is another way to travel. It is often called the narrow way, a way that few people have chosen, but it leads "unto life" (Matthew 7:14).

What are these two destinations that Jesus called "destruction" and "life"? Perhaps the best way to understand is to read a true story Jesus told in Luke, Chapter 16, about the rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. When they died, those two men went to two different places. Lazarus went to a place of comfort, described as "Abraham's bosom" (a Jewish expression meaning Heaven), and the rich man went to a place of torment, called hell. Neither Lazarus nor the rich man could leave one place for the other. These were their eternal (or forever) homes. Their final destinations were determined by the spiritual preparations they made before death.

The Book of Life

In ancient cities when a baby was born, his or her name was written in a city registry. When someone in that city died, their name was then marked out of the book of the living. The Bible tells us that God has a book where names are recorded as well. This book is called "the book of life" (Philippians 4:3). At the final Judgment, anyone whose name is not written in this book will be "cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15).

When you accept Jesus as your personal Savior, you are born again. You become spiritually alive, and your name is written down in the Book of Life. As long as you continue to live the life of an overcomer, your name will not be marked out of this book (Exodus 32:33; Revelation 3:5). Is your name written in this book? Have you made plans for your final destination? If not, it is not something to put off until another day.

Suggested Reading:

How to Resist the Devil by F. J. Perryman

The Devil by Earl R. Borders

The Downfall of Man by Roger Decker

What Is Sin? by Cleve Green

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