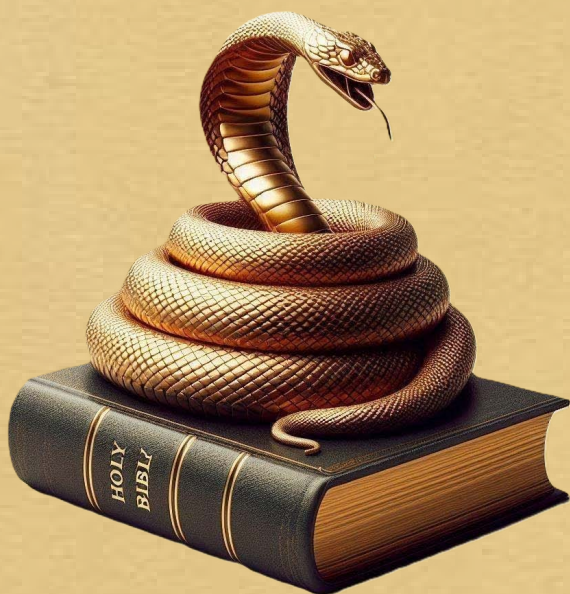


# SEARCHING *for the* SERPENT



*Essays on Presumptions and Practices  
That Vitate the Word of God*

**DAN BRUCE**

*Author of PROOF OF GOD and HE IS THE ONE*



# SEARCHING *for the* SERPENT

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That Vitiate the Word of God*

DAN BRUCE

THE PROPHECY SOCIETY  
ATLANTA

# SEARCHING FOR THE SERPENT

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## **THE BASICS**

*Tota Scriptura – the Bible is equally inspired by God;*  
*Sola Scriptura – the Bible alone is our highest authority;*  
*Sola Fide – we are saved through faith alone in Jesus Christ;*  
*Sola Gratia – we are saved by the grace of God alone;*  
*Solus Christus – Jesus Christ alone is our Lord and Savior;*  
*Soli Deo Gloria – we live for the glory of God alone.*

## **Attributes of God**

*Omnipotent: God is all-powerful.*

*Omniscient: God is all-knowing.*

*Omnipresent: God is everywhere.*

*Omniveritent: God is all truth.*

*Eternal: God is beyond time.*

*Immutable: God is unchanging.*

*Holy: God is set apart from sin.*

*Loving: God is love.*

*Just: God is a fair judge.*

*Merciful: God is forgiving.*

*Faithful: God fulfills his promises.*

*Creator: God is the source of all.*

# INTRODUCTION

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The movement to defend the authority of the Bible has roots that trace back to the early years of Christianity. It started gaining modern momentum in the 19th and 20th centuries in response to challenges posed by the rise of biblical criticism and advances in science, but most of all it was catalyzed by the infiltration of liberal theology into churches and seminaries in Europe and America.

One significant event in that movement was the publication of *The Fundamentals*, a multi-volume collection of essays published by the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (BIOLA) between 1910 and 1915. Written by various Christian authors and theologians, its aim was to define and defend core Christian beliefs, including inerrancy of the Bible, against modernism and skepticism. The term “inerrancy” itself gained prominence in theological circles during that period, with scholars and theologians asserting that the Bible, in its original manuscripts, was without error or contradiction in all matters of faith.<sup>†</sup>

A second major effort to defend the accuracy and authority of the Bible occurred in 1978 with the publication of The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. That document was formulated by over two hundred evangelical scholars at the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy held in Chicago. It affirmed belief in the accuracy of the biblical text and outlined a series of affirmations and denials concerning the nature of biblical exposition. The Chicago Statement has since served as a cornerstone in the defense of the Bible’s authority within conservative theological circles.<sup>††</sup>

In recent decades, conservative seminaries, churches, and para-church organizations have taken up the task of defending the doctrine

<sup>†</sup> The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth,” eds. A.C. Dixon, Louis Meyer, and Reuben Archer Torrey (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Company, 1910-1915). The essays are available online at: <https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/the-fundamentals/>

<sup>††</sup> Available online at: [https://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI\\_1.pdf](https://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf)

## *Introduction*

of biblical inerrancy. They have played significant roles in countering the rise of liberal theology, which often emphasizes individual reason and personal experience over the authority of the sacred text. Through their efforts, believers have greatly benefited. However, in their zeal to defend the Bible, some have inadvertently distorted its teachings.

The essays in this collection explore perceptions and practices resulting from omissions, mistranslations, or misinterpretations of the sacred text that have tended to corrupt biblical understanding and application over time. Though not intended to be exhaustive, the discussions will hopefully stimulate the reader to reexamine what the sacred text actually says, and then consider whether correction to what is being taught as “received truth” in Christian churches, seminaries, and publications is needed. Some of the topics that will be discussed in subsequent pages include the following:

- The universe is about 6,000 years old. FALSE
- Science and religion are adversaries. FALSE
- Life begins at the moment of conception. FALSE
- Speaking in tongues is a gift for believers. FALSE
- Perfecting society is the mission of the church. FALSE
- Sexual temptations are sins of the flesh. FALSE
- Faith guarantees health and wealth in this life. FALSE
- Jews have their own covenant of salvation. FALSE
- Everyone will eventually go to heaven. FALSE

## 7 RIPARTITE DECEPTION

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The Bible is essentially an instruction manual revealed by God to govern the thoughts and actions of the human beings he created in his image here on earth. All that a person needs to know in order to be pleasing to God in this lifetime, and eventually to be one with him in eternity, is provided in its pages. On our journey through life, the words of the Bible can nourish and sustain our soul in much the same way that food, water, and air nourish and sustain our physical body. All we have to do is believe and obey what it says to receive its blessings.

The early chapters in Genesis recount how God and man walked together in mutual love. Adam was created for that purpose: to love God and be loved by God. In the Garden of Eden, there was no need for a Bible to provide Adam with instruction, as he was created with innate knowledge of good on which to act. His mind was untainted by knowledge of evil, enabling him to have direct fellowship with God, conversing face to face with the Creator without the peril of being annihilated in the presence of his all-consuming goodness.<sup>†</sup>

Adam was created with free will to ensure that his love for God would be voluntary and thus genuine during their time communing together in the garden. As defined by God, love coerced would not be true love, thus, man was given free will. Located in the center of the garden was the tree of knowledge of good and evil, placed there by God with a warning not to eat of its fruit on pain of death. The purpose of the prohibition was twofold: to allow Adam to show his love for God by choosing not to use free will to be disobedient, and to protect Adam from the death sentence that would result from disobeying God.

One might ask: If a loving God created Adam to be loved, why would he then allow his beloved to suffer the pain of death? The answer is self-evident: The intrinsic nature of an omnipotent God requires it

<sup>†</sup> If you find the narratives in Genesis hard to accept literally, then consider them as parables meant to convey spiritual truths and look for the truths they convey.

to be so. His absolute universal authority over everything dictates that nothing embodying opposition to his will can exist in his presence. By choosing to act in disobedience by eating the forbidden fruit, Adam became opposition incarnate and thus could no longer be one with God. As long as he honored God's word by acting in harmony with it, he could have uninterrupted fellowship and union with God. However, once he chose to reject God's will for him, he forfeited that blessing. As the Genesis narrative goes on to tell us, Adam lost the privilege of being in God's presence once he had chosen to use his free will to rebel against the divine nature. The immediate penalty for Adam's disobedience was his permanent expulsion from God's loving realm.

The account in Genesis, chapter 3, reveals how the Serpent (*aka* Lucifer, Satan) tempted Adam to reject God's word. It gives us insight into how knowledge of evil (*i.e.*, knowledge originating in the temporal realm that contradicts God's revealed word) has operated to separate man from God throughout human history. Recall that God had warned Adam, saying, "*Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat of it you will surely die*" (Gen. 2:16-17). The Serpent said to Adam instead, "*You will not surely die, for God knows that in the day you eat it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil*" (Gen. 3:4-5).

The deception of Adam by the Serpent was achieved by adding one word to what God had said, changing God's word from "will" to "will not." Consequently, Adam was faced with the choice of either believing God's word, meant to safeguard and prolong his life in both the temporal realm and on into eternity, or disbelieving it by embracing the secular words offered by the Serpent, the latter choice ultimately leading to estrangement from God's loving presence.

By employing a corrupted version of the divine word to tempt Adam to doubt God's preeminence, the Serpent was able to persuade him to consume the forbidden fruit. Consequently, Adam's very being became infected with the knowledge of evil (*i.e.*, secular knowledge

that gave him the option of choosing to act contrary to God's will), thereby opening the door to future temptation and acts of rebellion against God's authority, the latter being the Bible's definition of sin. It is noteworthy that nothing in the fruit itself empowered Adam to rebel against God, since that capacity already existed in Adam as a feature of his God-given free will before he ever took the first bite of forbidden fruit. Instead, it was the words of the Serpent and Adam's decision to act on them (*i.e.*, absorb them into his being experientially) that made Adam a permanent repository of the knowledge of evil (*i.e.*, knowledge of how to sin). The interplay of free will and the conscious rejection of God's word infected Adam, introducing knowledge of evil to mankind.

The biblical narrative illustrates that the Serpent employs three main tactics to lead mankind away from God: (1) by inserting words into the Bible, (2) by removing words from the Bible, and (3) by persuading a person to disregard some or all of the words of the Bible and instead embrace the Serpent's words, thus enabling the individual to become his own authority for determining what is good and evil. More often than not, the deception is a combination of all three.

God's authoritative word was first written down by Moses and the prophets of Israel in what today we call the Old Testament. Its tenets became known over time as "The Law," and it provided the only authoritative guidance for correct interaction between God and man that had come direct from God. Soon after its introduction to Israel at Sinai, however, the Serpent began to corrupt the purity of God's revelation by applying his various methods of deception mentioned above. By manipulating the revealed words of God, the life-giving meanings and intent of God's revelation were corrupted and used to tempt mankind to live contrary to God in a state of spiritual death.

With the advent of Jesus, the Messiah, the revelation of God was made complete. The writers of the New Testament recorded the events of his mission and the message of love and redemption for mankind that came through him. Unfortunately, that did not end the deceptions of the Serpent; it merely provided additional words for him to corrupt

and use to tempt man into disobedience. The corruption of God's revealed word by the Serpent, which began in the Garden of Eden with Adam, has persisted uninterrupted over the centuries since Jesus established his church, distorting the meaning of God's written message as it is taught and preached today. The cumulative effect of those deceptive distortions appear to be particularly destructive in this present age. Given that reality, comprehending, rightly believing, and proclaiming the true and complete meaning of God's word may be more crucial today than ever before in history.

We are blessed to possess accurate Bible manuscripts that have been faithfully passed down through the generations, often at great cost by individuals who sacrificed their lives to protect and preserve them. Those manuscripts offer us reliable insights directly from the divine, originating from the mind of God. However, throughout history, the interpretations and intentions behind those words have occasionally been distorted by human manipulation. Consequently, the mission of the church of Jesus to convey God's truth to the world has frequently been hindered by the inclusion of extraneous man-made teachings and agendas. That additional burden greatly complicates the task of spreading God's message.

It is incumbent upon all who believe in the sanctity of God's word to, with a sense of reverence and humility, search out corruptions and distortions introduced by the Serpent into the sacred text, keeping in mind the warning given by God in Genesis 3:1, "*Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made,*" and the advice given by the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 2:15, "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*"

**THE EXPOSITOR'S PRAYER**

*"Lord, forgive what is mistaken  
... and bless what is true."*

*Alfred Edersheim (1825-1889)*

# HIDDEN KNOWLEDGE

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In modern Christianity, there is a movement built around the hypothesis that the universe is only six-thousand years old. Those who hold to that view, often known as “Young Earth Creationists,” maintain that a literal interpretation of the biblical text can produce only that conclusion. They also imply that those who hold a different view, especially a view of creation that takes into account the hypotheses of modern science, are essentially chronological heretics.

Advocates of the 6000-year time span for the age of the universe base their conclusion on a strict linear interpretation of the Bible’s narrative in Genesis, augmented by time-specific references found in other sections of the Old Testament. That view of creation first appeared in the sixteenth century in reaction to the nascent findings of the developing fields of secular science, which were beginning to question traditional religious teachings about how the world began. Although no single theologian can be pinpointed as the originator of the 6000-year timeline for the age of the universe, that viewpoint gained traction among theologians during that period.

Perhaps the most notable name in the history of determining an exact year of the creation event by using the biblical text as the primary source belongs to Archbishop James Ussher, Primate of the Church of Ireland. In the late seventeenth century, Ussher meticulously added up the ages of biblical figures and events mentioned in the text to arrive at his estimation. Ussher’s calculations led him to conclude that God created the universe in the year 4004 BCE. He published his findings and conclusions in “*Annales Veteris Testamenti*” (Annals of the Old Testament), in which he even specified an exact day for the start of creation, which he identified as October 23rd.

Ussher’s chronology was a product of the age in which he lived and the theological assumptions accepted as sacrosanct by him and his peers, the most important assumption being that the text of the Bible

is trustworthy (a correct assumption). During his lifetime, Ussher's chronology for the age of the universe was almost universally adopted, and later chronologies by those seeking to refine his calculations reflect a timeline that closely corresponds to his original. For the most part, they use the same methodology to identify dates for key events recorded in the Bible, then add up all the chronological markers found in the text. However, establishing a definitive timeline in that manner is complicated by the fact that the Bible's text contains discernible gaps in its chronology, thus making it impossible to do a simple linear totaling of biblical dates without assumptions and guesswork.

A journal article by Old Testament scholar and theologian James Barr identified the time periods that Ussher postulated to arrive at his 4004 BCE date for creation. Its main points are summarized below:<sup>†</sup>

**CREATION TO ABRAM'S MIGRATION:** The chronology for this section is specified in Genesis, chapters 5 through 11. Those chapters provide an unbroken male lineage with numbers of years specified from the creation event to the year Abram left Ur to reside in Haran. Ussher used the chronology recorded in the Masoretic text instead of the numbers found in the Septuagint. He fixed that period as 2082 years in duration, spanning from the creation event in 4004 BCE to 1922 BCE.

**ABRAM'S MIGRATION TO SOLOMON'S TEMPLE:** The period from leaving Haran to the Exodus was calculated by Ussher to have been 430 years in duration, based on his assumption that Abram's descendants suffered 400 years of affliction commencing 30 years after he left Haran. Since 1 Kings 6:1 states that 480 years elapsed from the Exodus to start of construction on Solomon's Temple in his fourth regnal year, the Temple's foundation was laid 910 years after Abram left Haran, making this section span from 1922 BCE to 1012 BCE.

**SOLOMON'S TEMPLE TO BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY:** This period is the most challenging to calculate with any degree of certainty, due to

<sup>†</sup> James Barr, 1984-85. "Why the World Was Created in 4004 BC: Archbishop Ussher and Biblical Chronology", *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 67:603-607.

the difficulties encountered in harmonizing the reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel. Ussher chose to ignore the kings of Israel and add up the years in the reigns of the kings of Judah, resulting in a total of 430 years. By assuming overlapping reigns, Ussher arbitrarily chose to abbreviate that period to 424 years spanning from 1012 BCE to 588 BCE.

**END OF EXILE TO NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DEATH:** After reckoning the years from creation to the last king of Judah, Ussher went on to use 2 Kings 25:27 to establish the length of time from creation to the accession of the Babylonian king Amel-Marduk (*aka* Evil-Merodach) upon Nebuchadnezzar's death. He then used information from secular Babylonian, Greek, and Roman historical sources to fix the date of Amel-Marduk's enthronement as the year 562 BCE, from which he was able to calculate a date for the creation event as October 23, 4004 BCE.

The Ussher-based chronologies reigned supreme in the realm of Bible theology and Western thought for more than two centuries, largely unchallenged until the emergence of early scientific discoveries. Those findings initiated a shift in how the natural world was perceived, gradually diminishing reliance on the Bible as the exclusive source of authoritative knowledge, especially within academic circles.

The developing fields of Geology and its offshoot Paleontology posed significant challenges to the Ussher-based chronologies. Both disciplines presented fossil evidence of animals, plants, and organisms from the distant past. Many fossils, such as those of dinosaurs, bore no resemblance to any creature described in Genesis. Furthermore, fossil evidence was not the sole challenge to the traditional Bible-based chronology. Advancements in astronomy indicated a universe millions of years old, offering evidence literally being declared from the heavens that contradicted the Ussherite interpretations.

In today's age of infotainment culture, debates between Bible-defending theologians and Bible-denying scientists about the age of the Earth and the universe have become common on modern media platforms, notably television and the internet. In those encounters, theologians, often lacking scientific training, clash with scientists who

usually lack basic theological understanding. Each side defends its position, talking past one another to no avail. Additionally, numerous books and academic articles contribute endless speculations on the topic. Unfortunately, the competition to persuade the public about a preferred date for creation will continue as long as both sides persist in ignoring what the Bible actually says about the matter.

Here is what they are missing. In Ecclesiastes 3:11, the sacred text clearly states that mankind cannot know the works of God from beginning to end, saying: *“He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also he has put eternity in [mankind’s] hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.”* There it is, literally, stated in plain language. Mankind can sense eternity (*i.e.*, can sense that time extends seemingly limitlessly into the past and into the future), but he cannot know the how and when of creation in the beginning nor the details of creation as it ends. That knowledge has not been granted for us to know.

The Book of Ecclesiastes was placed by the ancient rabbis in the Writings section of the Old Testament, along with works of wisdom such as the Books of Psalms and Proverbs. The books that comprise that ancient section were given specifically to offer godly counsel to the Bible believer. The wise child of God will heed what they say, realizing (in this case) that any claim to know the date of the creation event is essentially saying that God is a liar in view of the fact that he has told us that we cannot know it. And, if a person ever teaches a specific date of the creation event, he or she is guilty of disseminating error.

As for satisfying our curiosity as Bible believers about exactly how and when the Earth and the universe were created, the brief account detailing the order of creation in early Genesis should be sufficient, especially in view of the fact that God has said we cannot know more. And, after all, the most important knowledge about creation that God has revealed to us in the sacred text—that he alone is the Creator of everything—is really all we need to know.

# S SCIENCE vs. RELIGION

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In the minds of many people, especially within Christian circles, the Young Earth vs. Old Earth controversy has played a prominent role in fostering the idea that there is an inherent conflict between science and religion. As a result, some Christians are overly skeptical about anything originating from the field of science, fearing that recognition of scientific knowledge as legitimate indicates disloyalty to God.

In more recent decades, disputes between Christians with little scientific training and scientists with little theological understanding have been featured in the public discourse. Those two groups have frequently met to engage in debates, each defending their respective field of research as offering the only trustworthy path to truth. The debates usually end up presenting a false dichotomy between science and Bible research, which devalues both disciplines. Such encounters, which are often adamant rather than enlightening, deprive adherents in both fields of the enrichment that can come from considering each other's insights. And, as has sometimes been the case, well-meaning Christian participants have resorted to presenting pseudo-science scenarios in the Bible's defense, further confusing the issue.

Francis Collins, a respected American physician-geneticist and former director of the National Human Genome Research Institute who also identifies as an evangelical Christian, made the following observation during a television interview, "Science is a powerful way to study the natural world, but science is not particularly effective in making commentary about the supernatural world. Both worlds are quite real and quite important. They coexist. They illuminate each other. However, they are investigated in different ways."<sup>†</sup>

The Bible is the means through which spiritual reality is awakened within each of us. Its words provide the knowledge that shows us how

<sup>†</sup> "Religion and Ethics" with Bob Abernethy, [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org). June 16, 2000.

to have genuine faith in God. In a similar way, understanding the temporal world provides additional evidence of God that can open the door to faith. For example, when John the Baptist sent messengers to ask Jesus if he was the Messiah, Jesus himself called attention to the relationship of perceived reality and faith by directing John's disciples to relate the things they had seen and heard (Matt. 11:4). On the other hand, the Bible clearly states that faith does not depend solely on our temporal perceptions. It reminds us that faith is based on believing the evidence of things unseen and the substance of things hoped for (Heb. 11:1). So, in this lifetime, both temporal and spiritual knowledge work together to give complete understanding of God's truth.

In modern times, there has been an increase in instances where scientific findings have been presented as contradicting the teachings of the Bible. Scientific findings are hypotheses based on data gathered by observation and measurement, while the teachings of the Bible are based on the revelation of knowledge direct from God. When either is used to disprove the other, it can create a seeming conflict between temporal truth and sacred truth. That kind of disagreement is often seen in books and journals that discuss the origin of mankind.

For example, science explains the creation of man with a theory of evolution. According to that theory, humans evolved from earlier primates through a process of natural selection and genetic mutation. The exact details of how the pre-human primates emerged into the world in the first place are still a topic of investigation and speculation, but the general idea is that our early ancestors gradually evolved traits that distinguished them from other primates, leading to the emergence of *Homo sapiens*. Fossil evidence, genetic studies, and comparative anatomy are used to support that idea. However, it is important to note that the theory of human evolution does not cover everything because it does not explain where the requisite pre-primate ancestor came from. Instead, it kind of assumes, based on what amounts to an act of faith, that it evolved from a simpler organism that just popped into existence with life, eventually evolving over time to become us.

The Bible offers a different kind of faith-based explanation for the creation of mankind, saying: *“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, overall the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them”* (Gen. 1:26-27), and in a parallel account adding, *“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being”* (Gen. 2:7). Taken together, those accounts say that man was formed from elements found on planet Earth and imbued with the spirit of life by the action of a living God. Later on, the woman was taken from the flesh of man (Gen. 2:21-22). Obviously, since none of the finer details are included, the biblical account is not intended to be a step-by-step description of how God designed and built the first humans.

The creation narrative in Genesis is supernatural and theological in nature. Its aim is to convey spiritual truths about the origin of the universe and humanity, emphasizing God as the first mover and sustainer of all things, with man as a created being possessing spiritual capabilities enabling communion with God. In contrast, the scientific creation theory focuses exclusively on temporal processes that can be explained without involving the supernatural. It addresses the question of human origin by assembling together evidence from paleontology, genetics, anthropology, archaeology, and other scientific disciplines to construct a theory that tries to explain the history of our species in evolutionary terms. However, as a creation account it fails to provide a first mover to explain how the evolutionary trajectory of human development was originally set in motion in the beginning.

So, which creation account of the two seemingly contradictory accounts should Christians accept as valid, the one presented by science or the one presented by the Bible? The answer is that we do not have to choose. Both accounts have their place and contain knowledge that contributes to our understanding of God’s whole truth. It is important

to recognize that as human beings we live in two separate realities, one temporal and the other spiritual. The temporal reality can be explained by scientific laws, such as the law of gravity, that we can perceive and verify with our physical senses. On the other hand, the spiritual laws and the way they operate are intangible and can only be understood through the words of the Bible. In that way, we gain entrance into an unseen reality with insights that transcend our temporal reality. With that latter knowledge in place, as Christians we can safely profit from exposure to disparate viewpoints in our search for ultimate truth.

When evaluating the believability of any body of information, it is important to stay within the boundaries set by the principles and rules used to derive it. That applies to both scientific and religious knowledge, particularly if presented as “established fact.” Just as we use the rules of baseball to referee baseball games, we should use the scientific method to evaluate scientific information. Similarly, when evaluating the teachings of the Bible, we should use the rules that govern interpretation of the sacred text. Each claim of truth should be evaluated within its particular context. We should also allow for the fact that scientific discoveries can be incomplete and the possibility that the words of the Bible may have been misunderstood. Having said that, one guideline supersedes all others: Any methodology that claims to provide ultimate truth, irrespective of its origin, will never lead to a conclusion that contradicts the attributes of God as revealed in the Bible.

Today, the insistence on defending a 6000-year time span for the age of the universe, an error discussed in the previous chapter, is a primary motivation for the lingering perception that science and religion are adversaries in mankind’s pursuit of truth. Any conflict will eventually be resolved as knowledge increases, something that God has promised will happen as history progresses (*cf.* Dan. 12:4). In the future, when both science and the Bible are correctly interpreted and fully understood (neither are so at present), a single unified truth will prevail. There can be no other outcome, since truth is an intrinsic attribute of God, who is, by definition, One.

# ET THERE BE LIFE

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The Bible does not explicitly state a precise moment when human life begins. That omission has led theologians, religious scholars, and laymen to put forth a variety of interpretations and opinions.

Some say that life begins at conception, citing Psalm 139:13-16 as evidence, where the Psalmist speaks of being formed in the womb by God. Others argue that life begins at birth, when a newborn takes its first breath, citing the creation account in Genesis 2:7 where God breathed the breath of life into Adam. Still others maintain that life begins at some unspecified point between conception and birth, citing Exodus 21:22-25, in which accidental injury to a pregnant woman that endangers the life of her fetus is addressed. Those examples and other life-defining passages in Scripture have resulted in conflicting opinions among Bible believers on exactly when human life begins.

From a scientific viewpoint there is also diversity of opinion among researchers, but in general life is defined by biologists applying criteria that distinguish living organisms from non-living matter. The specifics may vary based on context, but below are some of the key criteria commonly used to determine if an organism is alive:

**CELLULAR ORGANIZATION:** Living organisms are composed of one or more cells, which are the basic structural and functional units of life. Cells carry out various metabolic processes necessary for life.

**METABOLISM:** Living organisms exhibit metabolism, defined as chemical reactions that occur within cells to maintain life. Those reactions typically involve the conversion of nutrients into energy and the synthesis of molecules needed for growth and repair.

**HOMEOSTASIS:** Living organisms maintain internal stability and balance through homeostasis, which involves regulating factors such as temperature, pH, and nutrient levels within a defined range.

**RESPONSE TO STIMULI:** Living organisms respond to stimuli coming from their environment, such as light, temperature, touch, and

chemical signals. Those responses may be behavioral, physiological, or biochemical in nature.

**REPRODUCTION:** Living organisms have a capacity to reproduce, either sexually or asexually, to produce offspring that inherit genetic traits from their parents.

**ADAPTATION:** Living organisms can adapt to changes in their environment over time through evolutionary processes, such as natural selection, mutation, and genetic variation.

Based on those criteria, science considers a human being to be present from the moment of conception, when a single cell (zygote) is formed through the fusion of a sperm cell and an egg cell. From that point onward, the developing organism meets the criteria for being considered human life, with cellular organization, metabolism, response to stimuli, and the potential for growth and reproduction.

Many Christians are surprised to discover that the scientific definition of life, as outlined above, essentially mirrors the perspective on life advocated by the “pro-life” movement, except for the parts about asexual reproduction and evolution. That political movement asserts that life commences at conception, when a sperm fertilizes an egg, forming a zygote with unique DNA. It is argued that the zygote possesses all the genetic material necessary for human development, thus warranting consideration as a human being with inherent rights, including the right to life. That argument serves as the foundation for the movement’s opposition to abortion, as it views abortion as the deliberate termination of human life.

In the discussion that follows in the remainder of this section, it should be noted that there is no attempt being made to pinpoint an exact moment when human life begins. Instead, the focus is solely on what the Bible says about identifying when life is present in an organism, as opposed to determining a precise moment when an organism first acquires life.

As Bible believers, we are blessed to have a criterion revealed by God and recorded in the sacred text to guide us in determining

the presence of life in an organism. That singular criterion is found in Leviticus 17:11(a), which says “*the life of the flesh is in the blood.*” That verse tells us how we are to understand the presence of life from the viewpoint of God as defined in Scripture. It provides a definitive statement about the relationship between life, flesh, and blood that supersedes all man-made opinions and definitions about life, stating without ambiguity that when flesh contains its own blood, it is to be considered to have life in the eyes of God. Conversely, if flesh lacks its own blood, then it is not considered to be alive by God.

What implication does that definition of life in Leviticus, which requires the presence of blood for flesh to have life, have on the various secular interpretations claiming to determine when human life begins? To answer that question, one must consider the latest research findings from the fields of Embryology and Developmental Biology that investigate the sequential stages of human development in the womb, with special attention given to development of the blood system from zygote through embryonic stage to early fetal stages.

In human development, the embryo starts to develop its own circulatory system early in gestation, but in a progressive process that takes many weeks. Early in the third week after conception, the embryo forms three primary germ layers: the endoderm, the mesoderm, and the ectoderm. The mesoderm layer, which develops into various bodily structures including the cardiovascular system, undergoes differentiation to form blood vessels and blood cells. By the end of the third week and into the fourth week, the embryo’s circulatory system starts to take form. That process involves the development of a primitive heart and blood vessels, and the beginning of blood cell production in the yolk sac. The embryo’s developing circulatory system will begin to interface with the mother’s blood system through the placenta, which facilitates nutrient and gas exchange.

Around the fifth week of gestation, the embryo’s rudimentary circulatory system begins to become more distinct and independent. The early heart-cell tubes come together and start to pulse, forming a

basic pumping mechanism. Circulation begins as that proto-heart starts to send blood cells through developing vessels. Additionally, the liver and spleen begin to contribute to blood cell production, taking over from the yolk sac. By the end of the embryonic period, around the seventh to eighth week of gestation, the major components of the circulatory system are established. The heart is almost fully formed, and blood vessels are well developed, including the major arteries and veins. At this stage, the embryo has become a fetus with its own functioning circulatory system, although it continues to rely on the placenta for oxygen and nutrient exchange until birth.

There are minor differences among medical researchers about exactly when the stages of human development outlined above occur during pregnancy, and no doubt timing can vary a bit from woman to woman. However, all researchers agree that no blood is present in the single-cell zygote that results at the moment of conception. Thus, using God's definition for flesh having life as dictated by Leviticus 17:11(a), it can be stated with absolute certainty that life does not begin at the moment of conception, at least in the eyes of God. And furthermore, based on the absence of a fully-functioning circulatory system pumping blood through its flesh, an embryo probably does not meet the biblical definition for the presence of life, either.

However, once an embryo becomes a fetus with a heart pumping its own blood through the arteries and veins of its flesh, which all researchers agree will have happened by the end of the seventh or eighth week of pregnancy, and certainly no later than the end of the first trimester, it can be said without equivocation that the fetus is a living human being created in the image of God, and thus deserving of the unalienable rights derived from having that unique status.

# 7 TONGUES SHALL CEASE

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Did Jesus ever speak in tongues? The answer is “yes” if we believe the testimony of Luke. It was in the Book of Acts, written by the Apostle Luke, where the concept of speaking in tongues is introduced, and where we have documented evidence of the resurrected Jesus himself giving us an example of how tongues operates in the church age. However, before explaining the one instance when Jesus did speak in tongues that is recorded in the Bible, it is worthwhile to recall the most doctrinally important time when he did not speak in tongues.

That instance occurred when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist, at which time the Holy Spirit descended from heaven and remained on him. Notice what did not happen then. Jesus did not speak in tongues as a result of that anointing. If speaking in tongues was meant to be a sign that verifies receiving the Holy Spirit, then no doubt Scripture would have recorded that was so at the time Jesus was baptized. But, the Bible does not contain any reference to tongues at the time of Jesus’ baptism, which means that tongues is not a sign of receiving the Holy Spirit. If it had been, Jesus of all people would have exhibited speaking in tongues at his baptism.

After his ascension to heaven, Luke records that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to indwell believers who were assembled in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost in 30 CE. As recounted in Acts 2:1-6, *“And when the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language.”*

## *Tongues Shall Cease*

As had happened at Jesus' baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit on that first Day of Pentecost was again made visible as it descended, this time as tongues of fire instead of as a dove. The Spirit was given and immediately empowered the Apostles to share the Gospel with the multitudes gathered in Jerusalem. The biblical text makes it obvious that they did so by speaking known languages to the crowds, since the hearers, Jews on pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover and the Festival of Weeks from all parts (and languages) of the ancient world, heard what the Apostles were saying in their own native language.

Scripture makes it clear that the pilgrims were not hearing an unknown tongue. *"Then they [the hearers] were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, 'Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs, we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God'"* (Acts 2:8-11).

The gift of tongues, as it was introduced on that first Day of Pentecost, was defined by the actions of the Apostles, and their actions that day would set the pattern for using tongues in the churches that would follow in the church age to come. Notice that the gift of tongues was given to the Apostles, not as a sign of being saved (they were already saved), but to confirm that they had the authority and power of the Holy Spirit to preach the Gospel of Jesus to unbelievers, and, critically important, to do so in his name. The Apostle Paul stressed to the early churches that the gift of tongues was for proselytizing unbelievers, writing in 1 Corinthians 14:22, *"Therefore, tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers."*

An instance of that exact usage is recorded in the sacred text in which Jesus himself speaks in a known language so that the unbeliever to whom he was speaking could understand the Gospel in his own native tongue. The account of Saul's encounter with Jesus on the road

to Damascus provides that example, as Paul testified: “*Whereupon, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting’*” (Acts 26:12-15). That day, Jesus spoke to Saul (renamed Paul) in a language he could understand, namely Hebrew, which he had undoubtedly used as his everyday language for studying and discussing the Scriptures as a student of the great rabbi Gamaliel.

In Paul’s letter to the Corinthian church, there is confirmation that the gift of tongues was practiced in church gatherings that took place after the first Day of Pentecost. Similar to that day, the gift of tongues involved followers of Jesus spontaneously speaking in known languages that they did not previously know. It was done so that visitors to an early church who were not saved could hear the Gospel of Jesus in their own language. During that practice, interpreters were always required to be present, not for the sake of the visitors who already understood their own language they were hearing, but for the regular members of the congregation. That was necessary so that they, too, could be edified by the message being preached in the “foreign” tongue. Moreover, interpreting the words preached in tongues was necessary so that the elders could verify that the message was approved.

As an exercise, imagine being part of a small Christian church in second-century Italy where everyone speaks Latin. Then, on a day of worship, visitors from Ireland come to visit who only speak Gaelic. In that scenario, if someone with the gift of tongues could arise and spontaneously preach to them in the Gaelic language, the visitors would then be able to understand what was being said. Since the Latin-speaking church members would not understand what was being said in the Gaelic language, someone gifted with the ability to translate

tongues, apart from the believer who was speaking in tongues, would need to be present who could simultaneously translate Gaelic into Latin. Translation would ensure that everyone present would be able to understand the message being preached, and that the elders could verify that the message was a true Gospel presentation.

In 1 Corinthians 14, the Apostle Paul gave explicit instructions and safeguards about how the gift of speaking in tongues was to be practiced in the early churches he had planted, as follows:

**EDIFICATION:** Speaking in tongues was intended to edify both the speaker while speaking and, after translation, the entire body of believers (1 Cor. 14:4). However, its primary purpose was to edify any foreign-language unbeliever who might be present (1 Cor. 14:22).

**INTERPRETATION:** If someone spoke in tongues, there was to be an interpreter present so that the congregation could understand and be edified by the message. If there was no interpreter available, the speaker should remain silent in the church. (1 Cor. 14:13-19)

**ORDERLY CONDUCT:** The importance of maintaining order during the exercise of spiritual gifts, including tongues, was paramount. At most two or three individuals should speak in tongues during a gathering, and they should take turns. (1 Cor. 14:27-28)

**GODLY DECORUM:** Believers must exercise their spiritual gifts in a manner that reflects decency and propriety. There should be no disorderly or chaotic behavior during gatherings. (1 Cor. 14:40)

As the Apostles and other disciples spread the Gospel of Jesus from Jerusalem and Judea to the Roman Empire and beyond, they encountered unsaved people speaking different languages. In those early days of Christianity, the gift of tongues was a useful tool for preaching the Gospel to those unbelievers in their native language. However, as the number of churches using a local language increased, the need for tongues began to diminish. Paul had predicted that speaking in tongues would eventually cease (1 Cor. 13:8), and that seems to be the case since there is no mention of the gift of tongues being used after chapter nineteen in the Book of Acts.

# OLITICS AND MISSION

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The relationship between Christians and the role they play in secular society varies based on their nationality and location. However, there are common biblical principles to keep in mind when engaging with government, politics, and society in general:

**RESPECT FOR AUTHORITY:** The Bible teaches that governments are established by God and encourages Christians to submit to the governing authorities in secular matters. (Rom. 13:1-7)

**PRAYER:** The Bible teaches that Christians should engage with the government through prayer for the wisdom of leaders and those in authority over secular life and civil matters. (1 Tim. 2:1-2)

**ENGAGEMENT:** The Bible does not prohibit active participation in secular civic duties such as voting and advocacy for policies aligned with Christian values, either as an individual or as part of a group.

**CONSCIENCE:** The Bible encourages Christians to follow their conscience on spiritual and moral issues, even if it sometimes means challenging the government on spiritual grounds. (Dan. 3, Acts 5:29)

**CHURCH AND STATE:** Christians should honor separation of church and state, insomuch as freedom of religion for all is guaranteed and government is prevented from establishing a state religion.

**ACCOUNTABILITY:** Christians acting in their role as citizens should hold the government accountable for its actions, particularly when those actions are contrary to principles stated in Scripture.

Christians can interact as an individual citizen or collectively within the framework of a para-church organization to engage with government. For believers living under the authority of a democratic constitution, their relationship with the government is multifaceted. It will involve mutual respect, engagement, critique, and advocacy, all guided by the believer's submission to the sacred text.

Christians are encouraged to participate in the greater society as responsible citizens reflecting the teachings of Jesus, which include

such qualities as love, justice, and compassion. However, our advocacy should be done as secular citizens who happen to be Christian, not collectively as an activist church. Nowhere in the Bible is the church given a commission to try to create a perfect society. After all, the sole mission of the church is to preach the Gospel and train the saints to preach the word of God while living a life pleasing to him.

Some argue that Jesus gave us an example of how to engage in political activism as Christians when he drove the money changers from the Temple with a whip (Matt. 21:12-13). They promote their interpretation of that event to justify civil disobedience and political activism by individuals and churches today. However, Jesus was not protesting against the government. Instead, he was keeping the commandment to cleanse a house of leaven, in this case his Father's house of the "leaven of the Pharisees," in preparation for the Feast of Unleavened Bread/Passover (Ex. 12:15, Luke 12:1). Jesus was making neither a political statement nor was he engaging in civil disobedience. Instead, he was opposing the corrupt practices the religious authorities had added to God's instructions for Temple worship. As believers, we should follow his example of righteous activism by challenging teachings and practices that corrupt God's word in the church.

It is important to remember that Jesus and the Apostles never tried to use government or politics to achieve spiritual goals. They lived in a corrupt first-century Roman society that was as sinful and evil, if not more so, than anything we encounter in the modern world, but they stayed true to their calling to preach and teach the message of God's redemption and salvation to their generation.

As Christians, our desire for biblical values to be reflected in all aspects of our society is a worthy goal. In recent decades, however, there has been a shift away from preaching the Gospel to change hearts and minds toward reliance on politics and social activism to bring about heaven on earth. That temptation must be rejected. The kingdom of righteousness we seek is not of this world, and it cannot be attained by relying on the things of this world to bring it about.

# SINS OF THE FLESH

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Every individual, upon reaching the age of puberty, becomes acutely aware of their sexuality. The Bible, in both the Old Testament and New Testament, addresses various aspects of human sexuality and provides moral guidance on what is and what is not appropriate sexual behavior in the eyes of God. Some of the sexual sins mentioned in the sacred text include:

**Adultery:** defined as the act of a married person engaging in sexual relations with someone who is not one's spouse. It is considered a violation of the marriage vow and is condemned in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20:14, it is stated: "*You shall not commit adultery.*" Jesus also reaffirmed this commandment in the New Testament in Matthew 5:27-28, where he emphasized that it is not just physically committing the act but also the intentions and lust of the heart to do so that constitutes adultery.

**Fornication:** defined as the act of engaging in sexual relations between individuals who are not married to each other. It specifically refers to premarital sex and other forms of sexual misconduct outside the bounds of marriage. The term is often used interchangeably with "sexual immorality" in various Bible passages, and it is condemned throughout both the Old and New Testaments. 1 Corinthians 6:18 says, "*Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.*"

**Incest:** defined as the act of engaging in sexual relations between close relatives who are prohibited from engaging in sexual activity with each other according to God's law. Leviticus 18:6-18 provides a detailed list of forbidden sexual relationships, including those between parents and children, siblings, grandparents and grandchildren, aunts or uncles with nieces or nephews, and other close family members. The prohibition against incest precludes marriage between the same list of individuals. Acts of incest defile both individuals and societies.

**Bestiality**: defined as the act of engaging in sexual activity with animals. It is explicitly condemned as an abomination in the Old Testament. For example, Leviticus 18:23 states: *“Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it. Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. It is perversion.”* Leviticus 20:15-16 declares: *“If a man mates with an animal, he shall surely be put to death, and you shall kill the animal. If a woman approaches any animal and mates with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood is upon them.”*

**Homosexuality**: defined as the act of engaging in sexual activity with someone of the same biological sex. It is condemned in both Old and New Testaments. Leviticus 18:22 says, *“You [a male] shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.”* Leviticus 20:13 says, *“If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.”* The New Testament says in Romans 1:26-27, *“For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due,”* and adds in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, *“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither ... homosexuals, nor sodomites ... will inherit the kingdom of God.”* Note that a believer tempted with same-sex attraction but who practices celibacy and does not lust is not guilty of sexual sin.

**Prostitution**: presented as immoral and harmful throughout the Bible. Though not explicitly condemned in the Old Testament, prostitution is frequently mentioned as a form of sexual immorality associated with idolatry and exploitation. One significant passage is found in Deuteronomy 23:17-18, which states: *“There shall be no ritual harlot of the daughters of Israel, or a perverted one of the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the wages of a harlot or the price of a dog to the house of the Lord your God for any vowed offering, for both of these are an abomination*

*to the Lord your God.”* In the New Testament, prostitution is clearly condemned. 1 Corinthians 6:15-16 says: *“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For he says the two shall become one flesh.”* Overall, the Bible portrays prostitution as a practice that goes against God’s intentions for human sexuality, often associated with moral degradation, exploitation of the individual, and association with idolatrous worship.

**Polygamy:** defined as the practice of simultaneously having multiple spouses. While the Old Testament records instances of polygamy among various figures, including the patriarchs, it does not explicitly endorse or condemn the practice. In the New Testament, polygamy is not explicitly addressed by name, but the teachings on marriage emphasize the union of one man and one woman. For example, Jesus reaffirms the traditional understanding of marriage from Genesis, saying in Matthew 19:4-6, *“Have you not read that he who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”*

The seven categories listed above reflect the names assigned in the Bible to some of the most frequent ways in which mankind engages in sexual sin. However, for every sinful conduct specified in that list, there are hundreds of ways of sinning sexually not identified and discussed herein. Because of the pervasiveness of sexual images and sexual stimulants in modern life, offered by the Serpent in movies and television, music, and especially from pornography readily available on the internet, and also in view of the sexual agenda being pushed by LGBTQ+ activists in public schools and embraced even by some churches, it is absolutely necessary that Bible-believing parents and churches correctly and completely teach what the Bible says about the destructiveness of sexual sin for individuals and nations.

When teaching about sexual sins, focusing on the relationship between temptation, lust, and sin is crucial. It cannot be stressed too much that temptation alone is not sin. Satan often employs a cunning tactic for separating believers, especially new believers, from fellowship with God by making them feel guilty for being tempted sexually. The guilt is achieved by interpreting temptation as an act of sinning. Parents and churches should clarify that sexual sins mentioned in the Bible are sins of commission, and that sexual sin occurs only when one gives in to temptation, indulges in lustful thoughts, and then acts upon those thoughts. That process constitutes sins of the flesh.

Temptation refers to the enticement to disregard one's conscience with respect to one or more of the sexual prohibitions specified in the Bible. Sexual temptation usually comes from an external stimulus, most often visual, that can develop into lust if not resisted. Lust involves intense desire going beyond mere attraction to become a consuming longing for doing something that is forbidden. For example, when a person looks at another person with desire, then imagines intimate sexual acts, he has crossed into lust by objectifying the other person and disregarding their humanity. Lust is explicitly warned against in the Bible. Jesus emphasized that lusting after someone in one's heart is a sin equivalent to committing adultery (Matthew 5:27-28).

The Bible provides us with clear instruction on how we can resist any temptation, including sexual temptation, by giving us the example of Jesus after he was baptized, when he was led by the Holy Spirit into the Judean wilderness to be tempted by Satan in all things (including sexual temptation according to Hebrews 4:15) for forty days and forty nights. Despite relentless trials, Jesus leaned on the authority of the sacred text and his commitment to be obedient to God's words to give him the ability to resist the temptation to sin against the will of the Father. His steadfastness provides the precedent for us today, illustrating how we can resist the allure of sexual temptation by adhering to the teachings and warnings about sins of the flesh provided in Scripture, thus safeguarding oneself and society from harm.

## RICH AND INFAMOUS

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Anyone familiar with the daily lifestyle of the Apostle Paul is no doubt envious of just how well he lived. For instance, Paul had a luxurious ten-room mansion in Jerusalem, and he had similarly opulent abodes in each of the provinces he visited on his mission trips to Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome. However, controlling his weight was a recurrent problem because he ate delicious meals three or more times a day, featuring the finest delicacies available in the Roman Empire during that time. Throughout his life, he wore the finest clothes and had the most exquisite accessories made of silver and fine gold. When he traveled, he rode in the most expensive horse-drawn chariots that money could buy. Paul's lavish lifestyle was made possible because he had the kind of faith preached by the modern Prosperity Gospel.

Today, that movement promises Christians the same lifestyle described above. The chariots are now private jets, but the mansions, clothes, and culinary delights are essentially the same, at least for the prosperity preachers heard on television and seen in crusades.

While specific teachings can vary among proponents, some teachings commonly heard in prosperity-gospel churches include:

***Faith as a means to material blessings:*** Adherents believe that having enough faith in God leads to financial prosperity, good health, and success in life. To support that belief, they often cite biblical verses, such as Malachi 3:10, *"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."*

***Sowing and reaping:*** That doctrine teaches that believers should give generously, often in the form of financial offerings or tithes, with the expectation of receiving material blessings in return. The metaphor of sowing seeds is commonly used, suggesting that giving money to the church or to ministries will result in a harvest of prosperity.

**Positive confession:** Adherents are usually encouraged to speak positively about their circumstances, believing that verbalizing faith and repeatedly uttering positive declarations can bring about desired outcomes. Prosperity and success can be spoken into existence.

**Divine health and healing:** Adherents often teach that God desires for his followers to always be physically healthy and that through faith, complete healing can be obtained. They may claim that illnesses and financial struggles are the result of lack of faith.

**Critique of poverty:** Adherents tend to view poverty as a sign of spiritual failure or lack of faith, and it often promotes the idea that financial wealth is a sign of earning God's favor.

Based on the details of its “doctrines” as described above, the Prosperity Gospel should have been demonstrated by Paul's life, with financial wealth and physical well-being for having the “right kind of faith.” So, let us compare the promises made by the prosperity movement with what the New Testament says about the Apostle Paul's lifestyle during his years of ministry. Its pages show a different story. His life was not very prosperous, at least in the money and health sense. Numerous adversities and challenges were faced as he spread the message of Christianity across the ancient world, including:

**Persecution:** Paul faced intense persecution for his beliefs and missionary work. He was frequently arrested, beaten, and threatened by both Jewish authorities and Roman officials who saw Christianity as a threat to their power and religious traditions.

**Opposition from Jewish leaders:** Paul, formerly known as Saul, was initially a zealous persecutor of Christians himself. After his conversion to Christianity, he faced opposition from Jewish leaders who saw him as a traitor to Judaism and sought to discredit his teachings and undermine his authority.

**Physical hardships:** Paul endured numerous physical hardships, including hunger, thirst, imprisonment, and exposure to the elements during his travels. He described some of these experiences in his letters, highlighting the physical toll of his missionary journeys.

***Religious controversies:*** Paul often found himself embroiled in debates and controversies within the early Christian community. He addressed theological disagreements, moral issues, and disputes over matters such as circumcision and dietary restrictions in his letters to various churches.

***Personal challenges:*** Paul faced untold personal challenges and struggles, including bouts of illness, opposition from false teachers, and even abandonment by fellow missionaries. Despite these difficulties, he remained steadfast in his commitment to spreading the gospel and nurturing the fledgling Christian churches he planted.

Paul persevered in the face of adversity by relying on his faith in Jesus and the support of fellow believers to overcome obstacles. With gratitude and praise, he continued proclaiming the message of salvation through Jesus. His enduring legacy continues to inspire Christians around the world today. And, well before Paul began his ministry, we have the testimony of Jesus, who the Bible portrays as someone who identified with the poor and marginalized while living his daily life as one of them. In Matthew 8:20, Jesus testifies that, “*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.*” This confirms that Jesus lived a humble and often itinerant lifestyle, lacking material wealth and possessions.

More than a few Bible passages emphasize the importance of prioritizing spiritual values over material wealth and caution against the pursuit of prosperity as the primary goal of faith:

*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matt. 6:19-21)—emphasizing the impermanence of earthly riches and the importance of prioritizing spiritual wealth.

*“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man*

*to enter the kingdom of God”* (Matt. 19:23-24)—warning against the potential spiritual obstacles that loving wealth can present.

*“Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to those who love him?”* (James 2:5)—highlighting the value of faith over material wealth and confirming that God’s blessings are not necessarily tied to financial success.

*“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness”* (1 Tim. 6:9-10)—warning against the dangers of pursuing wealth and its promises at the expense of spiritual well-being.

In the early days of television, a show called “Meeting of Minds” featured famous historical figures from different decades and centuries sitting together at a round table to discuss various topics and events from their respective time periods. The show aimed to provide viewers with an engaging and educational look at history by bringing together diverse figures in a unique and imaginative way. It would be interesting to see the leaders of today’s prosperity movement, the folks you see begging for money on Christian television programs and in Sunday morning services in their mega-churches, sitting at such a table with Jesus and Paul and the martyrs who have died for the faith.

In order to defend the teachings of their prosperity movement, those round-table proponents of the Prosperity Gospel would have no choice but to deny the examples of Jesus and Paul and ignore the clear teachings of Scripture, and they would have to do so while looking directly into the eyes of Jesus. No doubt, he would look back at them in sadness, reminding them about what he said in Luke 12:15 about living a life of faith, *“Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”*

## NE GOD, ONE PEOPLE

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Supersessionism, *aka* Replacement Theology, is a theological perspective based on the teachings of the New Testament. It holds that the Christian church, encompassing all believers from both Jewish and non-Jewish backgrounds across history, who place their faith in the atoning blood of Jesus as the exclusive means of reconciliation with God, has replaced the nation of Israel as God's chosen people. This view asserts that the redemption provided through the new covenant established by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, has superseded the sacrificial system of Temple worship established by Moses under the Sinai covenant, which was intended solely for the redemption and salvation of the Jewish people.

Supersessionism is not a popular perspective to espouse in many religious circles, especially in those segments that embrace some form of religious pluralism, but anyone who believes the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament will essentially agree with replacement theology. Jesus himself said it, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6).

Jesus reaffirmed himself as the new pathway to reconciliation with God when he passed the cup of wine to his disciples in the upper room on the first night of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was the day of preparation for the Passover just before his crucifixion as the Lamb of God the following day. Jesus told them, *"For this is my blood of the new testament (covenant), which is shed for many for the remission of sins"* (Matt. 26:28). Today, the New Covenant promised by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34) is the only way to have one's sins removed and to receive atonement (at-one-ment) with the God of Israel.

The Apostle Paul reaffirmed the tenets of replacement theology when he used the phrase "the Israel of God" in a letter of instruction to the church in Galatia, writing *"But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been*

*crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God*" (Gal. 6:14-16). Paul's prayer for peace and mercy was for the circumcision (Jews) and the uncircumcision (Gentiles), and the Israel of God (both Jews and Gentiles united as one people under God through faith in Jesus).

Does replacement theology mean that Jewish people who have not received Jesus as their Redeemer are going to hell when they die? The answer is "yes." Scripture tells us that all people who die without the remission of their sins through faith in Jesus are lost sinners and will be banished from the face of God when they enter eternity. Since Jews are included in the category "all people," that sentence of spiritual death in eternity applies to them as well. Paul reaffirmed that Jews need to hear and believe the Gospel of Jesus, writing "*Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel [in this case specifying Paul's Jewish kinsmen] is that they may be saved*" (Rom. 10:1).

What about modern Judaism? Does it not offer a pathway to redemption and salvation today? Although its traditions are beautiful and moving, with respect to obtaining eternal salvation, no it does not. The Law of Moses clearly stipulated that atonement could only be attained through an offering of blood on the altar of the Tabernacle and later the Temple. None of the later prophets of Israel invalidated that requirement for blood. Even Malachi, the last prophet recorded in the Old Testament, did not denounce sacrificial offerings for atonement; he simply criticized the manner in which they were being offered.

After the year 70 CE, when the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed by the Romans, achieving a blood atonement as prescribed by Moses was impossible, making all efforts to achieve atonement without blood a meaningless act. However, as he had done when he asked Abraham to offer his son Isaac, God provided his own Son as an acceptable way for obtaining atonement through the substitutionary sacrifice of his life on the cross, and God did so well before the Temple was destroyed.

In Isaiah, chapter 53, the prophet revealed that one of the sons of Abraham would die (be a blood offering) for the remission of sins and forgiveness of iniquities, a Messiah who would be a blessing to all nations. Today, many Jewish people do not hear its message, since synagogues omit reciting it during the Haftarah readings.

Here is what it says: *“Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. he has no form or comeliness; And when we see him, There is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected by men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we did not esteem him. Surely he has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon him, And by his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, Yet he opened not his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So he opened not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare his generation? For he was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of my people he was stricken. And they made his grave with the wicked— But with the rich at his death, Because he had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he has put him to grief. When you make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see the labor of his soul, and be satisfied. By his knowledge my righteous servant shall justify many, For he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, And he shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because he poured out his soul unto death, And he was numbered with the transgressors, And he bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.”*

After reading the above passage from Isaiah, it is easy to identify the person being talked about in that passage. While Jewish scholars may interpret it as referring to the remnant of the Jewish people, a closer examination of the text considered in historical context reveals that Isaiah prophesied the arrival of an individual, previously identified by the prophet as God's righteous servant who would establish a new covenant for both Israel and the Gentile world through his sacrificial death (Isaiah 42:1-7). Reflecting on documented Jewish history, it becomes evident that Jesus is the singular Jewish figure who fulfilled that prophecy. The New Covenant, sealed by Jesus' blood shed on the cross and affirmed by his resurrection to eternal life, today stands as the sole means for atonement and reconciliation with the God of Israel, applicable to both Jews and Gentiles.

The doctrine of Supersessionism is progressively revealed in the Old Testament and New Testament. However, before concluding this discussion, it is essential to address a key clarification regarding its assertions. Replacement theology does not invalidate God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants concerning their inheritance and ultimate ownership of *Eretz Yisrael*, aka the Promised Land. Alongside God's pledge to Abraham that his seed, the Messiah, would be a redemptive blessing to all families and nations, there was also a promise of perpetual possession and ownership of the land of Israel that is specific to the Jewish people (Gen. 12:7). While possession was contingent upon their faithfulness to obey God's commandments, the promise of ethnic ownership remained unconditional.

Supersessionism does not grant the universal church any right to claim temporal ownership of the land of Israel, except vicariously through the ownership vested in Jesus as defined in Matthew 28:18. Ownership of the land in this age remains a promise to Jews. However, regarding the election, there exists only one Israel of God, a congregation comprised of all believers, regardless of their ethnic origins, whose inclusion is guaranteed by faith in the blood of Jesus. By God's design, eternal unity prevails in his kingdom: One God, One People.

## 7 THE CHOSEN FEW

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The Bible teaches that God created the universe and everything in it, including us. Our existence encompasses both a temporal realm that we perceive with our physical senses and an eternal dimension that we can perceive only with our spirit. The latter is a capability that exists within each of us, enabling us to transcend our temporal reality to sense and understand the unseen eternal realm.

The Bible further explains that, as sentient beings crafted in the image of God to live in this temporal realm, we have free will to heed what the Bible teaches about God or to ignore its teachings altogether. That capacity for choice is a fundamental aspect of our existence, but is limited to the span between our birth and death. The sacred text reminds us of the temporary nature of our earthly life, emphasizing that one day our physical body will return to the dust from which it came, while our soul will continue on into eternity.

In the grand scheme of things, we are told that after we die in this world, there awaits a reckoning in eternity for the decisions we have made in this life regarding our connection with the divine. As succinctly articulated in Hebrews 9:27, “... *it is appointed unto men once to die, but after that the judgement.*” That verse encapsulates the profound truth that our mortal journey through this life concludes with a final assessment of its value in the eyes of God, a Judgement Day.

The most important decision we can make in this life is whether to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. For many people, that process begins by praying “The Sinner’s Prayer,” a prayer commonly used in a church service by individuals to express their faith in Jesus Christ and to ask for forgiveness of sins. While variations exist, the essence of the prayer typically involves acknowledging one’s need for salvation, confessing belief in Jesus as Lord and Savior, repenting of sin, and inviting Jesus into one’s heart and life. It is a first step toward initiating a personal relationship with God through faith.

However, genuine faith involves more than simply praying a few correct words. That is a first step, but faith must be nurtured through study of Scripture. If not, it will wither away over time. Several key components are generally considered evidence of true salvation:

**Faith in Jesus as Savior:** Central to salvation is absolute belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, sent to save humanity from sin. Believers are called to place their trust and faith in Jesus as the one who reconciles them to God in this life and in eternity.

**Repentance:** The act of repentance involves admitting one's sinfulness to oneself and to God, turning away from sin, and turning towards God. It is a necessary component of salvation, as Jesus himself emphasized repentance as a necessary first step to being saved.

**Confession:** Acknowledgement to oneself of total faith in Jesus is essential for salvation. The act of confession embraces Jesus' authority and lordship over one's life and expresses faith in his saving work.

**Grace:** Salvation is accepted as a gift of God's given by grace, not something earned through human effort or merit. It is by God's grace, made available through the gift of Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection, that believers are saved.

**Baptism:** Salvation is not achieved by baptism, but obedience to undergoing that sacrament publicly confirms a believer's identification with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, and signifies initiation into the universal Christian church.

**Transformed Life:** True faith in Jesus results in a transformed life marked by love for God and neighbor, obedience to God's commands, and growth in holiness and righteousness. While salvation is not earned through good works, a genuine faith is expected to produce good fruit in the life of a believer.

The categories above describe the aspects of salvation that are recognized by churches and religious organizations that espouse and teach a traditional trinitarian doctrine. Different denominations and theological perspectives may emphasize certain aspects more than others, but those core beliefs are the ones most often held.

The Bible tells us that faith comes by hearing, and that salvation can result from hearing the Gospel of Jesus. The word “gospel” has its roots in Old English, where it was spelled as “godspel,” meaning “good news” or “glad tidings.” The Gospel of Jesus is certainly good news for sinners who choose to believe its message, with definite temporal and eternal benefits that come with salvation, as follows:

**Forgiveness of Sin:** Salvation involves forgiveness of one’s sin. Through belief in and submission to Jesus Christ as Lord, believers receive forgiveness for their sins, reconciling them with God.

**Eternal Life:** Salvation promises life without end, specifically that believers will have everlasting life with a loving God in heaven.

**Redemption:** Salvation involves redemption, the payment of a ransom to free believers from the bondage of sin and death. The sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross is seen as the ultimate redemption, paying the price for humanity’s sins.

**Justification:** Salvation also involves justification, which means being declared righteous or without guilt in the eyes of God. Through faith in Jesus Christ, believers are justified, meaning that they are considered righteous in God’s sight.

**Regeneration:** Salvation brings about regeneration, a spiritual rebirth or renewal. Believers are transformed by the Holy Spirit, enabling them to live a new life in accordance with God’s will.

**Adoption:** Salvation includes adoption into the family of God. Believers are no longer considered merely created beings but are welcomed as children of God, heirs to the promises.

**Reconciliation:** Salvation reconciles believers with God, restoring the broken relationship between humanity and God. Through Jesus Christ, believers are brought near to God and can experience fellowship with Him.

The benefits named above collectively define the multifaceted nature of the salvation described in the New Testament, illustrating the depth of God’s love and the extent of his redemptive work through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Some people falsely teach that everyone alive today will be saved, claiming that a God of love would not let anyone die and go to hell, but that is not what Jesus said about obtaining eternal life. Salvation is open to all as a gift of grace, but God will never force anyone to accept it. The gift of salvation must be accepted by exercising one's God-given free will. In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus used a metaphor to illustrate that the path of faith is not easy or popular but difficult, saying to sinners, *"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."*

The evidence that a person's salvation is genuine will be reflected in everyday life as a daily desire to know and follow the teachings and commandments of Jesus as revealed in the Bible. The Apostle Paul wrote, *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Paul also writes that a transformation of character will occur in the life of a believer. That transformation is often referred to as bearing *"fruit of the Spirit,"* which includes qualities such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). Furthermore, while one's salvation is not earned through good works, a transformed life will naturally lead to good works done in gratitude and obedience to God. And, as you read the Bible with a seeking heart, God will give you the understanding needed to mature your faith in him (Heb. 11:6).

Finally, know this, that if your belief is anchored in the promises of God as revealed in Scripture, you will not need approval from a pastor, a priest, a rabbi, or anyone else to know that you are saved. God will give you resting peace in your heart that you are one of his when you believe with all of your heart and soul in the salvation promised in his Word. For true believers, the Holy Spirit provides absolute assurance of salvation in their heart: *"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God"* (Rom. 8:16).

## ONCLUSION

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The narrative about God and mankind begins in Genesis with a cautionary tale about the cunningness of the Serpent, later revealed to be the fallen angel Lucifer, *aka* Satan. The Serpent's evil objective within our temporal existence is to entice us, as God's beloved children, into the sin of disobedience. He achieves that goal by corrupting our understanding and application of Bible teachings by employing deliberate distortions of the biblical text.

As previously noted in this book, three primary tactics have been employed throughout recorded history to deceive humanity into disobedience against God: adding to the Bible, subtracting from the Bible, or by convincing individuals to ignore the sacred teachings of the Bible in favor of secular ideologies promoted by the Serpent. The result of those three deceptions has been to deceive individuals, and sometimes even congregations, into claiming independence, forsaking divine guidance for their own worldly standards of good and evil.

A realistic assessment of modern Christianity, particularly in the most recent decades, reveals a widespread and troubling divergence by the universal church from its central mission. Instead of focusing on the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus to a lost world in need of redemption and salvation, many have become ensnared in secular distractions, including contentious debates over the date and details of creation, entanglement in political and social activism, seeking spiritual gifts as a sign of special status, and lusting after material wealth.

It is your author's hope that the essays herein will inspire believers and churches to ferret out additional deceptions of the Serpent so that they can better focus their energies on fulfilling the Great Commission Jesus gave to his followers: *"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matt. 28:19-20).

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