

Finding Hope

... in a hopeless world



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Index

Chapter 1: Introducing Hope	1
Chapter 2: Creation's Design Specification	9
Chapter 3: The Argument for Holiness	17
Chapter 4: Identifying the Creator (Part 1)	30
Chapter 5: Identifying the Creator (Part 2)	47
Chapter 6: Manuscript Evidence	55
Chapter 7: The Creator Became a Man	69
Chapter 8: Finding Hope (Part 1)	84
Chapter 9: Finding Hope (Part 2)	100
Chapter 10: Living With Hope	115

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Chapter 1: **Introducing Hope**

At some time in our lives, all of us have desperately needed hope.

This book, however, introduces hope from an entirely different perspective. First, we are not asking that you believe what we are telling you. We will simply give you the information and then let you decide what you want to do with it.

We will be talking about Jesus more than any other person. You will find that the Bible describes him as a very different individual than the Christmas-card baby Jesus sleeping in a cattle feeding trough.

The second way in which this book will be strikingly different is in its contrast to many books which try to “market” Jesus by telling readers that he will give them peace, or that their life will be better because of him. These statements are all true, but we want to carefully explain the high cost of commitment to Jesus without coercing you into making a decision to follow him. In fact, we could not be clearer about anything than our desire to avoid any attempt to manipulate you.

This book's organization

In order to fully explain the hope we can have in God's full restoration of creation, we need to give you a fair amount of information from the Bible itself. However, we will not be quoting obscure Bible verses in order to bolster unique denominational interpretations. Rather, we will use Bible verses that have been clearly understood within the Christian tradition during its two-thousand-year-old history. We will make every attempt to give only those explanations that could be supported throughout the history of the three oldest Christian traditions.¹

We will avoid explanations that are dependent on Christian rituals such as *baptism*. As much as

¹ There was essentially a single Christian tradition from the time of Jesus' death (crucifixion) and return to life (resurrection) in 33 AD until the division between the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox traditions. Because there were many issues debated over a long period of time, no single date can be given for the breakdown in relations between these two groups. However, the events of 1054 AD may be used as a representative date (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East-West_Schism). The third important division in Christianity came in 1516 when the Protestant Reformation came out of the Roman Catholic tradition, though of course, that division quickly proliferated into many separate groups. (For more information see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ninety-Five_Theses and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestant_Reformation.)

possible, we will rely on the traditional Christian meanings of words such as *faith*, *salvation*, *redemption*, *crucifixion*, *resurrection*, and *kingdom of God*.

This book was written for those with limited knowledge of the Bible. Consequently, we will adequately explain each new subject. The more technical topics—and there will be many—will be developed in footnotes. You would be able to read the entire book with adequate understanding without looking at the footnotes. On the other hand, if you read the footnotes, you will gain further information that will give you better insight into the topics of discussion.

Why this book was written

There are two reasons why this book was written. First, more and more people in our postmodern²

² It is not particularly important that you understand the terms *modern* or *postmodern* as applied to today's world. Contemporary writers merely use these terms to represent a shift in the way society perceives itself. However, these same writers agree that our society has gone through a fundamental ideological change in the past few decades. Most agree that sometime in the mid-1950s our thinking as a society began to change. Prior to that time, we were *modern* in our thinking. We have now become *postmodern*—a

world have lost their sense of hope. Therefore, we want to remind our readers of a hope which has survived for almost 2,000 years within the Christian traditions. Secondly, there has been so much change that even the way hope was explained as recently as a few decades ago has been altered. The hope of twenty years ago no longer expresses convincing hope today.

First, we have lost our sense of hope. In the 1950s we thought we were about to experience an explosion of knowledge that would soon solve even the *unified theory* of physics—“the explanation of everything.” We thought diseases such as polio and smallpox were

development that has primarily taken place since 1980. For more information see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernism> and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernism>. Our primary reason for introducing this notion is that the way we think conditions us to understand our perceived dependence on society. We are simply suggesting that during the 1960s, many could think of their plight as individuals in the world as being distinct from the trauma society as a whole was facing. That is, in the past, an attempt was made to isolate an individual's problems in such a way that by confronting only the personal problems, the brokenness of society did not need to be corrected in order for the individual to make a satisfactory readjustment in life. There is an increasing awareness in today's world, however, that no individual is able to live apart from dependence on society. Thus, we believe today that an individual's brokenness can be healed only by also addressing the brokenness within society.

close to being eradicated. In just over two decades, test pilots had not only traveled at the speed of sound, but astronauts had walked on the moon. Heart and kidney transplants became routine, huge stores of information became available to anyone with an internet connection, and there seemed to be unimaginable opportunities for brilliant young entrepreneurs to develop wealth.

But we lost our hope. Suicide rates climbed among our youth. Unthinkable numbers of students began dropping out of school. HIV and AIDS became worldwide epidemics. And the worst blow of all came with the scourge of drug cartels, meth labs, and a staggering growth in prison populations and children raised with drugs and alcohol.

The utopian world we were anticipating in the 1950s was a fantasy that never materialized. True enough, we developed amazing technology. But at the same time, a brokenness that is now beyond belief spread throughout our society. It is not just the hopelessness of the chemically-dependent homeless who bed down for the night on our city streets. It is the even more wrenching reality of a high school senior who is earning good grades and living in a decent home, yet who is searching the internet for homemade bomb recipes because he has so little hope in the life he knows. Or the stay-at-home-mom

with a successful marriage and abundant income from her husband's high-tech job, who is having an affair. Or the young politician, perceived as a rising star, who has begun living a life of sexual duplicity because he has lost his sense of hope in the system he is serving. Or the soccer-mom who is stealing money from the fund-raising account to feed a gambling habit.

But we are not alarmed by just the soccer-moms-turned-criminals or the politicians or wives who are on a path to self destruction. What we find so alarming in our society today is the fact that *all of society is broken. Society is powerless to implement a satisfactory solution. There is no longer a corporate sense of hope.*

Secondly, the explanation for hope itself has changed. Every generation has had its moments of hopelessness, and this was equally true in the 1960s. A popular explanation to individuals searching for meaning in life during that time attempted to isolate the individual from society, and suggested that only internal changes were required. It was implied that God worked the change on the individual's behalf without requiring any change within society itself.

Thus, according to this point of view, no matter how disrupted an individual's life may have become because of the ills of society, if that person would

make a religious commitment to Jesus, Jesus would improve the quality of that seeker's life. There were great attempts made to deal with injustices in society, but it was often implied that the individual could be redeemed as an isolated person, finding the benefits of a relationship with God quite independently of whether or not society became involved in the redemptive process.

However, the recent shift to postmodern thought has brought us back to a more balanced perspective. Among both the secular and religious communities today, significantly more importance is again being given to the influence of society on the individual. Both communities would agree that to successfully redeem an individual from a broken society that offers no hope, the society must be redeemed just as completely as the individual.

In Chapter 2: *Creation's Design Specification* we will see why a two-thousand-year-old statement of a 13.73 billion³-year-old design specification gives us

³ Because this book deals with God's purpose in creation, it must make some reference to time. It is not our intent to debate creation dates. At the same time, we want to represent both scientific and biblical references without bias. The simplest way to do this is to use the standard for whichever system we are alluding to as the standard of reference for it. Let's use two simple illustrations. When dating the origin of the universe, the speed of light is its unit

the greatest hope for the ultimate redemption of our society as well as the possibility of the greatest hope in our personal lives.

of reference. Hubble's constant, which expresses the expansion rate of the universe, is 71 km/s/Mpc (kilometers-per-second-per-million-light-years). Allowing for the most recent estimates of its variables, we have a universe which is 13.73 (\pm 0.12) billion years old. (See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universe>.) It would be naive to try to base the age of the universe on anything other than the speed of light, inasmuch as light is the unit used for its measurement. In contrast, the Bible records a genealogy in Genesis 5 that is presumably based on the 365.2425-day (365 days, 5 hours, 49 minutes and 12 seconds) solar year. One point of this narrative places a timeline of recorded human activity at approximately 6,000 years ago. We will simply allow either of these two dating systems to state their own purpose without any attempt at reconciling light years with solar years in order to establish a single astronomical/biblical date. We will thus state that the universe is some 13.73 billion years old, while at the same time acknowledging the literal accuracy of the biblical record as being a true statement of the biblical author's understanding of the time structure of his day.

Chapter 2: **Creation's Design Specification**

The design specification for any project provides the precise requirements for that proposed design, giving in-depth detail about each step to be taken toward its completion. It provides the engineers and builders with all of the information necessary in order to achieve the intended outcome.

Any commercially designed building, highway, airport facility, fish hatchery, or parking structure would have been carefully described in its design specifications. Every engineer, architect and facility planner working on the project would have had the design specifications within easy reach. So, too, any human-aid project would also have a design specification describing every aspect of the proposed services, staff development, demographics of the area in which assistance would be provided, and the funding projects required in order to make it sustainable. It is the design specification which sets the standard for each part of the engineering and planning. It is the criteria against which aesthetic appearance is judged, and it is the legal document which determines compliance for any of the many sub-contractors and financial institutions working on a project.

Some 13.73 billion years ago, just before the Big Bang was initiated, God had a statement of his design specification firmly in mind. It has been his guiding principle in all that he has done within the universe since. Partial statements of that design specification are found throughout the Bible. In fact, as more of God's plan for redeeming the world became progressively known, he revealed more of the details of his design specification.¹

¹ This is probably a good place to begin an explanation of how God began the process of giving his written word, the Bible, to humans. The earliest recorded statements of God's interaction with humans come from the Mesopotamian area known as the Fertile Crescent. This area is also called the "Cradle of Civilization." It is the area known today as the Tigris-Euphrates Valley that contains or borders countries such as Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and the Persian Gulf region. The first usable phonemic alphabet (one that represents spoken language sounds rather than ideographs such as hieroglyphics) came from this same area and is known as the Phoenician alphabet dating from 1050 BC. Moses composed the first written accounts in the Bible. His life and that of the earliest Hebrew people are easily verified by secular history. The alphabet Moses used to write the first portions of the Old Testament is well documented, even though the form of the letters changed after the Hebrew captivity in Babylon (586 BC). Nonetheless, there is ample evidence that the books Moses wrote in approximately 1450 BC have survived until today in essentially a word-for-word reproduction. This is true because the Hebrew people considered the writings of Moses to be sacred and were

Consequently, probably the most comprehensive design specification in the Bible was written by the Apostle Paul in approximately 60-62 AD. This was less than 40 years before the last book of the Bible was written. Looking back to that time 13.73 billion years earlier—although the Apostle Paul certainly had no idea of a date that was based on the speed of light—he said:

Even as he [the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ] chose us in him [our Lord Jesus Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and without blemish before him (Ephesians 1:4).

Throughout the remainder of this book, Bible quotations appear in color as above. Numbers in longer Bible-quotation paragraphs identify the verse locations. The full reference is again given at the end of both longer quotations or single verses.

careful to preserve them exactly as they were written, even though the alphabet was later modernized. However, not all agree that Moses was the author of the first five books of the Bible. For comments regarding Moses' authorship of these books, see <http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/moses.html>.

Creation's "short" design specification

This short statement from Ephesians 1:4 is probably the most concise design specification for creation written in the Bible. In this short statement, however, we find four full expressions of God's purpose, and one implied statement:

1. **God had already chosen us.** God's role in creation was entirely active. Before the first 0.01th of a second² elapsed after the Big Bang, God had already designed humanity with all of our marvelous endowments, he had established his future plans for giving us our rich capacity for achievement, and he had made all of his plans for our future freedom which we would sadly use to cripple our own potential and that of others around us.

2. **God had already chosen us to be his through a future relationship with Jesus.** God created a world in which human beings would occupy a significant place. God's designated place for his future human creation was defined as being "in Jesus." As we see in many other portions of the Bible, humanity is incomplete when any individual would choose (as we will see is possible in #5 below) to remain apart from Jesus.

² Taken from *The First Three Minutes, A Modern View of the Origin of the Universe*, Steven Weinberg, ©1977, BasicBooks, a Division of HarperCollinsPublishers, page 5.

3. We were chosen before the world was made.

This short design specification statement makes it clear that humanity was uppermost in God's thinking before creation was initiated. We are not secondary to his plan, nor will we be overlooked in the final completion of what he intends to do when he ultimately perfects his creation. Everything suggests that he waited a long time after the initiation of the universe before he began the final work of producing humanity. Nonetheless, every part of his plan was in order when he initiated the first dazzling display of energy 13.73 billion years ago.

4. We were chosen to be holy and without blemish before God.

In addition to mere human existence, God added an important quality to his design specification. *We are to be holy and without blemish.* Two characteristics of this quality are mentioned in just this verse alone:

1. First, the standard for our holiness is the same standard God demands of himself. We were not designed merely to be good. We were designed to be transparently holy when God himself evaluates us. We will need to come back to this topic because the topic of holiness, more than any other, is the pivot on which God's design for humanity turns. Take heart for now, however. None of us will ever be capable of living holy

lives in our own strength, but as we will see, Jesus has made full provision for producing his holiness in us.

2. Secondly, now is the time for being holy. God did not design us so that we could be unholy now, waiting for some future heavenly state in which we would finally become holy. We are to be holy and without blemish before God *now*.³

5. We were given the ability to choose between holiness and disobedience. God's provision of

³ The New Testament portion of the Bible was originally written in Greek. The New Testament was written after Jesus' death and return to life in 33 AD. Greek scholars can read Ephesians 1:4 in the exact words the Apostle Paul used to write it. We will comment more in Chapter 6 about the incredible accuracy of the Bible. But we know almost to the word what was written in the New Testament almost 2,000 years ago. Ephesians 1:4 gives us a good example of what God intended to tell us. In Greek, the verb infinitive "to be," has verb tense (time). In English, of course, an infinitive does not have tense. In English, we must give an infinitive tense by adding additional words. For example, we could say, "to be good now," or "to be good in the future." However, grammatically the Greek word "to be" in Ephesians 1:4 is an infinitive verb in the present active tense. The Greek words used when it was written simply meant that we were "chosen...to be holy and without blemish as we live now." The Apostle Paul was not telling us that we **will** be holy someday in heaven and that holiness is not a requirement in our present life. He was clearly telling us that God created us to be holy and without blemish today.

choice is suggested in Ephesians 1:4. If holiness is an option, then we also have the option of choosing that which is not holy. But you might argue that holiness is not stated as an option in this passage. The answer is simply that holiness does not exist unless there is the freedom of choice to either pursue it or reject it. Once God committed himself to creating beings with free moral agency,⁴ he could no more create them with a predetermined holiness than he could create them with a predetermined bent to evil. Holiness would be a meaningless concept if it did not spring from choice. The test for a reformed felon is not whether or not he can keep the law while he is still incarcerated. It is whether or not he will keep the law after he is released. This range of choice is equally true in regard to holiness. Holiness is only meaningful if we have the choice to pursue it or reject it.

⁴ *Free moral agency* is a term applied to those created beings to whom God has given the ability to rationally choose obedience to him, or rebellion against him. The term *free moral agency* is not a biblical term, but the concept is, nonetheless, expressed throughout the Bible as a capacity of the human race. Thus, until Adam and Eve chose to obey or disobey God (Genesis 3:1-13), they were innocent, but they were neither holy nor disobedient. In their disobedience to God, they did not fall from holiness. They fell from innocence.

God's entire plan of creation is based on this fundamental principle. He has given each of us the responsibility to choose either holiness or disobedience to him. God is never the source of evil, but he offers choice because that is the prerequisite to holiness. And then, as we will see throughout this book, he understands our complete inability to produce holiness within ourselves. Consequently, at immense cost to himself, he has provided holiness for us from his own resources.

Chapter 3: **The Argument for Holiness**

Is holiness good only for God, or does it actually have benefits for us as well?

Before we look specifically at God's attribute¹ of holiness, let's look back at the historic chaos in Sub-Saharan Africa and let it suggest why human holiness is inadequate.

A trip to Darfur and Sub-Saharan Africa

In early 2003, a region known as Darfur in southern Sudan, Africa became embroiled in a deadly conflict with the Sudanese government. Within three

¹ The term *attributes* refers to the qualities of God that are inherent in his person. God is eternal, holy, unchanging, infinite, all-powerful, everywhere-present, all-wise, all-knowing, self-existent, self-sufficient, good, love, gracious, merciful, just, and sovereign, to name some of his attributes. It must be obvious, however, how important his attribute of holiness must be. For example, a God who was all-powerful but not holy would be a terror. A God who knew everything but was not holy could become the master blackmailer. A God who loved at least some of his created beings but was not holy could be capricious. Within this book, therefore, our point of view will always be that God's holiness is his most defining characteristic because it is his holiness which causes all of his other attributes to work for his good and the good of all of his creation.

years, at least 400,000 people had been killed, and more than 2 million innocent civilians had been forced to flee their homes and live in displaced-persons camps in Sudan or in refugee camps in neighboring Chad. More than 3.5 million men, women, and children relied completely on international aid for survival. Not since the Rwandan genocide of 1994 had the world seen such a calculated campaign of displacement, starvation, rape, and mass slaughter.

Of an estimated 40.3 million persons who were living with HIV/AIDS in 2005, 25.8 million lived in Sub-Saharan Africa. Early estimates were that within five years after that date, 20 million children in the region would have lost at least one parent to AIDS. By 2005, many of the children in that region were receiving no schooling of any kind, and just under half of Sub-Saharan Africa's population (some 313 million people) survived on less than \$1 a day.²

What would you have seen if you had been in a displaced-persons camp in either of these areas? Of course, you would have seen poverty on its most gut-wrenching level. But you would have seen a blend of poverty and affluence. You would certainly have seen government troops who were reasonably well

² Both news items were adapted from http://www.scinterfaith.org/darfur_&_sub-saharan_africa.htm.

dressed and fed. These troops would have been patrolling the area in modern vehicles. They would have undoubtedly had air support using unimaginably expensive planes and helicopters as compared with the dollar-a-day subsistence level of the impoverished internees. You would also have seen international aid workers who were—with complete justification—also well-fed and were able to use vehicles for transporting supplies. Thus, you would have certainly seen poverty and all its destruction on its human prey, but you would have seen it coexisting with a reasonably high level of wealth. Then, had you driven to the main cities in the area, you would have certainly seen an even greater contrast, since any of these countries would also have their enclaves of the wealthy elite.

In almost any poverty stricken area of the world, you could easily find a counterpart of extreme wealth and political elitism. The world's economic crisis does not exist because of a *lack* of resources; it almost always exists because of a selfish *hoarding* of resources by an elite few. It is not at all uncommon in today's world to hear of shipping containers of rotting food in a port city of a country in which there is famine. Under these circumstances, there will almost always be an organized black market

extending from high government officials to “facilitators” among the impoverished.

Solving world hunger and the lack of education

Can you see how simply the problem of hunger and lack of education in this one area of Africa could have been solved? Let’s say that we had designated the wealthiest five percent of the population to be those who would provide financial aid. From that group we would have taken a set amount of money—without imposing undue hardship—for redistribution among the poorest and least educated. We would not have required that these wealthy individuals practiced or even understood God’s holiness as long as the money itself was distributed in such a way that the best interests of the poor were met.

This idealistic system would have failed very quickly. First, as they had already probably done for their own advantage, a majority of the wealthy would have found a way to circumvent the collection of funds. Equally important, this system would have required a large number of mid-management level functionaries to distribute the money, converting it to goods and services. We would quickly have discovered that the entire mid-management system, working in collusion with a small group among the poor themselves, would have diverted large amounts

of the money for their own profit. The wealthy would have preyed on the poor and the poor would have preyed on the poorer still.

The only way such a system could have possibly worked is if it had been entirely dependent on voluntary, benevolent, and independently wealthy participants. These participants would then have needed to be internally motivated by a personal sense of something akin to holiness which would have caused them to self-regulate their concern for the well-being of the poor. This self-regulation would have then needed to control the participants in such a way that others' needs were met just as fairly as the needs of those administering their personal wealth. If the problems of mid-management corruption could have then been solved, the system would have worked.

Our need of God's holiness

In using the forgoing illustration, we do not want to imply that every human being is socially corrupted. Far from it. History has repeatedly modeled individuals who acted on principle and gave themselves for the well-being of others. But just as history has given us examples of the best of humanity, so it has given us far too many examples of the worst of humanity as well.

Therefore, to achieve social equity, we need to draw on something outside of ourselves. We need the absolute holiness of God as our standard.

The Bible describes God's holiness in this way:³

There is no one as holy as Yahweh, For there is no one besides you, nor is there any rock like our God (1 Samuel 2:2). But you are holy, you who inhabit the praises of Israel (Psalm 22:3). For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite (Isaiah 57:15). For he who is mighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name. His mercy is for generations of generations on those who fear him (Luke 1:49-50). Yahweh is righteous in all his ways, and gracious in all his works (Psalm 145:17).

"For I am Yahweh your God. Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am holy...For I am Yahweh who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You

³ God's concern with humanity's well-being includes *justice* and *mercy* as well as that which is strictly defined as *holiness*. Consequently, this list of references will include statements describing God's holiness, justice, and mercy.

shall therefore be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44-45). But just as he who called you is holy, you yourselves also be holy in all of your behavior; because it is written, “You shall be holy; for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15-16). Sing praise to Yahweh, you saints of his. Give thanks to his holy name (Psalm 30:4). They sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God, the Almighty! Righteous and true are your ways, you King of the nations (Revelation 15:3-4). One called to another, and said, “Holy, holy, holy, is Yahweh of Armies! The whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isaiah 6:3).

Let them praise [Yahweh’s] great and awesome name. He is Holy! Exalt Yahweh our God. Worship at his footstool. He is Holy! (Psalm 99:3, 5). For I will proclaim the name of Yahweh. Ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice: a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he (Deuteronomy 32:3-4). Who has shown this from ancient time? Who has declared it of old? Haven’t I, Yahweh? There is no other God besides me, a just God and a Savior; There is no one besides me

(Isaiah 45:21). [Yahweh] set judges in the land throughout all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, and said to the judges, “Consider what you do: for you don’t judge for man, but for Yahweh; and he is with you in the judgment. Now therefore let the fear of Yahweh be on you. Take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with Yahweh our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of bribes” (2 Chronicles 19:6-7). Yes surely, God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert justice (Job 34:12).

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne. Loving kindness and truth go before your face (Psalm 89:14). If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). But let him who glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows me, that I am Yahweh who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, says Yahweh (Jeremiah 9:24). Let the rivers clap their hands. Let the mountains sing for joy together. Let them sing before Yahweh, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with

righteousness, and the peoples with equity (Psalm 98:8-9). Yahweh is slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, forgiving iniquity and disobedience (Numbers 14:18).

But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) (Ephesians 2:4-5). For you, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive; abundant in loving kindness to all those who call on you (Psalm 86:5). Yahweh is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness. He will not always accuse; neither will he stay angry forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor repaid us for our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his loving kindness toward those who fear him (Psalm 103:8-11). Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy became our father again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3). Oh give thanks to Yahweh, for he is good, for his loving kindness endures forever (1 Chronicles 16:34). For as the heavens are high above the

earth, so great is [Yahweh 's] loving kindness toward those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us (Psalm 103:11).

Yahweh is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and of great loving kindness. Yahweh is good to all. His tender mercies are over all his works (Psalm 145:8-9). Who is a God like you, who pardons iniquity, and passes over the disobedience of the remnant of his heritage? He doesn't retain his anger forever, because he delights in loving kindness (Micah 7:18-19). But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love toward mankind appeared, not by works of righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy, he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly, through Jesus Christ our Savior; that, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:4-7). Yahweh takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his loving kindness (Psalms 147:11). Have mercy on me, God, according to your loving kindness. According to the multitude of your tender mercies, blot out my

transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity. Cleanse me from my sin (Psalms 51:1-2). Oh give thanks to Yahweh, for he is good, for his loving kindness endures forever (Psalm 118:29).

A first observation

There can be no true hope apart from a system of justice based on an absolute standard of holiness. That standard of holiness must further be administered apart from those who could profit from it. Therefore, there are three potential hazards: The first would be the absence of absolute holiness controlling the system. The second would be a self-serving “religious” administration of the system in which a single group would presume to know how best to conduct God’s business. And finally, there would be the hazard of personal profit to those who were unjustly administering the system.

A first practical application

1. If both a God-figure and sectarian religious control could be removed, almost all would agree that a universal administration that could be characterized as holy would produce the greatest benefit for the largest number of people. It would be readily agreed

that, under this administration, the world would have the greatest sense of hope, as humanity would be given its best opportunity for self-fulfillment.

2. It is obvious, however, that a system of God-directed holiness requires a concession that many in today's world are not willing to make. It requires that a supreme God must assume the role of absolute authority and that those participating must willingly obey him. We simply suggest that the posturing of ultimate human control apart from a standard of absolute holiness has made a significant contribution to the brokenness of society and the loss of hope we are experiencing today.

3. There is much more to the subject of holiness than the mere distribution of wealth. Nonetheless, the extreme disparity between the wealthy and the poor is a poignant reminder of the inequity that exists between ethnic, socio-economic, political, and religious groups that are bent on their own self-interests. Avarice (greed) and holiness are polar opposites.

4. In the first chapter we said that we are neither asking you to believe what we are telling you, nor are we trying to manipulate you. Our objective is merely to report a system of hope that has been acknowledged for almost 2,000 years. What you

choose to do with the information we are presenting is up to you.

5. Notice, however, that in this chapter we have introduced what we who have given credence to this two-thousand-year-old system of hope find so affirming. Its certainty is not based on human predictability or effort. Its promise is based on the holiness (goodness) of the sovereign creator of the universe.

Chapter 4: Identifying the Creator (Part 1)

To this point we have simply identified the Creator as “God.” That is, after all, how the account of creation begins in the first book of the Bible:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1).

As we have already said, the Bible is divided into two parts commonly known as the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament was written between the approximate dates of 1450 and 400 BC, while the New Testament was written by men who lived during Jesus’ lifetime. The first books of the New Testament were written approximately 20 years after Jesus was killed by crucifixion and came back to life (through resurrection) in 33 AD.¹ The last book (the Gospel of John) was written in approximately 98 AD when the

¹ In 525 AD Pope John 1 commissioned Dionysius to prepare a standard calendar for the Western Church. Because the history of the day was not certain, a number of critical dates were altered. As a result, the Western calendar gives an inaccurate date for Jesus’ birth, placing it later than it probably occurred. (Jesus was likely born in 5 or 4 BC.) However, this error in the traditional calendar has no bearing on the veracity of the biblical accounts. In order to avoid confusion, we will continue to use the traditional year 1 AD as the date of his birth.

Apostle John—the last of Jesus’ surviving Apostles—was an old man.

God progressively revealed who he was as the Bible was written. God gives less detailed descriptions of himself in the Old Testament as compared with the more complete descriptions he gives of himself in the New Testament.

The view of God in the Old Testament

It is clear that God describes himself in the Old Testament as being a God of unity.² Variations of the following quotation appear many times in both the Old and New Testaments:

Hear, Israel: Yahweh is our God; Yahweh is one (Deuteronomy 6:4).

The following Old Testament passages also declare that there is only one God:

[Moses] said [to Pharaoh], “Be it according to your word, that you may know that there is

² God is unity in that each of his attributes is represented completely and only in himself. For example, only God is eternal, only God is all-powerful, only God is all-knowing, and so on. Though God has created man in his image and has thus given human beings capacities that are modeled after his attributes, only God fully possesses these attributes. God is also unity in that his purpose is never divided or in internal conflict between the Father, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit.

none like Yahweh our God” (Exodus 8:10). ...according to all that Yahweh your God did for you in Egypt...It was shown to you so that you might know that Yahweh is God. There is no one else besides him (Deuteronomy 4:34-35). Know therefore this day, and lay it to your heart, that Yahweh he is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is none else (Deuteronomy 4:39). Therefore you are great, Yahweh God. For there is none like you, neither is there any God besides you (2 Samuel 7:22). For who is God, besides Yahweh? Who is a rock, besides our God? God is my strong fortress (2 Samuel 22:32-33). May Yahweh our God be with us...that all the peoples of the earth may know that Yahweh, he is God. There is none else (1 Kings 8:57, 60). Hezekiah prayed before Yahweh, and said, “Yahweh, the God of Israel...you are the God, even you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth” (2 Kings 19:15).

Yahweh, there is none like you, neither is there any God besides you (1 Chronicles 17:20). You are Yahweh, even you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their army, the earth and all things that

are on it, the seas and all that is in them, and you preserve them all. The army of heaven worships you (Nehemiah 9:6). For who is God, except Yahweh? Who is a rock, besides our God (Psalm 18:31). “Now therefore, Yahweh our God, save us from [the king of Assyria’s] hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you are Yahweh, even you only” (Isaiah 37:20). “You are my witnesses,” says Yahweh, “With my servant whom I have chosen; that you may know and believe me, and understand that I am he. Before me there was no God formed, neither will there be after me. I myself am Yahweh; and besides me there is no savior” (Isaiah 43:10-11). This is what Yahweh...says: “I am the first, and I am the last; and besides me there is no God” (Isaiah 44:6). Don’t fear, neither be afraid. Haven’t I declared it to you long ago...? Is there a God besides me? Indeed, there is not (Isaiah 44:8). I am Yahweh, and there is none else. Besides me, there is no God (Isaiah 45:5). Surely God is in you; and there is none else. There is no other god (Isaiah 45:14). For thus says Yahweh who created the heavens, the God who formed the earth and made it, who established it and didn’t create it a waste, who formed it to be inhabited: “I am Yahweh;

and there is no other” (Isaiah 45:18). Who has shown this from ancient time? Who has declared it of old? Haven’t I, Yahweh? There is no other God besides me, a just God and a Savior; There is no one besides me (Isaiah 45:21). ...for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me (Isaiah 46:9). Yahweh will be King over all the earth. In that day Yahweh will be one, and his name one (Zechariah 14:9).

One in number or one in unity?

English does not have two separate words that make a distinction between *one in number* and *one in purpose*. (We make that distinction in English by adding other descriptive words to the word *one*.) Apparently the Hebrew language does have two distinct words that convey these two meanings. Anyone reading the English translation of Genesis 2:24 which says, "Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother, and will join with his wife, and they will be one flesh" understands that the man and woman do not become a single person after marriage. The reader understands that they become one in a metaphorical sense in their purpose or unity.

Interestingly, the verse, “Hear, Israel: Yahweh is our God; Yahweh is one: and you shall love Yahweh

your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5), uses the same Hebrew word for “one” as the verse describing marriage uses for the man and his wife becoming “one” (Genesis 2:24). Thus, it is apparent that the verses describing God as “one” in the Old Testament are emphasizing the unity of God in the sense of his being “one” in his actions and purpose.

The expanded view of God in the New Testament

Jesus, as well as other writers in the New Testament, continued to make the statement that God is one. Jesus said:

One of the scribes...asked him, “Which commandment is the greatest of all?” Jesus answered, “The greatest is, ‘Hear, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one’ “ (Mark 12:28-29). How can you believe...and you don’t seek the glory that comes from the only God? (John 5:44). This is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and him whom you sent, Jesus Christ (John 17:3).

Other writers in the New Testament also said that God is one. The Apostle Paul frequently made this statement:

...since indeed there is one God... (Romans 3:30). ...to the only wise God... (Romans 16:27). We know that no idol is anything in the world, and that there is no other God but one (1 Corinthians 8:4). Now a mediator is not between one, but God is one (Galatians 3:20). Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever (1 Timothy 1:17).

On the other hand, Jesus also asserted his full equality with God:

John 10:22 It was the Feast of the Dedication at Jerusalem. 10:23 It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in Solomon's porch. 10:24 The Jews therefore came around him and said to him, "How long will you hold us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." 10:25 Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you don't believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, these testify about me... 10:30 I and the Father are one." 10:31 Therefore Jews took up stones again to stone him. 10:32 Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from my Father. For which of those works do you stone me?" 10:33 The Jews answered him, "We don't stone you for a good work, but

for blasphemy: because you, being a man, make yourself God.”...10:36 [Jesus answered them] “Do you say of him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You blaspheme,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God?’ “ (John 10:22-25, 30-33, 36).

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father...” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you such a long time, and do you not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. How do you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ “ (John 14:8-9). [Jesus speaking to the Father said] “The glory which you have given me, I have given to them; that they may be one, even as we are one” (John 17:22). For this cause the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill him, because he did these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, “My Father is still working, so I am working, too.” For this cause therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath, but also called God his own Father, making himself equal with God (John 5:16-18).

John 8:19 They said therefore to him, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me, nor my Father. If you

knew me, you would know my Father also...8:23 You are from beneath. I am from above. You are of this world. I am not of this world. 8:24 I said therefore to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins.” 8:25 They said...“Who are you?”...8:28 Jesus therefore said to them, “When you have lifted up [crucified] the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and I do nothing of myself, but as my Father taught me, I say these things. 8:29 He who sent me is with me. The Father hasn’t left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” 8:30 As he spoke these things, many believed in him...8:54 [Jesus said] “It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say that he is our God. 8:55 You have not known him, but I know him. If I said, ‘I don’t know him,’ I would be like you, a liar. But I know him, and keep his word. 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day. He saw it, and was glad.” 8:57 The Jews therefore said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” 8:58 Jesus said to them, “Most certainly, I tell you, before Abraham came into existence, I AM.” 8:59 Therefore they took up stones to throw at him, but Jesus was hidden, and went out of the temple,

having gone through their midst (John 8:19, 23-25, 28-30, 54-59).

Other writers also stated that Jesus is equal with God:

Philippians 2:5 ...Christ Jesus, 2:6 who, existing in the form of God, didn't consider equality with God a thing to be grasped [held unto], 2:7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men. 2:8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, yes, the death of the cross. 2:9 Therefore God also highly exalted him, and gave to him the name which is above every name;³ 2:10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth, 2:11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to

³ "The name which is above every name" is the name Yahweh. The statement, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess" is true only of Yahweh in the Old Testament. (See Isaiah 45:22-23 which quotes Yahweh as saying "For I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by myself, the word has gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and will not return, that to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath.")

the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” (Revelation 1:8). “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, the Holy One, to receive the glory, the honor, and the power, for you created all things, and because of your desire they existed, and were created!” (Revelation 4:11). “We give you thanks, Lord God, the Almighty, the one who is and who was; because you have taken your great power, and reigned” (Revelation 11:17).

The Apostle John’s perspective

Jesus trained twelve men during the three years in which he taught publicly. He also knew that one of them would betray him and that it would result in his arrest and execution. That follower, Judas Iscariot, committed suicide when he realized what he had done. Ten of the original twelve followers died as martyrs. One, however, was severely persecuted and imprisoned, though he was later released and lived to be a very old man. This one follower who died a natural death was the Apostle John who was probably in his late 90s when he died.

The Apostle John wrote five books in the New Testament. Two are very short letters (2 John and 3 John). One is a longer letter and is a significant book in its own right (1 John). His two longest books, however, are extremely important.

The first of these two longer books we now know as the last book of the New Testament. It was written about 96 AD while John was a prisoner of the Roman Emperor on the Island of Patmos. This small island is now held by Greece. Today, John's first longer book is commonly known as the book of Revelation because it is John's account of a revelation Jesus gave to him. In that revelation, John was shown future events and how Jesus would some day rule the perfect, redeemed world as its king. When Jesus was on earth, John knew him as a man, but also believed that he was God. In Jesus' revelation of himself to John, however, John saw Jesus in his full glory as Sovereign, Eternal God who had become man.

It is not surprising, then, that when John wrote the Gospel of John two years later in approximately 98 AD, he often reported many of the things Jesus did as a man from his new perspective after having seen Jesus as glorified God in Heaven.

It is with that perspective that John began his Gospel by saying:

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 1:2 The same was in the beginning with God. 1:3 All things were made through him. Without him was not anything made that has been made. 1:4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 1:5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness hasn't overcome it.

1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world didn't recognize him. 1:11 He came to his own, and those who were his own didn't receive him. 1:12 But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become God's children, to those who believe in his name: 1:13 who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 1:14 The Word became flesh, and lived among us. We saw his glory, such glory as of the one and only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-5, 10-14).

The grammar behind John's statement

John used very precise grammar when he wrote these verses.⁴ Figure 1 is a graphic representation of

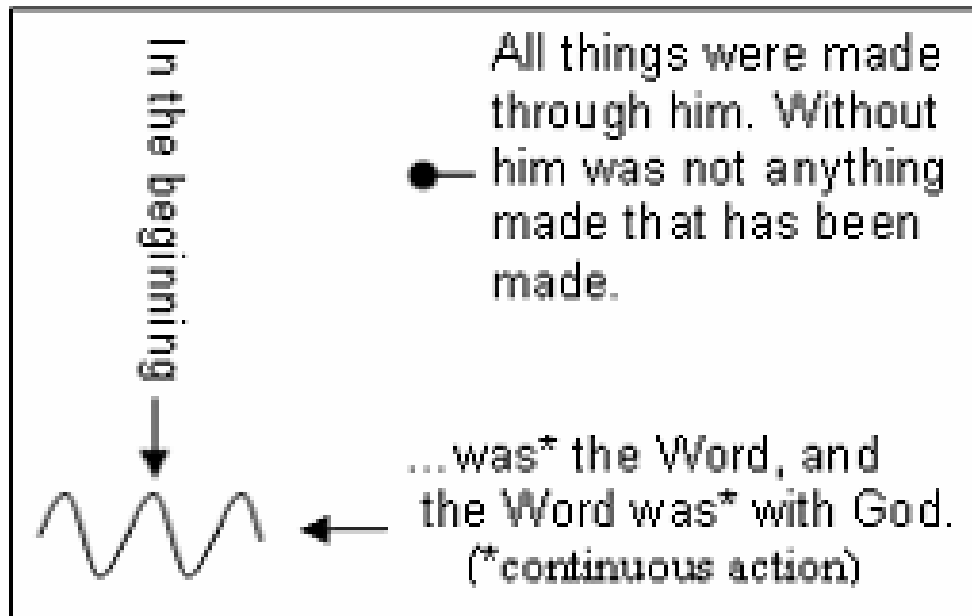


Figure 1: A graphic representation of the grammar of John 1:1-3.

⁴ The English translation properly reflects what John wrote in Greek. What is important, however, is John's letter-by-letter spelling. John used the Greek verb *eimi* (*to be*) twice in this sentence and it was translated both times into English with the word *was*. The tense of a Greek verb can express the *time* of the action (past, present or future) and the *kind* of action (continuous, completed or action at a defined time). The tense of this Greek verb makes its action *continuous*. Therefore, this Greek verb *to be* in John 1:1 has the sense of *was continually existing*. For a more complete description of Greek verbs see http://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/verbs1.htm.

what he said. He identified a precise point in time with the statement “In the beginning.” The *beginning* was John’s starting point. There was nothing he could describe before this time. Then John made the assertion that at that point in time before anything could be described, “The Word was [continually existing] with God” (The *Word* is defined as Jesus in verse 14 and fully identified as such in the remaining verses of the chapter.) According to the grammar rules of John’s day, he said two things in verse 1:1: “In the beginning the Word was continually existing,” and “the Word was continually with God.”

John thus made an incredibly important assertion. He said that Jesus was eternal. That is, *the beginning* was as far back as John could describe. Yet, at that earliest point in time—at the beginning—the Word (Jesus) was continually existing and was continually with God.

John made another assertion which was equally significant. He said that “**All things were made through him**” (*him* is the *Word* who is later identified as Jesus). “**Without him was not anything made that has been made.**” John was therefore saying that Jesus was entirely outside of creation because he was the one who created everything.

Notice in Figure 1 that creation was placed on the right side of “**In the beginning.**” That is, according to John’s description, creation started during the time after the beginning, whereas Jesus was continually existing with God before time had even begun.

In the next chapter we will explain more about Jesus as the Creator. For now, however, note that John asserted that Jesus (the Word) is eternal in the same sense in which God is eternal:

First, at the earliest point of time, Jesus was already continually existing and was with God.

Second, Jesus created everything, and without him, nothing was created. In John’s description, therefore, Jesus was outside of anything which was created. He himself could not have been created. Thus, Jesus was identified as being eternally existent.

We are left with an inescapable conclusion from both the Old and New Testaments, including the statements of Jesus himself. There is a sense of unity in which God can be described as “one.” At the same time, as a person entirely unique from God the Father, Jesus can be described as being eternal and existing continuously with God and as fully equal to God.⁵

⁵ First and second century Christians understood John’s description of Jesus to mean exactly what the Apostle John said—that Jesus was eternal and outside of creation. Therefore, they understood that God is described as being

one in unity, while at the same time he consists of three persons: the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit. Among the early Christians, there was never the suggestion, however, that there were three Gods. The first debates as to the nature of Jesus—that is, as to whether Jesus was truly God or was himself created—did not begin until the third and fourth centuries. The debate centered on whether Jesus was God or whether he was created. The name for the initial heresy claiming that Jesus was not eternal God is Arianism, named after Arius who lived between 250 and 336 AD. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arianism>

Chapter 5: Identifying the Creator (Part 2)

With the background of the previous chapter, we can now identify the Creator. He is the one who was eternally with God and who later came to earth as the man named Jesus. We can clearly see this in John chapter 1 when we group John's statements under appropriate headings:

The Word,¹ who is later identified as Jesus, is eternal

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 1:2 The same was in the beginning with God...1:14 The Word became flesh, and

¹ The Greek word *logos* which John uses in this passage is appropriately translated into English as *Word*. Yet, it had very specialized meanings in Greek and was used frequently by such Greek philosophers as Socrates and Plato. (Today we have the English word *logo* which is taken from this Greek word to mean a symbol or representation of a reality.) The *Word* could be understood in this passage as meaning *God's Spokesperson*. John's use of *Word* in this passage can briefly be described as stating that "the incarnation [coming of Jesus to earth] means the presence of God in the person of Jesus." (Quoted from *Word* in the *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3, Zondervan Publishing House, 1971, page 1117.)

lived among us. We saw his glory, such glory as of the one and only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:1-2, 14).

The Word is outside of creation because he is the creator of all things

John 1:3 All things were made through him. Without him was not anything made that has been made.² 1:4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world didn't recognize him (John 1:3-4, 10).

² Notice the statements speaking of Jesus as the Word which say, "All things were made through him. Without him was not anything made that has been made." (verse 3) and "...the world was made through him." (verse 10). These verses (along with others such as Colossians 1:15-17) that say that Jesus made all things are not contradicting the Old Testament statement that says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). In the Old Testament, God was only known as the one in unity. In the New Testament, however, Jesus expands the unity of God to include the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit. Our confusion today comes from using the term *God* to exclusively mean *Father* in the misleading sense that "In the beginning the *Father* created the heaven and the earth." (Review the headings **One in number or one in unity?** and **The expanded view of God in the New Testament** in Chapter 4.)

The Word became a man and lived in the world as a man

John 1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world didn't recognize him. 1:11 He came to his own, and those who were his own didn't receive him... 1:14 The Word became flesh, and lived among us. We saw his glory, such glory as of the one and only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:10-11, 14).

The Word was received as God by some and rejected by others

John 1:4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 1:5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness hasn't overcome it... 1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world didn't recognize him. 1:11 He came to his own, and those who were his own didn't receive him. 1:12 But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become God's children, to those who believe in his name: 1:13 who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:4-5, 10-13).

A second similar passage written by the Apostle Paul

The Apostle Paul made a similar statement about Jesus being the Creator when he said:

Colossians 1:7 Christ... 1:15 who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn³ of all creation. 1:16 For by him all things were created, in the heavens and on the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether

³ Jesus is identified as the *firstborn*. In the culture of the day, the firstborn son was the next generation's head of the family. The word *firstborn* could then mean either the eldest son or the preeminent son. It is used both ways in the Bible. Jesus could not be the first created being because he is identified as the firstborn (preeminent) one **OF** creation rather than the firstborn (in order) **IN** creation. Furthermore, the Apostle Paul uses the word *firstborn* again in the same passage (Colossians 1:18) where Jesus is identified as "**the firstborn from the dead.**" But Jesus was not the first in the order of individuals raised from the dead because Jesus himself raised three individuals from the dead before his own resurrection. (The son of a widow from Nain [Luke 7:11-14], the daughter of Jairus [Mark 5:22-43], and Lazarus [John 11:1-44]) In this instance, therefore, *firstborn* must mean *preeminent*. Most importantly, however, the author of Colossians (the Apostle Paul) would not have so eloquently described Jesus as having been *outside* of creation and then immediately put him *inside* of creation in the same passage by describing him as being the first created being.

thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and for him. 1:17 He is before all things, and in him all things are held together (Colossians 1:15-17).

Notice the Apostle Paul's five statements which identify Jesus in both his equality with God and as being the Creator:

1. Jesus is the *image* of the invisible God. (The English word translated as *image* comes from the Greek word *eikon*, meaning *exact likeness*, from which we get the English word *icon*.)
2. He is *outside of creation* because “...by him all things were created...”
3. He created *everything* in heaven and on earth. The Apostle Paul adds an interesting qualification which includes the visible and invisible things, spiritual powers, lords, rulers, and authorities. This is a comprehensive statement that Jesus is creator of everything that exists outside of the eternal God.
4. Jesus is before all things, and in him all things are held together.

A third similar passage from the Apostle John

The Apostle John made another statement about Jesus as the Creator in his book called *The Revelation*:

The four living creatures...saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come! Worthy are you, our Lord and God, the Holy One, to receive the glory, the honor, and the power, for you created all things, and because of your desire they existed, and were created!" (Revelation 4:8, 11).

Again, notice what John said about Jesus as both God and Creator:

1. Jesus was called "Lord God, the Almighty" which is a New Testament restatement of an Old Testament title reserved for Yahweh. Yet, it was clearly used to identify Jesus because it used his title "Lord." Thus, this statement places Jesus as being equal with God.
2. Jesus was identified as the one "who was and who is and who is to come" This imagery is used in several places in the book of Revelation to indicate the eternal nature of God. In this case, it was clearly used of Jesus, indicating his full equality with God.

3. Jesus was addressed as “our Lord and God, the Holy One” and as being worthy to receive glory, honor, and power. Again, this was terminology reserved in the Old Testament for none other than Yahweh himself.
4. Finally, Jesus was identified as the one who created all things by his will and who gave them existence because of his desire. Thus, Jesus was fully identified as being the God who created the heavens and the earth.

An identity for the Creator

In Chapter 4, *Identifying the Creator* (Part 1), we saw that the Old Testament presented God as being one in unity. However, we then discovered that the New Testament expanded that view of God as he revealed more of himself. The New Testament shows Jesus as being equal with God because he is also eternal just as he is outside of everything which is created. Thus, we learn that God can be described as “one” at the same time that Jesus can be described as being a person entirely unique from God the Father. Yet Jesus is also eternal and is fully equal to God.

In Chapter 5, *Identifying the Creator* (Part 2), we looked at three passages in which Jesus is described as being the creator of all things, yet having come to this earth to live a completely human life. Therefore,

we have identified Jesus himself as the Creator. In Chapter 7, *The Creator Became a Man*, we will examine the biblical claim that the man named Jesus, who lived almost 2,000 years ago, was the creator of the universe.

Before we go on to Chapter 7, however, we must stop and discuss the manuscript evidence for the Bible itself in Chapter 6: *Manuscript Evidence*.

Chapter 6: **Manuscript Evidence**

Did you notice in previous chapters that many of our arguments centered around verb tenses, precise words defining creation, the meaning of words such as “visible likeness,” and more?

Why is there so much concern with this detailed accuracy in the original Greek text?

Several years ago, I, the writer, had an interesting encounter with an articulate young man on a college campus. He described himself as being an agnostic who did not know if God even existed. He had come to that conclusion after having been a practicing Catholic who converted to charismatic Protestant Christianity as a young adult. He was quite knowledgeable regarding the theological issues and history of Christianity, and had come to his position as an agnostic after considerable thought.

Our discussion was cordial with mutual respect for each other’s viewpoint.

Toward the end of our conversation, I told him that there was one area on which my faith was entirely dependent. I explained that if this one area could be discredited, I would no longer be committed to Christianity. I asked him if he could identify one

comprehensive foundational necessity for the Christian faith.

He suggested a number of theological positions which are regarded as essential truths. After each suggestion, however, I assured him that as important as the particular doctrine he mentioned was, it was not the foundation on which my faith ultimately depended.

In time he conceded, and I gave him my answer:

My faith is entirely dependent on having a Bible with irrefutable manuscript reliability. I explained that statement to mean that the Hebrew and Greek texts used in modern translations of the Bible must be essentially a word-for-word reproduction of that which was written in the original autographs.¹ These

¹ The term *autograph* identifies the original document written by the Bible writer himself. John would have written an original document (on a scroll made of papyrus) containing what is now known as the Gospel of John. That single document is now called the autograph. Immediately after the autograph was given to the first Christian churches, Christian groups began copying and recopying it so that they would have John's account of Jesus' life for their own study. Since all of the copies were handwritten, there would presumably have been copying errors in all of them. However, because they were individual copies, the mistakes would have been randomly scattered throughout each copy unless a subsequent copy had reproduced a mistake found in an earlier copy. Thus, the autograph was written exactly as the

original-language texts are the Hebrew (Old Testament) or Greek (New Testament) texts from which an English (or any other language) translation would be made.

The essential question

The question then is this: can we be certain today that the text on which we base our faith is a precise reproduction of the original autographs? Can we be assured that uncertainty in the text is reduced to only inconsequential words or phrases which would make no change in the meaning of our Bible?

Let's use an example. In chapter 4 we said that the translated English phrase, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" uses a tense for the Greek verb *eimi* (*to be*) with the meaning that the "Word *being with* God," and the "Word *being* God," were both a ***continuous action***. It is not important that you know grammatical terms other than to know that this phrase has the English meaning of *was continually existing*. On the

author intended and was error free. However, any subsequent copies probably contained copying errors. No autographs of any part of the Bible exist today. Only copies of copies have survived. These copies are called *manuscripts* and range in date from the early second century (from approximately 125 AD) to the advent of printing.

other hand, this meaning is entirely different than it would have been had this Greek verb used a different common tense which would have had the English meaning *existed at a point in time*.

When the Apostle John used the construction meaning *continuous action*, he meant that the Word *was continually existing*, thus stating that the Word was eternal. On the other hand, if John had used the tense meaning *existence at a point in time*, he would have been saying that “During the time of the *beginning* the Word *existed*,” which could be true if the Word came into existence sometime before the beginning that John just described. However, since John used the construction of the verb *to be* as he did, he was unequivocally stating that the Word (Jesus) was eternal.

If we did not have a Greek text which was an exact reproduction of that which was originally written in the autographs, we could not be certain of the exact wording of many important passages. It is only when we have an exact Greek text that we can know what the original writers of the New Testament were saying.

A comparison of Old and New Testament manuscripts

The Old Testament was written between approximately 1450 BC and 400 BC. Any manuscript tradition this old would normally contain many errors. However, the care that was taken in making copies of the Hebrew Scriptures offset many of these difficulties. Hebrew copyists were meticulous in their reproduction of the text. The copies were often made as exact facsimiles of the manuscript being copied. Thus, for example, lines could be counted and comparisons of the last word on each line could be made. Any errors of either omission or addition of words could change the appearance of the original manuscript from that of the new copy.

Other techniques were also used in order to find and correct mistakes. Even though fewer copies of the Hebrew Old Testament were made as time went on, extreme care was always taken to ensure that the copies were as error free as possible. As a result, the manuscript evidence for the Old Testament in Hebrew is a remarkably faithful reproduction of the autographs. This is true even though verification with a large number of manuscripts is not possible as it is for the New Testament. The Dead Sea Scrolls which

were found near the Dead Sea in 1947² have confirmed the accuracy of the Hebrew text used for our present Old Testament. Other very old Hebrew manuscripts have also been found in ancient Egyptian synagogues.

The New Testament Greek manuscripts have quite a different history. They were primarily written for—and circulated among—Gentile (non-Jewish) converts to Christianity. (A large number of the early Christian churches were established in Greece, Rome, and what is present-day Turkey.) There was often far less care taken to ensure accurate copying. Nonetheless, as the church grew during its first 1,000 years, large numbers of manuscripts were circulated throughout Palestine, Asia Minor, North Africa, and even Europe. The result is that over 5,000 ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament have been discovered and are available for study today.

The dry climate in North Africa and Palestine is largely responsible for the preservation of a large

² The Dead Sea Scrolls which produced almost 200 biblical manuscripts contained every Old Testament book but Esther. They were hidden just prior to the Roman invasion of Jerusalem in 69-70 AD in several caves in the craggy hills overlooking the Dead Sea. Because they were copied sometime between 200 BC and 69 AD, they provide scholars with a very early group of Hebrew manuscripts for study.

number of extremely old manuscripts. The oldest known copy was found in Egypt. It is a very small fragment of the Gospel of John, which was produced about 125 AD. This means that it was probably copied within 30 or 40 years after the original autograph was written in about 98 AD. Most of the earliest New Testament manuscripts come from 200 to 300 AD. The remaining manuscripts date to as late as 1200 AD. Some of these manuscripts contain almost the entire New Testament. The majority, however, contain only a few pages or a single book. Nonetheless, this large number of manuscripts has allowed scholars, using textual criticism techniques, to reproduce the Greek text of the New Testament with an amazing degree of accuracy.

New Testament textual criticism defined

Textual criticism is the art and science of determining the most probable wording of the original text. This is done by comparing multiple ancient manuscripts of an identical text when each manuscript contains slight copying variations. This can be illustrated with an actual example.

From Chapter 4 we are already familiar with the phrase “**In him was life, and the life was the light of men,**” from John 1:4. We have also discussed the

meaning of the continuous action stated in the Greek verb translated into English as *was*.

The majority of the oldest Greek manuscripts containing this verse use the same Greek verb tense in both *was life* and *was the light*. However, five manuscripts use a present tense verb in the first instance, so it would be translated into English as, “In him *is* life, and that life *was* the light of men.” Consequently, a committee of textual critics determined which of the two possibilities (*is* or *was* when translated into English) was the most probable wording as written by John.³ Since a large majority of the oldest Greek manuscripts use *was*, and since the sentence would be grammatically awkward with two different verb tenses, the textual critics determined that the most probable text written by John was, “**In him was life, and the life was the light of men.**”

³ Every instance of textual uncertainty in the entire New Testament is catalogued in Bruce M. Metzger’s book entitled, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* by the United Bible Societies, New York, 1971. In every case, the ancient manuscripts which have the variant reading are listed. Every entry has a discussion of the words used in all manuscripts and the degree of certainty for the word or phrase finally selected. Thus, any reader may precisely determine every instance in the entire New Testament in which there is any uncertainty regarding the wording of the autograph and, further, may determine what all other alternate readings would be.

Consequently, that is the verb tense used in the published Greek text from which our English New Testament translations would be made today.

New Testament textual criticism in use

For the example we just used, the committee of textual critics had approximately 440 Greek manuscripts from as early as 200 AD to as late as the 14th century which included this verse from John 1:4. From those 440 manuscripts, one fourth century Greek manuscript and one sixth century Greek manuscript used the present tense *is*. In addition, there were three very old translations which used the present tense *is*. These translations included one Latin translation, one Syriac translation, and one Coptic translation. (The Latin, Syriac, and Coptic translations do not contain the Greek verb, but they translated the verb into their respective languages in the present tense. This is a good indication of the tense of the Greek verb in the text used by the translator.)

From this information, we see that approximately 438 Greek manuscripts used the verb in question in a past continuous tense and only two Greek manuscripts and three ancient translations used it in the present tense. Since the number of texts showing that it was in the past tense so far outweigh the

evidence that it was written in the present tense, and since the evidence for the past tense was from older manuscripts, the textual critics concluded that John originally wrote the sentence with both verbs in the past tense. Hence, the Greek text uses the past tense and the English translation from that Greek text says, **“In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”**

Over the years, biblical textual critics have made this kind of decision each time new manuscript evidence showed discrepancies in early Greek manuscripts. The accumulated corrections have resulted in a reliable Greek text that today reflects almost the exact wording used by the original authors.

Other aspects of textual criticism

There are many other considerations concerning textual criticism. Usually, the oldest manuscript is considered to be the most accurate because there are fewer copies between it and the autograph. (There are, however, exceptions to this rule.) Ancient manuscripts can often be dated quite precisely. At times, a scribe may have dated a manuscript by inserting the name of an emperor in the margin just as we would use a calendar date. At other times, the manuscript may be dated by comparing the color of the ink, penmanship style, or the writing material used (reed paper called *parchment* or animal hide

called *vellum*) with other secular manuscripts which bear a specific date. A few New Testament manuscripts have been dated very precisely. Most manuscripts, however, can only be dated to the particular century in which they were copied.

There are often classes of copying mistakes that textual critics can identify in order to explain what the Greek text should have been. Among the typical mistakes are repeated words or phrases. A mistake often occurred when a copyist would inadvertently skip the phrase between two similar words or phrases. The reverse could happen when similarities caused something to be incorrectly copied twice. Another kind of copyist error occurred when another passage in the New Testament was similar and the scribe wrote from memory rather than directly copying the text. Whatever the type of error, when a variant text can be classified as having a common copyist error, it gives the textual critic good reason to make a calculated judgment that the manuscript with the common copyist error is the faulty manuscript.

The objective of textual criticism

The objective of textual criticism is *always* to determine the reading which best represents that which the original author would have written. That is accomplished by examining the same verse in a

number of manuscripts and explaining why the variant words or phrases in one manuscript are different from other manuscripts. In almost all cases, the words or phrases which are used in the largest number of manuscripts as well as in the oldest manuscripts are considered the *preferred* reading while the words or phrases used in fewer manuscripts are identified as the *variant* reading. There are very few instances in the New Testament in which there is significant doubt regarding the words or phrases which were originally written in a given passage. In those relatively few instances, however, there is almost always the possibility of a choice between one of two words or phrases. In addition, the exact location of the error is always known.

On the other hand, it must be clearly stated that the objective of textual criticism is *never* to alter the Greek text to promote a particular doctrine. The field of New Testament criticism has largely been developed over just the past 400 years. The key people in the field have come from a wide variety of church backgrounds and from many countries. Some of those working in New Testament textual criticism have not even claimed to be Christians. This wide range of people and faiths assures the New Testament

reader today that the Greek text has not been modified in order to promote particular doctrines.⁴

An application of manuscript evidence

Today we know that the Greek text of the New Testament is almost exactly the same as that which was written by the original authors. This is important to know because Christianity is not merely a philosophy. It is a precise faith which requires knowing who Jesus is as well as having a knowledge of specific information regarding the Christian way of life. It would be impossible to have any certainty in the Christian faith if the text on which it was based was not completely accurate.

Mere accuracy does not ensure, however, that the text is inspired of God. We are able to verify the reliability of the text with textual criticism. But the decision to accept that text as being a revelation from God is a personal decision made by faith.

Remember, however, our comment from the first chapter where we said that we are presenting information, but that we will leave it up to you to

⁴ However, this same statement is not true of Bible translations. Disappointingly, there have been many cases where Bible translations were produced in order to promote a certain doctrine.

decide what you will do with it. This is what we mean. The Bible, and particularly the New Testament, can be verified as reporting Jesus' life exactly as the original authors described it. On the other hand, it is your decision as to whether or not you will acknowledge that information as being true because you believe that it comes from God.

Chapter 7: **The Creator Became a Man**

In Chapter 5 we learned that the Bible says that Jesus is both eternal God and the Creator of the universe. In Chapter 5 we also saw that this same Jesus became a man. In this chapter we want to look at the period of time when Jesus lived on earth.

Jesus was born as a human

Many passages in Scripture confirm this:

The Word became flesh, and lived among us (John 1:14). God was revealed in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16). Since then the children have shared in flesh and blood [human nature], he also himself in the same way partook of the same [human nature], that through death he might bring to nothing him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might deliver all of them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Hebrews 2:14-15). Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God (1 John 4:2). For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who don't confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh (2 John 7).

Matthew 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was like this; for after his mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph, before they came together, she was found pregnant by the Holy Spirit. 1:19 Joseph, her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, intended to put her away secretly. 1:20 But when he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take to yourself Mary, your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 1:21 She shall bring forth a son. You shall call his name Jesus, for it is he who shall save his people from their sins.”

1:22 Now all this has happened, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, 1:23 “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son. They shall call his name Immanuel”; which is, being interpreted, “God with us.”

1:24 Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took his wife to himself; 1:25 and didn’t know her sexually until she had brought forth her

firstborn son. He named him Jesus (Matthew 1:18-25).

How did Jesus became a man?

Traditional Christianity, from the first century onward, has understood Jesus to be God, and yet to have been born as a human infant.¹ A very old creedal statement from 381 AD says, “We believe...in one Lord Jesus Christ...very God of very God...being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate [became human] by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.”

¹ As we said in Chapter 4, footnote 5, the debate as to whether Jesus was God or a created being did not begin until the third and fourth centuries. Nonetheless, each of the three traditions identified in Chapter 1, footnote 1, have historically stated that Jesus is God. Nonetheless, there are religious groups today which believe in a historic Jesus, but do not follow the traditional Christian belief that Jesus has eternally existed as God. These groups include Jehovah’s Witnesses, Unitarians and others. Some believe that the Bible was changed and must be “corrected” by their own translation. Others believe that the Bible is mere literature, but not inspired of God, Some believe that the Father, [Jesus,] and the Spirit are one person who has shown himself as three manifestations (appearing at different times as the Father, [Jesus,] and the Spirit).

Interestingly, however, there has historically been little teaching as to what took place when God became a man, and how this transformation from God to human being actually worked during Jesus' lifetime. Nonetheless, we assume that many readers are curious as to how this might have taken place. Since we want to report that which would be a consensus among all traditions, we will quote the Bible and give only a few additional comments.

Jesus was God, but he gave up all he had when he became a man. The Bible says that “**Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, didn't consider equality with God a thing to be grasped [held on to], but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men**” (Philippians 2:5-7). The Greek word translated into English as “emptied himself” gives us an important clue to what this verse is saying. To empty means to pour out so that there is nothing left. Earlier we talked about God's attributes. (See Chapter 3, footnote 1.) According to the verse we just quoted, Jesus had the nature (all of the attributes) of God. He was therefore all powerful, had all knowledge and possessed all of the other attributes of God before he became a man. All of this is acknowledged in the oldest Christian traditions.

Now we want to give a brief explanation of the possible meaning of the statement that Jesus “emptied himself.” It would be consistent with everything traditional Christianity believes to say that Jesus *emptied* himself, or *gave up* the exercise of his eternal attributes as God. (We are not saying that Jesus gave up his divine attributes. We are saying that he gave up *exercising* or *using* his divine attributes during the time he was on earth.) Therefore, when he became a human being, he no longer exercised any of his previous knowledge as God. He took the form of a servant—that is, he became a human being and needed to study in school and learn in his home and neighborhood just as would any other boy his age. So, too, he gave up the exercise of every other attribute and lived as any other human being needed to live. Just one event when he was 12 years old was recorded in Luke’s Gospel during Jesus’ boyhood. He stayed behind at the temple in Jerusalem without his parents’ knowledge while the group he came with began their journey home. When Mary and Joseph realized Jesus was not in the traveling group, they returned to Jerusalem and began a frantic search until they found him. Luke says,

Luke 2:48 When [his parents] saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us this

way? ...your father and I were anxiously looking for you.” 2:49 He said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Didn’t you know that I must be in my Father’s house?” 2:50 They didn’t understand the saying which he spoke to them. 2:51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth. He was subject to them... 2:52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:48-52).

If, then, Jesus did not have any divine power as a human being, how did he live a perfect life without sin?² We would suggest that he was able to do that because the Father and the Holy Spirit *empowered*³ him to live a perfect life. We are suggesting that it

² Hebrews 4:14-15 says that Jesus committed no sin during his entire life. “Having then a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold tightly to our confession. For we don’t have a high priest who can’t be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who has been in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin.”

³ By *empowered*, we mean that the Father and the Holy Spirit worked through Jesus using *their* power rather than using a divine power which resided in Jesus. In this way, Jesus was fully human and yet performed miracles. That same empowerment is available to those who have been redeemed by Jesus. “Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us...” (Ephesians 3:20).

was the strength of the Father and the Holy Spirit in Jesus that allowed him to live his human life without sin; it was not divine power that he had within himself. Equally, how did he perform miracles? Again, it was because the Father and the Holy Spirit empowered him to heal others. In contrast, if, as a human being, he still had a small vestige of divine power that he carried from his eternal past, then he would not have been truly human, because none of us as human beings have that kind of divine power when we are born. The test of his humanity must be that he was human just as we are human.

What did Jesus accomplish as a man?

In Chapter 2: *Creation's Design Specification*, we carefully explained the Bible's statement, "Even as [God] chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 1:4). During the time that Jesus lived as a man, he grew from infancy to adulthood. As a man of approximately 30 years of age, he began a teaching ministry which was to continue for about three years. During his teaching ministry, he gathered a group of faithful followers who eventually came to believe that he was the promised deliverer of Israel. (See Acts 1:6.) But above all else, Jesus came to this earth to be the Redeemer. It is Jesus' role as

Redeemer which gives us the possibility of hope. Again, everything that will be said under the following two headings is consistent with the faith of traditional Christianity.

Human beings were given choice but exercised it poorly. The first humans, Adam and Eve, were created by God and were given a spacious garden as their home. They were also given the ability to choose to be either obedient or disobedient to God.

Genesis 1:27 God created man in his own image. In God's image he created him; male and female he created them. 1:28 God blessed them. God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." 1:29 God said, "Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree, which bears fruit yielding seed. It will be your food (Genesis 1:27-29).

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more subtle than any animal of the field which Yahweh God had made. He said to the woman, "Has God really said, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?' " (Editor's note: It is almost universally understood that

Satan—or the Devil—was speaking through the snake.)

3:2 The woman said to the serpent, “Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat, 3:3 but of the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”

3:4 The serpent said to the woman, “You won’t surely die, 3:5 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.”

3:6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit, and ate; and she gave some to her husband with her, and he ate. 3:7 The eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. 3:8 They heard the voice of Yahweh God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Yahweh God among the trees of the garden.

3:9 Yahweh God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?”

3:10 The man said, "I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

3:11 God said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

3:12 The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."

3:13 Yahweh God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

3:16 To the woman he said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain you will bear children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

3:17 To Adam he said, "Because you have listened to your wife's voice, and have eaten of the tree, of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground for your sake. In toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. 3:18 It will yield thorns and thistles to you; and you will eat the herb of the field.

3:19 By the sweat of your face will you eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:1-13, 16-19).

The loss caused by their disobedience to God did not fall on Adam and Eve alone. It was a loss to all of humanity. But there was another loss as well. Something happened that day which has caused the universe we live in to be less than perfect. The universe does not have choice, but God made the change in it because of the human disobedience.

8:19 For the creation waits with eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 8:20 For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 8:21 that the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of decay into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. 8:23 Not only so, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body (Romans 8:19-23).

Jesus redeemed both humanity and creation. Redemption’s basic meaning is "to buy back" and is

associated with humanity being "bought for a price."
"You are not your own, for you were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

We want to let the Bible speak for itself as it gives us information about the wonderful redemption Jesus provided for humanity and for all of creation.

Knowing that you were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold...but with precious blood, as of a faultless and pure lamb, the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19). Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God set forth to be an atoning sacrifice, through faith in his blood, for a demonstration of his righteousness through the passing over of prior sins (Romans 3:24-25).

Ephesians 1:7 [Jesus,] in whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 1:8 which he made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 1:9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him 1:10 to an administration of the fullness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things on the earth, in him; 1:11 in whom also

we were assigned an inheritance, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his will; 1:12 to the end that we should be to the praise of his glory, we who had before hoped in Christ: 1:13 in whom you also, having heard the word of the truth, the Good News of your salvation—in whom, having also believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (Ephesians 1:7-13).

[The Father] who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the Kingdom of the Son of his love; in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins (Colossians 1:13-14). ...how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, since a death has occurred for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, that those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:14-15).

We will quote for a second time the verses which show that creation will also be redeemed because Jesus “bought it back.”

Romans 8:19 For the creation waits with eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 8:20 For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 8:21 that the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of decay into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. 8:23 Not only so, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body (Romans 8:19-23).

Redemption means that Jesus gave his life and was raised from death to make it possible for human beings to come back to God. Because first century Christians lived in a society in which slavery was common, they understood the Apostle Paul's description of a slave who was given freedom [redemption] to illustrate the man or woman who was given freedom [redemption] through Jesus' sacrifice. “Being made free from sin, you became bondservants of righteousness...But now, being made free from sin,

and having become servants of God, you have your fruit of sanctification, and the result of eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. ” (Romans 6:18, 22-23).

Chapter 8: **Finding Hope** (Part 1)

If you knew with absolute certainty that you were “**holy and without blemish before God,**” would that not be the basis of immense hope? Look at what is yours when God sees you as perfect in Jesus:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ; even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and without blemish before him (Ephesians 1:3-4).

What would happen if we could meet God’s design specification of holiness? The verse just before this one explaining God’s design specification for us tells us that God will give us “**every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ**” when we are “**holy and without blemish before him.**” Before any of us were even born, we were designed so that we would thrive if we were holy. Just as Satan (also known as the Devil) lied to Eve and told her that her life would be better if she disobeyed God (Genesis 3:1-5), so he has lied to all of us, telling us that life would be better

if we were not holy. But it is a lie.¹ We were designed to thrive as human beings when we are holy and can live to our full potential—living with no fear that God could find fault in us. That same holiness that Jesus can give us also guarantees that we will live forever with Jesus when he rules as the sovereign king in his perfect kingdom.

That is real hope!

But I *can't* be holy

You are correct. None of us has the ability to be holy.

Even the Apostle Paul did not have the ability to be holy. But he discovered that Jesus *could* make him holy. He said,

Romans 7:15 For I don't know what I am doing. For I don't practice what I desire to do; but what I hate, that I do. 7:16 But if what I don't desire, that I do, I consent to the law that it is good. 7:17 So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwells in me. 7:18 For I know

¹ Concerning the devil, Jesus said, "You are of your father, the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and doesn't stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks on his own; for he is a liar, and its father." (John 8:44).

that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing. For desire is present with me, but I don't find it doing that which is good. 7:19 For the good which I desire, I don't do; but the evil which I don't desire, that I practice. 7:20 But if what I don't desire, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwells in me. 7:21 I find then the law, that, to me, while I desire to do good, evil is present. 7:22 For I delight in God's law after the inward man, 7:23 but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members. 7:24 What a wretched man I am! Who will deliver me out of the body of this death? 7:25 I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord! So then with the mind, I myself serve God's law, but with the flesh, the sin's law.

8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death. 8:3 For what the law couldn't do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh. (Romans 7:15-8:3).

Can you hear the Apostle Paul's shout of joy when he says that his inability to live a holy life is resolved through Jesus, "Who will deliver me out of the body of this death? I thank God [who does this] through Jesus Christ, our Lord!"

Now notice a parallel between God's design specification in Chapter 2: "even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and without blemish before him," (Ephesians 1:4) and one of the verses just quoted: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). The design specification for all humanity says that "He chose us IN HIM before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and without blemish," and then we see that "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are IN CHRIST JESUS."

Being IN Jesus is the basis of our hope.

But I don't even want to be holy

You are not alone. Because of the devil's lies, none of us even *want* to be holy. But there is hope even here.

First, Jesus said he will draw all men to himself. His drawing us will include everything necessary for us to come into fellowship with him, including the

desire to be made holy and to give ourselves completely to him. Jesus said,

If I am lifted up from the earth [and die on the cross, I] will draw all people to myself (John 12:32).

Secondly, the Bible is clear that God can give us a will to do that which is best for us even when we do not have the ability to do it in our own strength.²

For it is God who works in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

Finally, he can then empower us to do that which is impossible for us as human beings to do in our own strength. The following verses show what is promised to us after we have been redeemed in Jesus.

I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I that live, but Christ living in me. That life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith

² God gave human beings choice, and he will always honor the choice each person makes. If an individual asks God for holiness, and then God empowers that person to become holy, God is certainly not acting contrary to the individual's choice. Equally, however, when God gives an individual the will to become holy, it will, nonetheless, be dependent on the individual's desire to let God produce that willingness. It might well result from a prayer something like, "Jesus, I don't even want to be holy, but please give me a desire to be holy."

in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me (Galatians 2:20). Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us (Ephesians 3:20).

The truth is, none of us have the ability to be holy, nor do we even naturally desire to be holy. God permits each of us to choose to follow him or to be disobedient to him. However, within that area of personal choice, God has also made himself available to all who recognize their need for his empowering strength in any part of the process. (Again, refer to footnote 2 in this chapter.)

In the next chapter, *Finding Hope* (Part 2), we will evaluate the process of coming into a relationship with Jesus.

Before we go on to Chapter 8, however, we want to let the Bible tell its own story of Jesus' death and return to life, which is traditionally called the *resurrection*.

Jesus is taken to the Roman governor

Matthew 27:1 Now when morning had come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: 27:2 and they bound him, and led

him away, and delivered him up to Pontius Pilate, the governor.

Judas kills himself

27:3 Then Judas, who betrayed him, when he saw that Jesus was condemned, felt remorse, and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, 27:4 saying, “I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood.”

But they said, “What is that to us? You see to it.”

27:5 He threw down the pieces of silver in the sanctuary, and departed. He went away and hanged himself.

Pilate questions Jesus

27:11 Now Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, “Are you the King of the Jews?”

Jesus said to him, “So you say.”

27:12 When he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. 27:13 Then Pilate said to him, “Don’t you hear how many things they testify against you?”

27:14 He gave him no answer, not even one word, so that the governor marveled greatly.

Pilate tries to free Jesus

27:15 Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release to the multitude one prisoner, whom they desired. 27:16 They had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. 27:17 When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus, who is called Christ?” 27:18 For he knew that because of envy they had delivered him up.

27:19 While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, “Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.” 27:20 Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes to ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. 27:21 But the governor answered them, “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?”

They said, “Barabbas!”

27:22 Pilate said to them, “What then shall I do to Jesus, who is called Christ?”

They all said to him, “Let him be crucified!”

27:23 But the governor said, “Why? What evil has he done?”

But they cried out exceedingly, saying, “Let him be crucified!”

27:24 So when Pilate saw that nothing was being gained, but rather that a disturbance was starting, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this righteous person. You see to it.”

27:25 All the people answered, “May his blood be on us, and on our children!”

27:26 Then he released to them Barabbas, but Jesus he flogged and delivered to be crucified. 27:27 Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium [Roman judgment hall], and gathered the whole garrison together against him. 27:28 They stripped him, and put a scarlet robe on him. 27:29 They braided a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they kneeled down before him, and mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!”

27:30 They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. 27:31 When they had mocked him, they took the robe off of him, and put his clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him.

Jesus is crucified

27:32 As they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, and they compelled him to go with them, that he might carry his cross. 27:33 They came to a place called “Golgotha,” that is to say, “The place of a skull.” 27:34 They gave him sour wine to drink mixed with gall. When he had tasted it, he would not drink. 27:35 When they had crucified him, they divided his clothing among them, casting lots, 27:36 and they sat and watched him there. 27:37 They set up over his head the accusation against him written, “THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

27:38 Then there were two robbers crucified with him, one on his right hand and one on the left. 27:39 Those who passed by blasphemed him, wagging their heads, 27:40 and saying, “You who destroy the temple, and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!”

27:41 Likewise the chief priests also mocking, with the scribes, the Pharisees, and the elders, said, 27:42 “He saved others, but he can’t save himself. If he is the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. 27:43 He trusts in God. Let God deliver him now, if he wants him; for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” 27:44 The robbers also who were crucified with him cast on him the same reproach. (Note: one robber later asked for salvation. See Luke 23:39-43.)

Jesus dies

27:45 Now from the sixth hour [noon] there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour [3:00 pm]. 27:46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lima sabachthani?” That is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

27:47 Some of them who stood there, when they heard it, said, “This man is calling Elijah.”

27:48 Immediately one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him a drink. 27:49 The rest said, “Let him be. Let’s see whether Elijah comes to save him.”

27:50 Jesus cried again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit. 27:51 Behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. The earth quaked and the rocks were split. 27:52 The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; 27:53 and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection, they entered into the holy city and appeared to many. 27:54 Now the centurion, and those who were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake, and the things that were done, feared exceedingly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God."

27:55 Many women were there watching from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, serving him. 27:56 Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

Jesus is buried

27:57 When evening had come, a rich man from Arimathaea, named Joseph, who himself was also Jesus' disciple came. 27:58 This man went to Pilate, and asked for Jesus' body. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given

up. 27:59 Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 27:60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut out in the rock, and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed. 27:61 Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb.

The tomb of Jesus is guarded

27:62 Now on the next day, which was the day after the Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees were gathered together to Pilate, 27:63 saying, “Sir, we remember what that deceiver said while he was still alive: ‘After three days I will rise again.’ 27:64 Command therefore that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest perhaps his disciples come at night and steal him away, and tell the people, ‘He is risen from the dead;’ and the last deception will be worse than the first.”

27:65 Pilate said to them, “You have a guard. Go, make it as secure as you can.” 27:66 So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone.

Jesus rises from the dead

28:1 Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. 28:2 Behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from the sky, and came and rolled away the stone from the door, and sat on it. 28:3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 28:4 For fear of him, the guards shook, and became like dead men. 28:5 The angel answered the women, "Don't be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus, who has been crucified. 28:6 He is not here, for he has risen, just like he said. Come, see the place where the Lord was lying. 28:7 Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has risen from the dead, and behold, he goes before you into Galilee; there you will see him.' Behold, I have told you."

28:8 They departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring his disciples word. 28:9 As they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!"

They came and took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.

28:10 Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Go tell my brothers that they should go into Galilee, and there they will see me.”

The soldiers report to the leaders

28:11 Now while they were going, behold, some of the guards came into the city, and told the chief priests all the things that had happened. 28:12 When they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave a large amount of silver to the soldiers, 28:13 saying, “Say that his disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. 28:14 If this comes to the governor’s ears, we will persuade him and make you free of worry.” 28:15 So they took the money and did as they were told. This saying was spread abroad among the Jews, and continues until this day.

Jesus talks to his followers

28:16 But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had sent them. 28:17 When they saw him, they bowed down to him, but some doubted. 28:18 Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, “All

authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 28:19 Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 28:20 teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 27:1-5, 11-66, 28:1-20).

Chapter 9: **Finding Hope** (Part 2)

This chapter will explain how to come into a relationship with Jesus. Each of the three Christian traditions basically agree as to what the Bible actually says about salvation. The difficulty, however, is that too often each tradition has added its own interpretation of the Bible's teaching.

Throughout this book, we have attempted to represent the Christian faith as it is understood by the oldest Christian traditions. Therefore, the best way to accomplish our purpose without bias is to rely primarily on quotations from the Bible itself. Where necessary, we will give a short introduction to the topic, but will depend on the Bible's statements to supply the needed information.

How can I come into a relationship with Jesus?

Many verses we have quoted to this point in the book have identified the individual who is redeemed or saved¹ as one who has a perfect relationship with

¹ The term *redemption* (or *redeemed*) has already been used numerous times. It means *to be purchased or bought back*. Within all traditional Christianity, the term is understood to refer to the death and resurrection (coming back to life three days later) of Jesus that paid the penalty for the sin of the

Jesus. This includes verses such as, “Even as he [God] chose us in him [Jesus] before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and without blemish before him” (Ephesians 1:4), and “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). However, there has still been no explanation as to how we come into this relationship with Jesus. As much as possible, we will again let the Bible give its own explanation.

Jesus is the only way to God

“There is salvation in none other [than Jesus Christ], for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, by which we must be saved!” (Acts 4:12). For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:5-6). Jesus said..., “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me” (John 14:6). [Jesus said] “I am the door. If anyone enters in by me, he will

human race. It is also understood that any individual who chooses to do so might have this relationship with Jesus. The term that is universally understood in traditional Christianity to identify this relationship with Jesus is the word *salvation* or *to be saved*.

be saved, and will go in and go out, and will find pasture. The thief only comes to steal, kill, and destroy. I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly” (John 10:9-10). Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will still live, even if he dies. Whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25-26).

Again...Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world He who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will not be hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35). [Jesus said] “I am the living bread which came down out of heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever” (John 6:51). For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16). One who believes in the Son has eternal life, but one who disobeys the Son won’t see life, but the wrath of God remains on him (John 3:36). “I said therefore to you that you will die in your

sins; for unless you believe that I am he², you will die in your sins” (John 8:24).

“Most certainly I [Jesus] tell you, he who hears my word, and believes him who sent me, has eternal life, and doesn’t come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (John 5:24). The testimony is this, that God gave to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has the life. He who doesn’t have God’s Son doesn’t have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:11-13). By this we know that we remain in him [God] and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him, and he in God (1 John 4:13-15).

² In this statement, Jesus requires a belief that he is eternal God. The Hebrew name of God (*Yahweh*, or as sometimes pronounced, *Jehovah*) is the first person conjugation of the verb *to be*. That is, if translated into English, God's name would be I AM. See Chapter 4, footnote 3.

Grace, not good works, provides our relationship with Jesus (salvation)

Grace is understood by any one of the Christian traditions to be “God’s unmerited favor,” meaning that the one receiving this grace has been given something from God which was undeserved. Salvation can never be earned—God gives it to us simply because we believe that Jesus’ righteousness is all that we need to be **“holy and without blemish before him.”** Repentance is recognized by these same Christian traditions as “turning and going in the opposite direction.” Sin is understood to be that disobedience to God in which an individual chooses to do as he or she pleases rather than to obey God. Thus, repenting from sin is universally understood by each of the Christian traditions to mean turning away from disobedience to God and turning toward that which he desires.

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not toward God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” Now to him who works, the reward is not counted as grace, but as something owed. But to him who doesn’t work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for

righteousness (Romans 4:2-5). For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we would walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Yet knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law, because no flesh will be justified by the works of the law (Galatians 2:16). Because by the works of the law, no flesh will be justified in his sight. For through the law comes the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the law, a righteousness of God has been revealed, being testified by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all those who believe. For there is no distinction, for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:20-24).

For him [Christ] who knew no sin he [God] made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him

we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). For while we were yet weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man. Yet perhaps for a righteous person someone would even dare to die. But God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we will be saved from God's wrath through him. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life (Romans 5:6-10).

Therefore, the generally-understood steps leading to salvation³ among most who adhere to the 2,000 year-old Christian tradition are:

³ There has been an age-old response in every branch of Christian tradition to add some work of penance, baptism, religious activity, or sanctimonious living as a requirement for salvation. Nonetheless, salvation by God's grace alone without any work to earn it has equally been recognized by each of these three traditions in their official doctrinal affirmations. Wanting to add human effort in order to acquire salvation was, in fact, a problem even for the first century church. In Galatians 3:1-5, the Apostle Paul said, "Foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you not to obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth among you as crucified? I just want to learn this from you. Did you

1. **Recognition of personal sin.** For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).
2. **Repentance from sin.** [Jesus said] unless you repent, you will all perish (Luke 13:5). Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out (Acts 3:19).
3. **Trust in Jesus' holiness as all that is needed to be "holy and blameless before God."** But now apart from the law, a righteousness of God has been revealed,...even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all those who believe (Romans 3:21-22). The testimony is this, that God gave to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has the life. He who doesn't have God's Son doesn't have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:11-

receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now completed in the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain, if it is indeed in vain? He therefore who supplies the Spirit to you, and works miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the law, or by hearing of faith?"

13). If you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart, one believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Romans 10:9-10).

How is faith expressed in order for God to grant salvation?

For almost 2,000 years, the human mind has had great difficulty in defining salvation as nothing more than a simple trust in Jesus. For that reason, even those who rely the most heavily on a straightforward act of faith will frequently consider prayer to be a necessary part of salvation. It is often true that prayerful acknowledgement of sin, repentance of it, and trust in Jesus' righteousness as sufficient may help an individual personalize that commitment. We would encourage anyone who is making this step to express it to God in prayer. But it is not prayer itself—nor any other religious exercise—which initiates a relationship with Jesus. *It is the acknowledgement of personal sin and the need to change direction, coupled with faith in Jesus' righteousness as being all that is needed, which initiates salvation.*

The cost of a relationship with Jesus

Jesus frequently warned those who followed him that their faith would be costly. That certainly proved to be true in the early history of Christianity. All but one of Jesus' disciples died as martyrs. At times, the first century church was severely persecuted across the entire Roman empire.

For almost 2,000 years, believers in Jesus have been persecuted for their faith.

In some way, whether it results in severe persecution, or merely entails the routine of daily faithfulness, a life lived for Jesus will be costly.

But it will be a satisfying life with purpose and hope as you serve Jesus.

But now, being made free from sin, and having become servants of God, you have your fruit of sanctification [holiness], and the result of eternal life (Romans 6:22).



John 12:20 Now there were certain Greeks among those that went up to worship at the feast. 12:21 These, therefore, came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we want to see Jesus." 12:22 Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn, Andrew came with Philip, and they told

Jesus. 12:23 Jesus answered them, “The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 12:24 Most certainly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. 12:25 He who loves his life will lose it. He who hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life. 12:26 If anyone serves me, let him follow me. Where I am, there will my servant also be. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him” (John 12:20-26).



Luke 14:25 Now great multitudes were going with him. He turned and said to them, 14:26 “If anyone comes to me, and doesn’t disregard his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he can’t be my disciple. 14:27 Whoever doesn’t bear his own cross, and come after me, can’t be my disciple. 14:28 For which of you, desiring to build a tower, doesn’t first sit down and count the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? 14:29 Or perhaps, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, everyone who sees begins to mock him, 14:30 saying, ‘This man began to build, and wasn’t able to finish.’...14:33 So therefore whoever of you

who doesn't renounce all that he has, he can't be my disciple" (Luke 14:25-30, 33).



[The apostles were doing many miracles in Jesus' name and were drawing large crowds.] Acts 5:17 But the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy, 5:18 and laid hands on the apostles, and put them in public custody. 5:19 But an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors by night, and brought them out, and said, 5:20 "Go stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life."

5:21 When they heard this, they entered into the temple about daybreak, and taught. But the high priest came, and those who were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. 5:22 But the officers who came didn't find them in the prison. They returned and reported, 5:23 "We found the prison shut and locked, and the guards standing before the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside!"

5:24 Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard

these words, they were very perplexed about them and what might become of this. 5:25 One came and told them, “Behold, the men whom you put in prison are in the temple, standing and teaching the people.” 5:26 Then the captain went with the officers, and brought them without violence, for they were afraid that the people might stone them.

5:27 When they had brought them, they set them before the council. The high priest questioned them, 5:28 saying, “Didn’t we strictly command you not to teach in this name? Behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man’s blood on us.”

5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. 5:30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you killed, hanging him on a tree. 5:31 God exalted him with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins. 5:32 We are His witnesses of these things; and so also is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

5:33 But they, when they heard this, were cut to the heart, and determined to kill them.

5:34 But one stood up in the council, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, honored by all the people, and commanded to put the apostles out for a little while. 5:35 He said to them, “You men of Israel, be careful concerning these men, what you are about to do. 5:36 For before these days Theudas rose up, making himself out to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were dispersed, and came to nothing. 5:37 After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the enrollment, and drew away some people after him. He also perished, and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered abroad. 5:38 Now I tell you, withdraw from these men, and leave them alone. For if this counsel or this work is of men, it will be overthrown. 5:39 But if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow it, and you would be found even to be fighting against God!”

5:40 They agreed with him. Summoning the apostles, they beat them and commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 5:41 They therefore departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that

they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for Jesus' name.

5:42 Every day, in the temple and at home, they never stopped teaching and preaching Jesus, the Christ (Acts 5:17-42).

Chapter 10: **Living With Hope**

There are at least four major components in the hope which results from our salvation in Jesus. As almost everyone in traditional Christianity would agree, the first of these four components is the hope of eternal life that each individual may have as a result of being set free (redeemed) from sin. However, there are three other elements of hope that were largely overlooked during the past century.¹

The second important part of redemption through Jesus is that God will exercise perfect justice. Only when his justice is ultimately applied perfectly will

¹ If you have had a long-term acquaintance with what is called evangelical Christianity, the concept of the *redemption of society* and the *redemption of the universe* may be unfamiliar to you. Before you dismiss this as questionable doctrine, however, carefully consider the Scriptures cited in this chapter on which these teachings are based. It would also interest you to know that Jesus' future kingdom (Revelation 21:1-4) is increasingly being recognized among evangelicals as being an eternal kingdom on earth. Further, consider the promise made to Abraham in which God tells him that a specified geographical area on *earth* will belong to his descendants *forever* (Genesis 15:18-20). That promise can only be fulfilled if a redeemed, occupied, physical earth exists for the duration of the *forever* in the promise.

there be meaning to either obedience or disobedience (sin) in human choice.

The third vital part of redemption through Jesus is that society will some day be set free so that there will be complete peace between all nations and ethnic groups.

Finally, our fourth hope is that all of creation will be set free and there will once again be a perfect universe.

Perfect justice, a perfect society, and a perfect universe

Let's examine our opportunity for hope in three areas: perfect justice, a society that will truly be redeemed, and a universe that will someday be redeemed. The following description is from the revelation that Jesus gave to the Apostle John. It is found at the end of the New Testament book of Revelation. In this passage of Scripture, Jesus described his work as judge, and the beginning of his kingdom on earth. The Apostle John's words in these verses address perfect justice, and also lay the foundation for our understanding of the freedom that both society and the entire universe will some day experience.

Revelation 20:11 I saw a great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. There was found no place for them. 20:12 I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and they opened books. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. 20:13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and Hades [Hell] gave up the dead who were in them. They were judged, each one according to his works. 20:14 Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 20:15 If anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

21:1 I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth have passed away, and the sea is no more. 21:2 I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. 21:3 I heard a loud voice out of heaven saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with people, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

21:4 He will wipe away from them every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away.”

21:5 He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” He said, “Write, for these words of God are faithful and true.”

21:6 He said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give freely to him who is thirsty from the spring of the water of life. 21:7 He who overcomes, I will give him these things. I will be his God, and he will be my son” (Revelation 20:11-15, 21:1-7).

Our hope in perfect justice

Remember that we said in Chapter 2 that there cannot be true holiness without the freedom to also choose that which is not holy. Neither can there be a reward for choosing holiness without there also being consequences for choosing disobedience. Because justice is a part of the nature of God, he cannot mete out one without the other.

Obviously, Revelation 20:11-14 as quoted above is a description of hell. John is describing hell as a real place in which real judgment occurs. In our popular

culture, hell is often depicted as the place where a vengeful God sends those who have done bad things. This is a false characterization of what will actually take place.

1. Before time began, God designed us to be holy, while at the same time giving us choice. Therefore, we can choose to be disobedient if we are so inclined. Sadly, throughout history, many have chosen to live apart from God's holiness.
2. Knowing that humanity is completely incapable of producing holiness within themselves, the Creator became our Savior at tremendous cost to himself. "The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but is patient with us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; who desires all people to be saved and come to full knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3-4). It would be entirely incorrect, therefore, to portray God as being uncaring toward those who choose disobedience.
3. The essence of hell is not a devil with a pitchfork who delights in the torture of his victims. Rather, hell is simply the opposite of God's kingdom. The perfect coming kingdom will be good for the very reason that it will be where God is. In contrast, hell

will be hell for the reason that there will be no trace of a holy God.

4. Thus, God does not *send* anyone to either heaven or hell. He will merely honor the choice each of us ultimately makes. For those who want to be holy and be in his presence, he has made provision through salvation that we may be with him. On the other hand, for those who do not want to avail themselves of his holiness, he will permit them to exercise that choice and exist for eternity where he is not present. The name of the place where God is not present is hell. It will be a horrifying place of total chaos because there will be no hint of the holiness of God.

Our hope in a truly free society

In the remainder of Revelation 21, the Apostle John describes the size and splendor of this city called the New Jerusalem. It is beyond imagination in both its wealth and its provision for its residents. Then in chapter 22, we are given a glimpse into the future that should take our breath away:

He showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On this side of the river and on that was the tree

of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruits, yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:1-2).

Why is this description so remarkable? Look at the short phrase, “The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

What would a nation that was *healed* to the standard of God’s perfect holiness be like? And what kind of freedom and personal fulfillment would every individual enjoy if all nations on earth were completely healed to this degree?

At this point, we can only speculate because the Apostle John did not give us many details. In today’s world, each nation contains at least one culture, if not multiple cultures. Anthropology studies substantiate that in order for a culture to be sustained, there must be language. Experience tells us that the diverse nations of the world have unique ethnic groups, unique arts, unique value systems, and unique festivities. All of these unique qualities of a nation, we believe, will be transferred in perfected form to the coming kingdom of God.

Can you imagine the health of a world in which each nation respects the richness and depth of its own language and culture while at the same time honoring those same elements in every other group of people?

It will be a world in which no ethnic group will be viewed as being either superior or inferior to another; in which no one language will be dominant, and where acceptance of others will prevent language from being a barrier. In a way that we cannot yet grasp, cross-cultural communication will be fully functional. Each culture will preserve its arts, its value systems, and every other quality that makes it unique within the bounds of holiness, while at the same time equally guarding that same freedom for all others.

But why, you might ask, would God not just eliminate human diversity in his coming kingdom? He could clone all individuals in some identical heavenly ethnicity, permitting only one language, giving everyone the same taste in art and music, and avoiding all of the headaches of the redemption process that would be necessary in order for all nations to be healed. The answer is very simple. The New Jerusalem under Jesus' rule will display for all eternity his power to set mankind free of sin. He is not merely able to create heavenly clones who will cooperate with each other. He will show forever that his death and return to life (resurrection) is sufficient to set free (redeem) even the most antagonistic of nations and unify the most widely diverse cultures.

We cannot comprehend the hope that this healing of nations will bring. Every individual will have the ability to develop to his or her highest potential. All of humanity's hindrances resulting from poverty, lack of education, and political strife will be removed.

What an immense hope this gives us.

Our hope in a perfect universe

In Chapter 7, we saw the verses that say, “For the creation waits with eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of decay into the liberty of the glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:19-21).

First, we note that it was God himself who crippled creation (“creation was subjected to vanity [it was in some way crippled], not of its own will, but because of him [God] who subjected it”). Being inanimate or non-human life with lower cognitive functions, creation does not have a free will and cannot exercise choice. God's response to human sin condemned creation to its present state of imperfection.

It is difficult to know the full extent to which creation was altered. As we look at the universe

today, we still marvel at its beauty and grandeur, whether through the astronomical, geological, or life sciences. But somehow our human disobedience to God brought disorder to the created world. Of course, some of that disorder has been caused by our own wanton destruction of our environment and natural resources. Yet someday, when Jesus establishes his kingdom on earth, this disorder will be rectified.

Hope can therefore be compounded. We can have a hope of being set free (redeemed) as individuals. In addition, however, we can have hope that God will exercise perfect justice. Then we can have hope that society will someday be set free so that there will be complete peace between all ethnic groups. Finally, we can add to all of that the hope that the entire creation will be set free and there will once again be a perfect universe.

Discontinuity between the individual and society

In Chapter 1, we said that during a period in the 1960s and 1970s, the brokenness of an individual was often viewed independently from the brokenness of society. It was assumed that an individual's problems could be resolved without addressing the need of society. Today, there is a growing sense that to successfully redeem an individual from a broken

society that has no hope, the society must be redeemed just as completely as the individual.

Notice, however, the hope that Jesus is offering to those who are in relationship with him. Our hope is not just that the individual may be redeemed. There is also the hope that society—and even nations—will be perfectly redeemed. The hope for those who will one day live in the kingdom of God is that not only will they as individuals be completely redeemed, but that everything in their entire universe—other people, their unique ethnic group, nations, the earth, and the physical universe itself—will be wholly redeemed.

For all future time, this completed hope will be a testimony to the Creator's ability not only to create, but also through his death and resurrection almost 2,000 years ago, to perfectly redeem everything he made.



Our soul has waited for Yahweh. He is our help and our shield. For our heart rejoices in him, because we have trusted in his holy name. Let your loving kindness be on us, Yahweh, since we have hoped in you (Psalm 33:20-22). Now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in you (Psalm 39:7). For you are my hope, Lord Yahweh; my confidence from my youth. I have relied on you from the womb.

You are he who took me out of my mother's womb. I will always praise you (Psalm 71:5-6). For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that through patience and through encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope (Romans 15:4).

Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good work and word (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17). Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and Christ Jesus our hope (1 Timothy 1:1). Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's chosen ones, and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who can't lie, promised before time began; but in his own time revealed his word in the message with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior (Titus 1:1-3).

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation [for] all men, instructing us to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we would live soberly, righteously, and

godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good works (Titus 2:11-14). whom he poured out on us richly, through Jesus Christ our Savior; that, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:6-7).

Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, proof of things not seen...Without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to him, for he who comes to God must believe that he exists, and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him (Hebrews 11:1, 6).

1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy became our father again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 1:4 to an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance that doesn't fade away, reserved in Heaven for you, 1:5 who by the power of God are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 1:6 Wherein you greatly rejoice, though

now for a little while, if need be, you have been put to grief in various trials, 1:7 that the proof of your faith, which is more precious than gold that perishes even though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ— 1:8 whom not having known you love; in whom, though now you don't see him, yet believing, you rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory—1:9 receiving the result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

1:13 Therefore prepare your minds for action, be sober and set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ—1:14 as children of obedience, not conforming yourselves according to your former lusts as in your ignorance, 1:15 but just as he who called you is holy, you yourselves also be holy in all of your behavior; 1:16 because it is written, "You shall be holy; for I am holy." 1:17 If you call on him as Father, who without respect of persons judges according to each man's work, pass the time of your living as foreigners here in reverent fear: 1:18 knowing that you were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from the useless way of life

handed down from your fathers, 1:19 but with precious blood, as of a faultless and pure lamb, the blood of Christ; 1:20 who was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of times for your sake, 1:21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead, and gave him glory; so that your faith and hope might be in God (1 Peter 1:3-9, 13-21).

If you want to know more about God and Jesus, we encourage you to read the Bible.

If you do not already have a Bible, we suggest that you find a modern English translation such as the *Today's English Version* (TEV) which is also known as *Good News for Modern Man* or the *New International Version* (NIV).

You may download and print the *World English Bible* which has no copyright from the free website at <http://ebible.org/bible/web>. You may also download free, uncopyrighted MP3 audio recordings of the *World English Bible* from <http://ebible.org/webaudio/mp3.htm>.

We suggest that you begin by reading the New Testament first because it is the part of the Bible that tells the story of Jesus.