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MAGNIFIED

ANSWERS TO 25 INTERESTING BIBLE QUESTIONS

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Unless otherwise indicated, Bible quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

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Preface

Questions are good. It is a sign of a seeker! We all have questions as we read the Bible and God has designed it so.

As long as we are sincerely seeking for answers, the Lord will provide it all through different sources. He is the ultimate Source of all truth. In Him and His Word we find answers to all our quests. He alone can satisfy the longing of the soul and the probing of the human mind that wants to know more. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, God ministers to us.

The questions in this book *Magnified*, are real-life questions asked by people who wanted to dig deeper into the understanding of God's Word. I am sure these are some of the questions that you might have too or you might be confronted with, one day. This little book would be handy as you study and share God's Word!

We need to study and search the Word of God to satisfy our souls and also answer believers and unbelievers who might have questions on different Bible passages. The Word says, "The heart of the righteous studieth to answer" (Proverbs 15:28). So let's study to answer our own questions and be prepared to answer others as well.

--Michael Pedrin

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1

Wasn't the bronze serpent made by Moses in the wilderness an idol? Wasn't it idolatry to look upon it for healing?

No! It wasn't, though apparently it seems so. First of all, we need to understand who defines what idolatry is? Is it man or God? The logical reasoning is—if it was idolatry, do you think the wise God would contradict His own Word?

Let us get the context and see why the bronze serpent was made.

And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for here is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. (Numbers 21:5)

True, there was no bread and water in the wilderness through which the children of Israel were traveling. But God had provided them free and healthy bread from heaven every morning and water from the rock (See Exodus 16:35; 17:5, 6). They called the bread of heaven, which was named manna, which angels also eat or provided (See Psalm 78:24, 25), as “light” bread. Another version says “this worthless bread” (NKJV). They ridiculed and scorned what God provided.

See their audacity and complaining spirit and how they questioned God's wisdom: “Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?” We need to ask—were they “dying” in the wilderness? Wasn't God miraculously sustaining them? What they accused God of doing, He permitted it to happen.

And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. (Numbers 21:6)

We need to be careful not to accuse God of something that He is not really doing, lest He makes the very thing happen! We are to learn from past experiences, that God has recorded for our benefit. Paul said:

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

Only when tragedy strikes we tend to turn to God for help and deliverance. That is exactly what our forefathers did when the serpents killed many of their loved ones.

Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. (Numbers 21:7)

God, not only permitted the fiery serpents to be there in the camp but He also made a way out for them when they requested for the serpents to be taken away.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. (Numbers 21:8)

Why didn't God simply remove the serpents from the camp? Why did He prefer to have them around and simultaneously provide a way of healing by looking at a bronze serpent? The serpents that were biting them represented someone else,

That old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan. (Revelation 12:9)

As Satan is still around in the world of sin, hurting us all the time, so also were these serpents in the wilderness permitted to be around. But as God provided a way of escape for us through Jesus Christ our Lord, on the Cross of Calvary, so also the Lord symbolically provided a way of escape for them in the wilderness through the brazen serpent on the pole.

When we see the bigger picture we realize that this is the way the Lord works, with us sinners, most of the time in this world filled with troubles. He does not promise to remove the troubles and trials that we face, but He gives us a solution and the needed help to face it and overcome it. Jesus said,

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

When Paul prayed three times for the removal of the “thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan” (2 Corinthians 12:7), God did not remove it, but gave him the remedy for it.

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Isaiah the prophet has written down what the Lord said about how He deals with our problems:

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour. (Isaiah 43:2, 3)

The trouble is not taken away, but God is our companion through it—and that is so comforting. God has the power, no doubt, to remove the very problem, but most of the time He prefers to let it remain there for our own good.

The Children of Israel were told to look upon the brass serpent, which the Lord commanded to be placed upon a pole, but He did not command them to bow down to it or to worship it.

And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

(Numbers 21:9)

When their eyes were fixed on the brass serpent, they did not die of real snakebite. By faith they had to look at it. Of course, there was no miraculous power in the brass serpent; it was the power of God that healed them. Also when the children of Israel sinned and were stung with the venom of the real serpent—the devil—they were to bring an animal sacrifice as a means of deliverance (See Leviticus 3:1-12). But there was no real power in the blood of bulls and goats to wash away their sins, as Paul wrote:

For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

(Hebrews 10:4)

It was only a symbol of something to come. It was the shadow of:

The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

Like the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament the brass serpent was symbolizing Christ to whom we have to look upon for healing of the soul and forgiveness of sin. He said:

Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. (Isaiah 45:22)

But, one might say: wasn't it wrong to make a brazen serpent in the first place? Doesn't the second commandment (Exodus 20:4, 5) forbid even making any idol or graven image? It appears so!

Consider this for example. One of the 10 Commandments says, "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13.) But did not God command the children of Israel to put to death the ones who did grievous sins? (See Leviticus Chapter 20). Was God contradicting Himself by asking them to kill people? No! These killings were reflecting the destruction of the wicked in the final judgment when God would execute the "second death" which is the "wages of sin" (Revelation 21:8, Romans 6:23).

Also the book of Proverbs talks much about harlots, and cautions God's people not to be trapped by them (See Proverbs 7:6-12, 25-27). But did not God command Hosea the prophet to marry an unrepentant harlot? (See Hosea 1:2, 3). God asked Hosea to do this strange act because He wanted to give the nation Israel a live demonstration of something. In the spiritual marriage God was the husband and they were his wife; and God was faithful and they weren't.

Many times we get the actions of God wrong. Listen to God speaking to us:

Ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal? (Ezekiel 18:25)

Through prophet Isaiah, God spoke out:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than

the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8, 9)

The purpose of God in placing the brazen serpent on the pole was later twisted by these idolatrous people. The “Old serpent, which is the devil and Satan” (Revelation 20:2), deceived many of the children of Israel. That brazen serpent, which was just a temporary remedy and a symbol of an eternal truth became an object of worship for the people. Several hundred of years after Moses’ death, this brazen serpent was still an attraction to the spiritually blind people. Hezekiah, the king of Judah, by the inspiration of God, acted swiftly against this idolatry:

He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it. (2 Kings 18:4)

The Bible adds, regarding Hezekiah:

And the Lord was with Him. (2 Kings 18:7)

The temporary erection of the brazen serpent by Moses in the wilderness at the command of God was not at all idolatry but a symbol of Calvary, the permanent solution to our sin problem. As the children of Israel burnt “incense” and worshipped the symbol of deliverance, today many Christians are doing the same by burning incense and worshipping the cross which is the symbol of Jesus’ sacrifice. The subject (the Lord Jesus Christ) should be worshipped and not the object (the cross).

The Israelites took the very things of God which were supposed to be lessons of faith and medium of blessing and made them objects of worship. It is the nature of sinful man to incline to the worship of the

instruments and agents that God chooses to use to bring honor and glory to Him, than to God directly.

Yes, that brazen serpent symbolized the Lamb of God who hung on the cursed cross for the healing and the restoration of all those who behold Him by faith! Jesus later drew a comparison of the brazen serpent to Himself when He spoke to Nicodemus. He said,

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

(John 3:14)

2

Isn't the serpent a symbol of the Devil? Then why did Jesus compare Himself to a serpent when He said, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up"? (John 3:14)

Yes, Jesus compared Himself to that serpent which the Lord commanded Moses to make for the healing of the people. Was it a good comparison, is the question? Certainly yes! There is a lot of truth concealed therein when we look at it a little deeper.

A serpent is a cursed creature. Remember God cursed the medium that the devil used in the Garden of Eden?

And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. (Genesis 3:14)

The serpent in the Garden of Eden was not the devil, but was only a medium of the devil; that is, the devil was in the serpent. Don't we have today, too, people who are possessed with demons? They are not devils in flesh and blood, but humans who have the evil one residing within.

That serpent was a real serpent; it was used as the medium by the enemy of souls. And the curse of sin came upon the earth through this medium that the devil used.

God, on the other hand, used another medium where the curse would be removed. The Son of God

would be the instrument through which God would undo what Satan did through his medium.

Jesus bore the curse of sin upon Himself on the Cross. He is called:

The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

Listen to what Paul said about Jesus hanging on the tree, or the Cross:

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree. (Galatians 3:13)

As the serpent was cursed for being a medium of the devil to bring in sin into our world, Jesus was cursed, for our sakes, being the medium of God to pay the penalty for sin, and to take away sin from this world.

His curse was a blessing to us. The apostle tells us of the blessings we receive because of Christ being cursed for our sakes:

Being made a curse for us... that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Galatians 3:13, 14)

It was a grand and unfathomable exchange of love for us, sinners! Peter too said:

By whose stripes ye were healed. (1 Peter 2:24)

That is the reason Jesus cried out in deep agony as He was being crushed with the curse of sin on that rejected and despised cross:

My God My God, why hast thou forsaken me. (Matthew 27:46)

He was condemned for our sins because God loved the world so much! Because Jesus, the innocent

Son of God, was condemned to die the second death, voluntarily, we escape the condemnation and curse. When we believe and look upon the Son of God hanging on the Cross, by faith, as the children of Israel looked upon the brazen serpent, the symbol of curse in the wilderness, we escape the condemnation of eternal death, as they escaped the first death. What a promise we have:

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

(Romans 8:1)

O' what love! God preferred His only begotten Son to die rather than to see us perish forever! Paul wrote:

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

(Romans 8:32)

Christ did not mind being cursed and condemned for us; He did not mind bearing the marks of guilt for us; He did not mind risking His own life for us; He did not mind being looked upon as the One who deserved it; He did not mind facing the justice of God's holy law for us; He did not mind hanging between two thieves and being "numbered with the transgressors"! (Mark 15:28).

Jesus not only took our sin on Himself, but it was little more than that. Paul writes,

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Therefore He told Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, who knew very well the story of the brazen serpent:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:14-18)

What a soul-stirring and clear message that was!

Only by beholding the Savior through faith on the Cross, whose power transforms, can we escape from death, the eternal death, which comes because of the sting of that:

Old serpent called the devil and Satan.

(Revelation 20:2)

Thank God for Jesus who bore the curse so that we can live and be blessed forever! Thank you Lord Jesus for doing it for us!

3

Didn't Uzza do the right thing in trying to hold the Ark of God when it was about to fall? Why did God kill him for obviously a good intention on his part? (See 1 Chronicles 13:10)

Uzza (also spelt as Uzzah) and Ahio were chosen to drive the cart that contained the ark of God from the land of the Philistines to the land of Israel. It was a great day indeed for all the people of God.

On the way the ark of God tilted, and Uzza put forth his hand to hold it.

And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God. (1 Samuel 6:6, 7)

The Lord smote him for his "error", it says. Obviously it means he did something that he should not have done!

Explicit commands were given regarding who could handle the ark. Not everyone, even among the priestly clan, was to touch it for any reason. However good his intension was, it was against the Word of God. Only the sons of Kohath could bear the Ark of the Covenant which had the Ten Commandments within. It is written:

And when the tabernacle setteth forward, the Levites shall take it down: and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up: and the stranger that

cometh nigh shall be put to death.
(Numbers 1:51)

And when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation... And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Cut ye not off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites: But thus do unto them, that they may live, and not die, when they approach unto the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in, and appoint them every one to his service and to his burden: But they shall not go in to see when the holy things are covered, lest they die. (Numbers 4:15, 17-20)

God had already given enough instructions regarding the most holy thing of the sanctuary. Obedience is first; whatever might be one's intentions does not matter. It is written:

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice. (1 Samuel 15:22)

The result of touching the most holy thing was death. God wanted people to have holy fear when they drew near to this most sacred item without appropriate preparations.

There was a series of errors done before this fatal error occurred. First, of all the ark was to be borne upon the shoulders of the priests who belonged to the

Kohathite family. Second, in the prescribed way it had to be borne on shoulders with the staves or poles. God said,

And thou shalt cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in the four corners thereof; and two rings shall be in the one side of it, and two rings in the other side of it. And thou shalt make staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold. And thou shalt put the staves into the rings by the sides of the ark, that the ark may be borne with them. (Exodus 25:12-14)

The cart tumbling was a test to Uzzah. Would it fall? No! It didn't and it wouldn't. Like the ship that carried Jesus and the disciples looked like it would sink but it didn't and couldn't, so also the ark of God, wouldn't! Uzzah, instead of praying to God for help thought that God needed his help to protect the ark!

He was the wrong man for the job with the wrong methods to transport the most sacred furniture, and with an unprepared heart it cost him his life!

The Philistines, though they touched it, were not punished severely as they did not know the Word of God. But Uzza, being a Jew, was expected to know it. God will not punish anyone so severely if light has not been given!

Also we need to remember that no one naturally does something daring and bold. It is a constant, step-by-step, departure from the right path that finally makes a person to be bold and careless. Like Judas Iscariot "because he was a thief" (John 12:6) who made robbing a habit became careless and bold enough, finally, to sell his Master for 30 pieces of silver, so also Uzza developed this careless attitude to holy things in his life and finally paid the big price "for his error".

He and a few others in scripture who were instantly punished are as an example to the rest not to undermine even the slightest instruction of God.

Uzza's punishment should make all of us alert and reverent to the holy law of God, lest on the Day of Judgment we be found wanting, and face second death finally!

Uzza's story also teaches us not to treat any holy thing lightly!

4

The Bible says—Prophet Isaiah walked naked for three years! How can God command Isaiah to do such a disgraceful act? (See Isaiah 20:2, 3)

Indeed the Bible talks about prophet Isaiah walking naked. Let us read the passage:

At the same time spake the LORD by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot. And the LORD said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia. (Isaiah 20:2, 3)

For three years the prophet was naked? Clothing is so important for man, not just to cover the shame but also to protect us from the weather, which might otherwise lead to falling sick.

Can you imagine the Lord bidding His own child, that to a great prophet of the Bible, to do such a disgraceful act? Would God not care for Isaiah's self-worth? And wouldn't Isaiah be a stumbling block and a source of temptation for lust, and also a bad example of immorality to the youth?

When people went to the presence of God, the Lord was particular that they not uncover themselves or expose themselves with improper covering. He said,

Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon. (Exodus 20:26)

And through the prophet of God the presence of God was manifested as He was God's representative. So why would God ask a great prophet to uncover himself, that too for 3 years?

"Naked"—does it mean really naked, without any clothes whatsoever? The word for naked in the Hebrew is "arom", and it could either mean fully naked or half clad. Paul too talked about being naked. He wrote to the Corinthian church:

Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace. (1 Corinthians 4:11)

Was Paul literally naked while writing the letter to the church? Surely not! Naked always does not mean without any clothes, but means without the luxury of the regular clothing.

When God says cover or clothe the "naked" (Isaiah 58:7), in the Bible, it means provide clothing to the poor and the needy. When you read James 2:15, 16, you come to know that clothing the naked means even giving a poor person some warm clothing.

Isaiah the prophet was wearing sackcloth, as symbol of mourning and God commanded him to remove that sackcloth. In that sense he was naked, not having the regular sackcloth which he was wearing. The Lord said:

Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot. (Isaiah 20:2)

Only the sackcloth he was asked to remove. But he would surely have had the inner garments on at least.

King Saul also was "naked" for a day and night, in the sense He removed his royal clothes!

And he stripped off his clothes also, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Wherefore they say, Is Saul also among the prophets? (1 Samuel 19:24)

Talking about King David the scripture says he uncovered himself on one occasion in public. And his wife Michal was upset.

Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel to day, who uncovered himself to day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself! (2 Samuel 6:20)

Was David literally uncovered or naked? No! He removed his kingly robes and was dressed differently. It says:

And David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod. (2 Samuel 6:14)

Isaiah too was naked, in that he was without his usual prophet's dress, and the garment of mourning!

5

We know from various scripture passages that the New Earth will be the eternal paradise home of the righteous. But how come Isaiah says that there will be death in the New Earth? (See Isaiah 65:20)

Before we come to the text of Isaiah, we will look at a very interesting text that the apostle James wrote regarding the connection between lust, sin and death. This is what he said:

When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. (James 1:14, 15)

The apostle Paul wrote:

The wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23)

For death to occur anywhere, sin has to be there, for “the wages of sin is death”. So, will sin be there in the New Earth—is the first question? Well, we know that there will be no sin, and no trace of sin in any form. So how can there be death?

Let us now analyze the verse in Isaiah:

There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. (Isaiah 65:20)

A casual reading suggests death. That is why we need to be cautious and not casual.

Let us analyze the context. Isaiah 65:17 gives the introduction to the passage—and the topic is “New Heavens and New Earth”. And right in that verse, it is

compared with “the former”, i.e., the old earth that we now are in. Two verses further down God says:

And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. (Isaiah 65:19)

This passage is about the New Earth, and God says there will be no crying there. Think for a moment—If there is going to be death in the New Earth, won't there be weeping and crying? (Only a hardhearted person will not cry, but there will be no hard-hearted persons there!)

It is sin that causes pain and suffering and finally death. And since there will be no sin there (See 2 Peter 3:13; Nahum 1:9 Malachi 4:1-3); there will be no death there (See Revelation 21:1, 4, 5; Isaiah 25:8, 9). At the end of that chapter of Isaiah, the last part of the verse, the Lord sums up the whole blessed passage thus:

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD. (Isaiah 65:25)

So there will be nothing that hurts, and there will be no destruction whatsoever. Therefore there cannot be death, because death hurts a lot, and it is destruction's most ugly face!

Listen to the Master Himself, the one who conquered death, talking about the life hereafter:

Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and they are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. (Luke 20:36)

With this background, what does Isaiah 65:20 really mean if there is no death at all? Please notice the three phases or stages of a person mentioned here—“infant of days,” “child”, and “old man”. During

Isaiah's time, hundred years was a dream for anyone to reach. (And isn't it the same today?) And like today, many couldn't see their dream come true, even in Isaiah's day. There were many in Isaiah's day that died in infancy, childhood, and manhood, just like in our times.

A person is called an infant (baby) from the time of birth till the age of approximately three years. From three years till approximately sixteen a person is called a child, and from the time one has fully grown in height, it is a series of stages—adulthood, middle age and finally old age.

In this sinful earth there are many infants who have not even lived their full days. And there are many children who have not seen their full phase, and of course there are many old people who come short of that coveted mark of a century. This is the issue that Isaiah is talking about in verse 20. Having the conditions of the present earth in mind, and the untimely striking of death that denies one from seeing the fullness of every phase of life, he speaks this passage as an assurance that the fullness of years will be there in the New Earth.

In the resurrection though people who died, will get up with immortal bodies (1 Corinthians 15:52-54), they will rise up with the same stature as they went down to the grave. Which means a little child who died in Jesus will get up as a little child at the resurrection. It is Isaiah again, who writes about the New Earth and mentions little ones of different age groups there—"a little child", "the sucking child" and "the weaned child". He wrote,

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.
(Isaiah 11:6-9)

These little children will grow in a perfect environment and will grow to the full potential of their different phases. Here again that promise,

There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. (Isaiah 65:20)

Infants can feel secure and happy thinking of the New Earth, as there will be: “no more thence an infant of days”. And an old man can be happy too, for it says, “Nor an old man that hath not filled his days”. (Well we know there will be no old men there, as time will have no bearing on us there. It is just an earthly term used to make us understand.)

What does it mean?—

The child shall die a hundred years old.
(Isaiah 65:20)

Please notice what you have probably missed out. It does not say that a “man” shall die a hundred, but a “child” shall die a hundred.

Can anyone, who is hundred years old, be called a “child”? At what age a person is addressed as a “child”? We have seen that it is from three years to sixteen years approximately. In our present earth,

childhood ends at sixteen or so, but over there, God says, it will end at hundred years!

That word 'die', means, "come to an end" (and it still has that meaning, doesn't it?). It means, a child will cease to be a child at hundred, or childhood will end at hundred. The phases that are short here will be really long there.

The Bible says:

All have sinned and come short.... (Romans 3:23)

We have come short not only of the glory of God but in many ways too. Each phase of life too has come short after sin kept establishing itself on earth. The length of each phase was longer in the beginning—during the start of our present planet. Adam was an hundred and thirty years old when Seth was born; and Seth was an hundred and five years when Enos was born; and Enos was ninety years when Cainan was born, and so on (See Genesis 5:3, 6, 9). But today you cannot imagine a couple having a child at hundred; they would never live till that period for that matter. And Noah begat children when he was around five hundred years old! (See Genesis 5:32).

During the early period of our present planet, childhood ended at around hundred—therefore they got married around that time. So it will be in the New Earth regarding the length of each phase of life. The longevity of every phase will be restored. Not that a child would die at hundred, but rather, a child would end, or cease to be a child, at hundred!

That verse also states:

The sinner being a hundred years old shall be accursed. (Isaiah 65:20)

We know that there will be no sinners there (See Revelation 21:27; Matthew 5:5). So what does the above passage of Isaiah mean? Here in our present

planet, there are a few who live even up to a hundred in spite of sin, a sinful life, a sinful environment, etc. Some reach the desired goal of a century even though they live a life that is displeasing in the sight of God. The longevity of years here is no proof of a pure and pleasing life. If a man has not been converted in this present life, he will be accursed and will have no part in the New Earth; and it does not matter how long he lived while on probation, on this planet, this present life. Justice will be meted regardless of anything—poverty, riches, status or age.

Many who reach a century here are praised as blessed people. The length of time that a person is alive here is no proof of how godly he was. There are many saints who die young, and that is no proof they were ungodly. The wise man wrote:

There is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness.

(Ecclesiastes 7:15)

If one has continued to live in sin, however long he has lived here, he will be cut off and will have no part in the New Earth.

One might say: shouldn't we take it literally—that a child would “die” there? Well then, you should take every word literally in that text itself. So that would mean, exactly at hundred a child will die (not a day more or less!); and that would also mean only men will live long, and not women, as it only mentions “old man”! Well, you see what happens if you take the word to mean just that and nothing else?

We praise God that the plan for redemption will be full and complete and even better than how it was at the beginning!

Also, some scholars suggest that God was not really referring to the New Earth in that passage

though the context is about the future life, but that He was talking about God's children in the present earth who could live a long life if they were true to God.

No doubt it has been God's desire to bless His children who obey Him with long life right here on this earth. It was always God's intention to bless his people with health and longevity even in this present sinful earth. Look at what God said to the children of Israel who were coming out of Egypt journeying to the Promised Land.

And the LORD will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 7:15)

As he would take away disease in the New Earth He wanted to do the same and give them long life, even here, if they obeyed Him. Unfortunately, that didn't happen.

Right in the 10 Commandments we have a blessed promise of living long:

Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. (Exodus 20:12)

The law of God is called "the commandment, which was ordained to life" (Romans 7:10). Yes, there is life and longevity promised to the obedient. The wise man wrote,

My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. (Proverbs 3:1, 2)

So, in that context even in this present earth it was God's intention to bless the nation Israel with long life, which didn't happen because of their disobedience, but which will be fulfilled in the New Earth!

6

Wasn't it John the Baptist who introduced Jesus as the "Lamb of God"? Then why did he doubt later whether Jesus was truly the Messiah? (See Matthew 11:2, 3)

Though Jesus and John were relatives, (their mothers were cousins—Luke 1:36) John did not know Jesus personally as they were living far apart. It was God who revealed it to John during the time of the Baptism, that Jesus was the Messiah. John testified:

And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God. (John 1:33, 34)

John was a fearless preacher. He openly pointed out the sins of the people regardless of who they were. Because of his straight testimony he was put in prison by Herod, the ruler of the Jews.

For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her. For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife. Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not. (Mark 6:17)

Probably, John was expecting Jesus to come and rescue him from prison with His wondrous display of supernatural power. But, instead of moving in that

direction, when He came to know of John's imprisonment, Jesus moved farther away!

Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee.

(Matthew 4:12)

John was informed by his followers of the marvelous works of Jesus. And he sent emissaries to Him.

Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? (Matthew 11:2, 3)

It says, he had “heard” of “the works of Christ” and then sent messengers with his questions of doubt. If John started to doubt without hearing the works that Christ was doing we probably can understand as to why he might have doubted; but having heard of His works and then doubting, is a paradox!

The thought, probably, that troubled John was—how come Jesus was not coming to help him? Was His power limited? Is it that He could only work smaller miracles, and therefore it was not possible for Him to rescue John?

The sympathizing Savior understood the struggle that John silently was going through. He did not rebuke him, but gave him more evidences so that all his doubts that Satan was trying to put in would be swept away. Jesus made the 2 disciples of John to watch some of His grand miracles and report firsthand what they saw.

Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are

raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. (Matthew 11:4, 5)

Many mighty miracles were performed right there, even the raising of the dead. So that would have given John hope and courage to face any eventuality boldly, even death, for the Messiah's power extends beyond life, beyond death, beyond any challenge!

John, being a prophet, would have known the Old Testament passages regarding the work of the Messiah that was foretold in the same book of Isaiah that also talked about his own mission. That Old Testament prophecy was getting fulfilled right in the sight of John's messengers. Isaiah penned down the prophetic words:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn. (Isaiah 61:1, 2)

It is interesting to note that Christ skipped the phrase in Isaiah's prophecy which reads, "to proclaim liberty to the captives", when he sent back a word to John who was a physical captive in the prison house of Herod. Yes, Jesus was spiritually setting many captives free from the prison house of sin, including John from the doubts that were imprisoning his mind!

Christ gently rebukes his forerunner with a blessing intact in it. He said:

Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me. (Matthew 11:6)

The above verse indicates that there is a possibility for one to be offended with the ways of Jesus. He may not work the way we want Him to, He may not answer our prayers the way we would like it to be answered, and He may not give us the things we desire. The same Gospel prophet recorded:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8, 9)

Jesus was reminding John of the ways and approach of God that is so much different to man's finite approach. He was inviting John to commit his thoughts to God's leading, whatever might be the outcome. John indeed stumbled at this point, but Christ strengthened him in his hour of crisis with works and words of love!

Even the disciples of Jesus doubted whether He was the Messiah when Jesus was put to death. They expressed this doubt to Jesus not recognizing that He was the risen Christ. They said,

But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel. (Luke 24:21)

But here, John is in prison and he realizes he might be put to death. Probably, John was seriously pondering if he identified the right person as the "Lamb of God"! If he didn't then it meant that John mislead thousands of people to someone whom he thought was the Christ! And could it be that, therefore, as a punishment from God he was now cast into prison for misleading people? The temptation was strong and his imaginations seemed to be right. But the words of Jesus and the first hand witness from his 2 disciples would have driven the doubts away.

After they were gone, as the multitudes lingered, Jesus gave assurance to the crowd, who probably started to doubt John whether he was a prophet or not for having such doubts on Jesus! Jesus gave them assurance, as well, and said that John was greater than a prophet. In fact Jesus also said John was the greatest born of women (apart from Jesus, of course).

But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.... Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist. (Matthew 11:9, 11)

This incident is a gentle reminder for all of God's children to realize that doubt is a powerful weapon of Satan and only through absolute faith in God and His Word, we can overcome doubt! And God wants us to,

Walk by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7)

7

God told Adam, “For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17). But Adam died 930 years later!

In the Garden of Eden God gave a test to Adam. Also God spelt out the consequence of disobedience clearly:

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (Genesis 2:17)

The phrase, “for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” could also mean for certainty you will die if you eat it, though it doesn’t specify when. Another translation puts it this way:

And of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou dost not eat of it, for in the day of thine eating of it--dying thou dost die.’ (Genesis 2:17) (YLT)

So it simply means death will be the result and you can’t escape from it.

Let’s look at the first sinner in heaven, Lucifer. He and the angels that joined him didn’t die the day they sinned! They are still alive after 6000 years. God has sustained them for a purpose till the plan of redemption is complete and then He will execute divine judgment on them.

After Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit God stopped them from eating the fruit of life, and a gives a reason as well.

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever. (Genesis 3:22)

As the tree of life would perpetuate life if they ate of it so also the tree of knowledge of good and evil would perpetuate death if they ate of it.

The process of death began that very day they ate the fruit. Adam and Eve felt a change in their own bodies. One of the first things that this process of death brought was the sight of their shame. The divine clothing of light which was theirs, with which also angels are covered with, departed from them, and they saw that they were naked.

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. (Genesis 3:7)

The physical body started its degeneration. The spiritual standing with God was cut off as well and they felt spiritually naked too along with the sense of physical nakedness.

Sin is dangerous because it disconnects a person from the Source of life.

But your iniquities have separated between you and your God. (Isaiah 59:2)

When one is separated from God, the Source of life, death which is the opposite of life, is the natural consequence.

The pronouncement of death was decreed to Adam that same day he sinned that he would surely die one day.

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art,

and unto dust shalt thou return. (Genesis 3:19)

Also Adam and Eve saw what death was all about, when the first sacrifice was performed that very day in their presence when an animal was slain, so that their spiritual nakedness could be symbolically covered with the skin of an innocent victim.

Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them. (Genesis 3:21)

This sacrifice served two purposes. Adam now saw what death was, which he would later experience, and also he saw by faith the death of Christ his Savior, dying in his place, which gave him hope of living again, even though he would die the first death.

It took Adam 930 years to finally die. It just shows that death couldn't get Adam that quickly as he was made perfect in the image of God, with full of life and vitality. But our human frame now, 6000 years later, can hardly survive a sinful environment for 70 or 80 years.

But we need to also remember it is because of the plan of salvation, Adam and all of us sinners are still alive. God is still sustaining our lives in this sinful world which can go down very easily. The scripture says,

For in him we live, and move, and have our being. (Acts 17:28)

It is by grace and the extended probation from God that we are still alive. God is hoping that during this time of unmerited favor, we would accept His offer of eternal life that comes to us freely through the atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said,

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever

believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

8

What did Jesus mean by saying, “No man hath ascended up to heaven” (John 3:13)? The Bible clearly presents the translation of Enoch and Elijah to heaven!

We know from Scripture about the translation of Enoch and Elijah into Heaven without seeing death.

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him. (Hebrews 11:5)

And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. (2 Kings 2:11)

Also Moses was resurrected and taken to heaven, (See Romans 5:14, Jude 1:9), and the confirmation of it is seen when Moses, along with Elijah, appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration talking to Jesus (See Matthew 17:1-3)

Soon after saying “no man has ascended to heaven” in verse 13 Jesus made a reference to Moses, in the very next verse, the man who was taken to heaven. Jesus said,

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up. (John 3:14)

Just before Jesus made that statement about how “No man hath ascended up to heaven”, He was talking

about the authority and certainty of His teachings. He said,

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen. (John 3:11)

Jesus was telling Nicodemus that He is talking from experience of what He knows and has seen. Jesus not just knows about heaven and has seen heaven, but He is “the Lord from heaven” (1 Corinthians 15:47) who has come down for a purpose.

He said, to a group of Jews elsewhere:

Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.

(John 8:23)

Not only is Jesus the only One, among men, to have come down from heaven to tell us about heavenly things, He is the only One who has seen God the Father, and therefore is the only One truly qualified to speak about the God of heaven as well. It is written,

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. (John 1:18)

Yes, Enoch, Elijah and Moses ascended to heaven but didn't return to teach people about heaven and heavenly things. (Though Moses and Elijah came down on the Mount of Transfiguration, they didn't speak to anyone except Jesus Christ). So, Jesus was essentially telling Nicodemus that that He is the only One truly qualified to talk about heaven and heavenly things because He is the only One who has come down from there. That verse continues,

Even the Son of man which is in heaven. (John 3:13)

Yes, the Son of man was on earth when He said that. So what does it mean—"the Son of man which is in heaven"? It simply means heaven is the place of Jesus; He came from there and He will return there; that's his abode; that's His Father's house and that's His permanent residence! He later said,

I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. (John 16:28)

Interestingly Nicodemus, a teacher in Israel, who couldn't fathom Jesus' teaching on being born again in the early part of his discussion (See John 3:4), didn't object to Jesus' statement about "no man has ascended to heaven" because he realized that Jesus was not actually saying no one has gone to heaven but no one has gone to heaven and returned to speak and declare about heaven and heavenly truths except He who came from there!

9

Why was Cain's sacrifice rejected? Was it because he brought a wrong offering or because his heart was not right?

The actions of a right heart are always right, but the actions of a wrong heart could be either right or wrong—for actions could mislead! The logical conclusion is: if Cain's offering was rejected it could either mean that his offering was not right (because his heart was not right too) or his offering was right (but his heart was not anyway). So where was the problem?

In the Old Testament we see that not only animal sacrifice but even fruit offering were both brought before the Lord when God asked for it. For example it is written,

And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which thou, O LORD, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the LORD thy God, and worship before the LORD thy God. (Deuteronomy 26:10)

To understand what was really wrong with Cain we need to read that passage of scripture and then analyze it.

This is the first act of worship in human history that is recorded where the two brothers came to offer before the Lord.

And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof.

And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.
(Genesis 4:2-5)

It is obvious from the passage that both the brothers came together to offer an offering before the Lord. They were evidently following a particular time schedule for the sacrifice before the Lord. Cain brought “The fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD” and Abel brought “The firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof”.

The Bible says:

The LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. (Genesis 4:4)

It is clear from the above verse that God was displeased not only with Cain but with “his offering” too. And on the other hand God was pleased with Abel and “his offering”, the verse declares. So the problem was not only with Cain, but with his offering as well, which means he didn’t bring what was expected of him.

The New Testament sheds more light about this incident. Paul wrote,

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts. (Hebrews 11:4)

“By faith”, Paul wrote, that Abel offered unto God “a more excellent sacrifice”. The same apostle Paul tells us elsewhere that faith is connected to hearing and obeying the Word of God. He wrote,

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17)

Abel heard and obeyed the Word of God in bringing “a more excellent sacrifice” whereas Cain didn’t pay heed to the instructions given regarding the sacrifice. Obviously they both knew what God wanted from them, and Abel responded positively because his heart was right before God and Cain stubbornly bought what he thought was right in his sight because his heart was in the wrong place!

John the apostle also wrote about Cain and Abel and their actions.

Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous. (1 John 3:12)

His “works” were evil, but his brother’s works were righteous, therefore Cain slew Abel, he says. The only work of the two we have in the Genesis record is their offerings to the Lord, their spiritual works. Not only did Cain not have “faith” but he didn’t have “works” too. And the Bible says,

Faith without works is dead. (James 2:26)

He was dead both ways—not having faith and works too! But Abel had both.

The Lord did not just reject Cain and his offering but also gave him the reason for it. He said,

If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. (Genesis 4:7)

Something was wrong with what he did. Something was wrong with his offering. “If thou doest well” God said, he would have been “accepted”. God was addressing his action that was wrong.

We really are not told in Genesis how God demonstrated to both of these worshippers--one of acceptance and the other of rejection. It is possible that God responded the same way like the two groups

of worshippers later at Mount Carmel where Elijah's offering was accepted by God, made evident by the fire coming down from heaven and consuming it. It says,

Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice. (1 Kings 18:38)

The Word of God highlights not just about the sacrifice that Abel brought but also it mentions specifically that he offered the "fat" of his sacrifice. Abel offered:

The firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. (Genesis 4:4)

The "fat" of an animal signifies sin. Isaiah later wrote of the people who didn't offer the fat,

Neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. (Isaiah 43:24)

God wanted people to come and bring their sins to Him as sin is the real problem that separates a holy God from us. Jesus, the true "Lamb of God", also invites His people to come to Him with their sins, as only when we give our sins over to Him we can go free. He said:

I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. (Luke 5:32)

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)

Abel slew his sacrifice and also offered the "fat" of the animal to the Lord, as he hated sin, and wanted to always live a life free from it. But Cain acted like a self-righteous man who came with only a fruit offering to

God. It didn't have "fat" in it as if to indicate He wasn't a sinner.

Apart from the fat, even the blood of the sacrifice played an important part in the offering. When an animal is sacrificed its blood is shed. That blood which Abel shed of that innocent animal was a display of his faith in the Redeemer to come, and His saving blood! The Scripture declares:

Without shedding of blood is no remission.

(Hebrews 9:22)

When God reasoned out with Cain he, instead of changing his ways, decided to rebel and wanted Abel also to change his ways and come in-line with him. He took his younger brother for a walk—the last walk of his life—and talked with him about the whole episode. It is obvious that Abel did not agree with Cain, and would have told him to follow the instructions of God.

And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. (Genesis 4:8)

Since his offering was rejected primarily because it did not have blood in it (and the fat too,) Cain decided to finally shed blood—not the blood of a sacrificial animal, but the blood of his own brother! God told Cain,

The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. (Genesis 4:10)

But one might say: Cain brought the fruits of the ground because he was a "tiller of the ground", and Abel could bring an animal sacrifice because he was a "keeper of sheep". So Cain was giving God what he really owned.

Let me illustrate why that reasoning is not proper: Suppose a person is a computer engineer, does he then offer computers as sacrifices to the Lord? And if

someone is a carpenter, does he offer a wooden sacrifice? Wouldn't Abel readily give Cain a sheep for a sacrifice? Abel was a righteous man. If Abel refused to give his brother an animal then God should have been upset with Abel and not with Cain!

The two brothers were not the owners of the animal and plant kingdom respectively; they were just keepers of it. All the fruits were not Cain's exclusively. Abel and all others before the flood were vegetarians. (Genesis 1:29). As Abel was taking from "Cain's" fruits, (as Cain was the tiller of the ground,) couldn't Cain freely take one of "Abel's" sheep or at least asked for it?

Also we need to remember that in the ceremonial system of Moses, which was later introduced, there were offerings that were offered without blood—like the meat offering (grain offering). But they were linked with other offerings that had blood in it. And if it stood alone, it was specifically commanded by God for only certain offerings and for certain people, like the poor who could not afford to purchase an animal sacrifice. Cain came under no such category. He deliberately went against the plain teaching of God.

Cain was actually repeating the actions of his parents who, after they sinned, were trying human methods to solve their problem. When Adam and Eve found themselves naked,

They sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. (Genesis 3:7)

But,

The LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them. (Genesis 3:21)

For coats of "skin" to be made an animal was sacrificed—for skins are taken from animals that are dead.

Remember, it was the sign of blood that saved the Israelites during the first Passover and the absence of it brought death to the inmates. God told,

And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.
(Exodus 12:13)

Yes, Abel brought an animal sacrifice stained with blood which symbolized the sacrifice of Jesus and His holy blood that covers sin and therefore God accepted his offering, but Cain showed his rebellion by working out his own method of salvation without blood and rejected the only method—which is through blood!

10

Cain said in Genesis 4:14—“Everyone that findeth me shall slay me”. Who is this “everyone”?

Cain murdered his righteous brother Abel, after his sacrifice was not accepted by God while Abel’s was. He committed the first murder on earth. Guilt now filled his heart.

He feared what he did to his brother will be done unto him. He told God of this terrible feeling of being killed any time. He said to his Creator:

And it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. (Genesis 4:14)

These have to be his brothers who would probably want to take vengeance on Cain for the murder of their brother Abel. We know of similar incidences where the loved ones of the victim took revenge on behalf of their siblings (see 2 Samuel Chapter 13; Genesis Chapter 34).

Obviously, from the very words of Cain, we realize that there were other people around. He did not say if my “parents” find me, but he said, “every one” that finds me. His parents would not kill him. The sin that they committed in the beginning was more than enough for them to refrain from committing any further sins, by the grace of God.

Cain and Abel, the first two sons of Adam and Eve, were not children but men. We know that Cain was probably married at this point of time. Immediately after this act of cowardice Cain was driven from his home, and he dwelt on the east side of Eden, and

there is a mention of his wife conceiving. The record reads:

And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived. (Genesis 4:16, 17)

It is almost similar to Adam's story where he was driven out of Eden, and then Eve conceived. The Bible declares:

So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived. (Genesis 3:24, 4:1)

The "man", Adam, was driven out, it says. Obviously his wife, Eve, followed him out of the Garden. It is very interesting to note that Adam, though was married, "knew Eve his wife; and she conceived" only after the test. Cain too, their eldest son, had a test along with his brother, and had a similar experience. It was only after the test:

Cain knew his wife; and she conceived.
(Genesis 4:17)

When he was driven out from the presence of God into the land of Nod, his wife would have followed too, being "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24), like Eve followed Adam, earlier.

The Bible talks about Adam having many sons and daughters and not just Cain, Abel and Seth whose names are mentioned for a particular purpose.

And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth: And the days of Adam after he had begotten Seth were eight hundred years:

and he begat sons and daughters. (Genesis 5:3, 4)

Adam lived for 930 years. He had many children, for God gave him the direct command, in the beginning:

Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. (Genesis 1:28)

One might ask: Weren't these sons and daughters born after the birth of Seth? Well, the Bible does not say that. The fact it mentions the name of Seth and his birth, is because he would be the link through whom the Messiah would ultimately be born. Moses was recording the holy lineage.

Isn't it wonderful to know that Moses, who lived 1500 years before the coming of Christ, was told to record the name of Seth, and not the names of the other sons and daughters of Adam? It was clearly indicated here that he would be the seed through whom the promised Seed, Jesus the Messiah, would come!

Adam was 130 years old when Seth was born. It says:

He begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth.
(Genesis 5:3)

Seth resembled Adam more than any of his other sons. Probably the difference was hardly noticeable! Our first parents had "sons and daughters"; plenty of them from the beginning till their good old age permitted them. Don't forget Noah was five hundred years old when his children were born! (See Genesis 5:32)

Listen to what God said to Cain:

And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD

set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. (Genesis 4:15)

Notice the words, “whosoever slayeth Cain... lest any finding him”; and Cain’s words earlier, “everyone that findeth me shall slay me. “Whosoever”, “any” and “everyone” clearly indicate that the earth was fairly populated at this time with the brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces of Cain and Abel! And even the construction of the sentences is in present tense and not future tense indicating that many people were around when the murder took place. These words from the Lord, and from Cain himself, are proofs that Adam had many children by then.

One might ask: If there were other people around, why didn’t the Bible clearly mention it? Well, we need to look at what the issue in focus was. The issue was not about how many people were there, but about the difference of sacrifice of the two brothers. Remember in one of the parables Jesus talked about two people who went up to pray in the temple—a Pharisee and a publican (Luke 18:10). Because Jesus mentioned only two people who went to pray, does that mean no one else were there in the temple praying, accept these two? No, the issue was about not how many people went up to pray in the temple but about the difference of the two prayers.

So the issue in Genesis Chapter 4 was not about how many children Adam and Eve had, but about how these two sons were different from each other in their attitude towards God!

Cain and Abel were the first two children of Adam and Eve, but they were not the only children around at the time of the test at the altar of sacrifice, as is obvious from the verses just discussed above.

11

God says He is a “Jealous God” (Exodus 20:5). How can a holy God be Jealous? Isn’t jealousy a negative trait?

Jealousy can be a negative trait or a positive one. It depends on how it is used and the context of it. Jealousy in the negative sense means being “envious, desirous or covetous”, but Jealousy in the positive sense means, “unable to tolerate unfaithfulness”, “possessiveness”, etc.

Let us see the context in which God made that statement. Talking about worshipping graven images and other gods, He declares:

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. (Exodus 20:5, 6)

Since God is our Creator, He alone is worthy of worship. If we are unfaithful in rendering worship to Him and give the glory to another, God will make His displeasure known to us. This is not something negative but a positive trait indeed.

Let me illustrate it: A man has every right to show his displeasure if his wife flirts with another man. She is his possession and property and he can’t sit back and relax saying I need to be positive and share my belongings with others too! Certain possessions you

can't share; it is yours exclusively and you have a right to be upset and jealous.

The relationship that God shares with us spiritually is compared to a husband-wife relationship in the Bible. He said,

For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel. (Isaiah 54:5)

Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you. (Jeremiah 3:14)

Since God is like our husband, He will not tolerate our spiritual unfaithfulness to him and He will express His displeasure as any faithful husband would do.

Notice to which group of people He shows His unhappiness. It is to “them that hate me” (Exodus 20:5), He says. He does not say, to them that “don’t know me”, but to them that “hate me”. You cannot love or hate someone unless you know that person very well. So these people know God and hate Him, and therefore, He shows them His displeasure to them.

Can a holy God be a “jealous” God? Can these two attributes—holiness and jealousy—go together? Yes, it can. Listen to what Joshua says about God:

He is a Holy God; he is a jealous God. (Joshua 24:17)

So Jealousy and holiness can go together. Jealousy is not always a negative trait; it is a virtuous positive character trait too.

Like “jealousy” can be a positive or a negative trait so also “love” and “hatred” and many other words can be positive or negative in intent.

“Hatred” is good if it is “hatred to sin”; but “hatred” is a bad quality if it is “hatred to a person”. “Love” is a positive quality if it is “love God” or “love your

neighbor” but love is wrong if we “love sin”. So also “jealousy” for the right things is a positive quality and jealousy otherwise, is a negative trait!

We are God’s treasured possessions. We are His by creation and He paid a very great price to purchase us back from eternal destruction too. Doesn’t God, therefore, have a legal right to be jealous or dearly concerned over His own heritage? Doesn’t He also have the right to show us His displeasure if we flirt around with false gods, after knowing Him?

God says in the book of Ezekiel:

I will be jealous for my holy name. (Ezekiel 39:25)

God has a right to protect His holy name. The children of Israel nearly spoilt the name of God by committing abominable sins in the sight of the heathens. And God had to prove to all, who He is, and not what His children made Him out to be, to the world.

In Zechariah God talked about His jealousy for His place. He said:

Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. (Zechariah 1:14)

These two places were special to God. What happened there reflected His character and God had to be jealous and protect His name in these two holy places.

Look at Paul who, under inspiration, wrote to God’s church, the bride of Christ. He said:

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:2)

God’s jealousy is a “godly jealousy”. Paul mentions about the marriage of Christ and the church. Christ is the faithful husband and the church should

remain faithful. The Holy Spirit, speaking through Paul, had this burden of carefully watching over the purity of the church, as it is the lovely bride of Christ, the Son of God.

Yes, our God is a jealous God. He is very possessive of all His treasures. Even when one sheep was lost of the hundred, He went after it until He found it. It just shows His deep love and possessiveness, which is such a blessed trait. And this kind of jealousy is good for the safekeeping and happiness of all His creatures!

12

Why did Jesus ask Thomas to touch Him after His resurrection when He did not permit Mary Magdalene to do so? (See John 20:17, 27)

The first person that Jesus appeared to after His resurrection was to Mary Magdalene. Mark records,

Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene. (Mark 16:9)

Mary was so excited to see her Master that she wanted to hold on to Him and not let Him go. Jesus forbade her from touching Him at that point because He wanted to first present Himself to His Father first, being the first fruit of the great harvest to come (See Leviticus 23:10,11; 1 Corinthians 15:20). We see a few days later He allowed Thomas to touch Him.

Let us first read both the passages as recorded by John in Chapter 20:

The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre... Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God... Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst,

and saith unto them, Peace be unto you... And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them; then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. (John 20:1, 17, 19, 26, 27)

Thomas and Mary met Jesus. Mary met Him on the resurrection morning and Thomas after eight days. Mary was not permitted to touch Jesus because the Lord wanted to first meet His Father. Jesus said, "I am not yet ascended to my Father". But Thomas was permitted, and in fact was asked to do so, by Jesus. So this would obviously mean that Jesus already ascended to the Father and was now back, as that was the reason for Him in forbidding Mary earlier to touch Him.

It was not just Thomas who was permitted to touch Jesus after 8 days but on the same day, after Jesus met Mary, a little while later, a few other women met Jesus and held His feet and worshipped Him.

And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. (Matthew 28:9)

Obviously Jesus must have ascended to heaven and returned during this intervening period of time. Anyway, how long does it take for Jesus to travel back and forth from heaven to earth!

One might say: But didn't Jesus ascend to Heaven only after forty days according to Acts Chapter 1? Let us read those verses.

To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God... And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel. (Acts 1:3, 9, 10)

Here it does not say that Jesus ascended to heaven only after forty days after His resurrection, it just says that his disciples and many others witnessed the ascension on the fortieth day. So, did Jesus ascend to His Father before the grand public ascension on the fortieth day? Yes, He did!

Look carefully at what He told Mary in the passage on that resurrection morning:

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. (John 20:17)

The phrase—“I am not yet ascended”—means He would soon do so. Notice the tense of the phrase, “I ascend”. It is in the present tense and not the future tense—“I will ascend”. If He was referring to an act that would take place forty days later, then Jesus should have said—“I will ascend”. But the very fact that he used the present tense, “I ascend”, shows that the event was about to take place in the present tense.

What message did He want Mary to share with the rest? He said:

But go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and to my God and your God. (John 20:7)

If Jesus was referring to the 40th day ascension here, what was the urgency for Mary to convey this message to the rest? Wouldn't they all witness that event anyway? Also why should Jesus send Mary with a message about His 40th day ascension when Jesus would be meeting the disciples several times during his 40 days sojourn before that?

On another occasion Jesus appeared to them on the sea side. John wrote,

After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias..... This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead. (John 21:1, 14)

The apostle Paul says that at one time more than 500 people saw the risen Lord.

After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once. (1 Corinthians 15:6)

Luke wrote that during these 40 days Jesus regularly met with His people and spoke to them about heavenly things.

To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3)

From all these scripture passages we can safely conclude that Jesus first appeared to Mary and then ascended immediately to heaven to present Himself to the Father as the first fruit of the future harvest, then He came back that same

morning and appeared to the women, then to the disciples and the 500 people, then after 8 days He appeared again when Thomas was around and told him not to doubt but put his finger into the nail prints to confirm it was Him. Then Jesus appeared several times during these 40 days teaching them about the Kingdom of God and finally on the 40th day He ascended publicly to heaven!

13

Was Moses' act justified when he broke the two tables of stone? Why didn't God punish him for breaking what God wrote? (See Exodus 32:19)

In the entire Bible, only the Ten Commandments did God Himself write. The Scripture declares:

Two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God. (Exodus 31:8)

Obviously this was the most sacred part of the holy Bible. God wrote it twice and didn't allow Moses to write it, even the 2nd time, after he broke the first set.

God wanted to write this moral law Himself for a purpose. He wanted to show to all, that this law of His was indeed special. This was the rule of life, the principle of living. All the other laws and rules find their source in it. All Scriptures revolve round these ten rules. It is the transcript of God's holy character. The will of God is expressed in these ten precepts.

Paul wrote to the Roman believers about knowing God's will, and He said it is contained in His law.

And knowest his will...being instructed out of the law. (Romans 2:18)

The Psalmist David, too, wrote that obeying the law is God's will for our lives:

I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart. (Psalm 40:8)

In the final day, at the Second Coming of Jesus, a great group of religious people will be shocked to hear that they are lost because they didn't do God's will. Jesus said:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 7:21)

The will of the Father is so important. And His will is that we keep His law. The ones, who will be rejected at His 2nd Coming, are lawbreakers. Jesus said,

And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' (Matthew 7:23) (NKJV)

The law of God is like a mirror that reveals our sin. In fact sin is defined as breaking God's law.

Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. (1 John 3:4)

It is God's will that we keep it by His grace and not keep transgressing it.

The delivering of the law was a grand event. God in His glory first proclaimed it with His own voice.

And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God.... (Exodus 20:1, 2)

At the end of it, the people were so shaken up and fearful seeing the terrible sight on the mountain and hearing the awesome voice of God. The scripture records,

And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. (Exodus 20:18, 19)

The Lord didn't come alone. He came down with ten thousands of saints, that is, angels (Acts 7:53), during the giving of the law. Moses wrote:

The LORD came from Sinai... and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them.
(Deuteronomy 33:2)

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of stone, the people were engaging in a great sin by worshipping a golden calf and dancing around it. (See Exodus 32:15-26). In fact God told Moses about this and commanded Moses to rush down from the mount to the people.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation. (Exodus 32:7-10)

God had just instructed in Exodus 20, the Ten Commandments to all His people and here they were already breaking the law of God right at the foot of the mountain while the law-Giver was still writing! God wanted to destroy all of them as they were unworthy of His mercy and goodness, and to receive the holy law.

Moses, His faithful servant, was boiling with holy temper when he witnessed this sacrilegious sight:

And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount.

(Exodus 32:19)

Did Moses commit a great sin, or a greater sin than the people, for destroying the 2 tables of stone? Did he do something contrary to what God wanted him to do? No, he didn't!

When at Meribah, where he did something else out of anger by striking the rock twice, God rebuked him instantly and disciplined Moses for that (See Numbers 20:12). But here, at Mount Sinai, we don't see God rebuking or punishing Moses for breaking the 2 tables of stone. Obviously He didn't displease God here, but acted in according with what the Spirit of God would have impressed him to do.

The people would have got a shock of their lives seeing Moses breaking the tables of the law of God, which was written with the holy finger of God! If I may say so here--that was a demonstration of what sin is—sin is breaking the law of God! Pun intended! The people were breaking the moral codes of life by worshipping a false God. Moses was just showing them what they were doing in reality.

God told Moses later to come up again and bring another set of tables of stone and God would write out the law once more.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest.

(Exodus 34:1)

And he wrote on the tables, according to the first writing, the ten commandments, which the LORD spake unto you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly: and the LORD gave them unto me. (Deuteronomy 10:4)

Moses casting down the 2 tables and breaking it into pieces was a real demonstration of an important truth of what sin is, and God rewriting it also demonstrates that God's law still remains and is unchangeable.

14

Weren't the sacrifices of the Old Testament all pointing to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the true sacrifice? If so, then why does God say in Leviticus 4:28, 32, a goat or a lamb should be a female, and not a male?

It is true that all the sacrifices in the Old Testament were symbols of Christ. They were shadows of the reality, but only faint shadows. There can be nothing close to that perfect reality, we must all agree.

All the aspects of the shadow cannot be taken to represent the reality. Only what was intended has to be applied. For example, these animals walk on four legs, and eat grass; the birds that were sacrificed had wings. Obviously these shadows cannot be a perfect mirror of Jesus. There are many other things these animals had that Christ did not have in common with them—their features, their characters, etc.

Look at the priests in the Old Testament who were shadows of Jesus, the real High Priest. These priests, who were symbols of Christ, were sinners. But the one they represented did not sin. So they were symbols of Christ in their ministry, and not in all aspects.

Now coming to the masculine and feminine part of the offering: Is God male or female—is our question? Well, we know that God made Adam and Eve in His own image. The Scripture declares:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. (Genesis 1:27)

Who was the perfect image of God, the male or the female? Well, both were in God's image!

After God came down on Mount Sinai and gave the Ten Commandments, Moses instructed the people about God's appearance. He told the people that they only heard the voice of God but did not see His form. He said:

Ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude;....the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female.
(Deuteronomy 4:12-16)

We cannot limit God to a particular sex; He is above all limitations.

The woman is called "the weaker vessel" (1 Peter 3:7) compared to the man especially in physical strength. Muscularity represents strength and power, in that sense. God is portrayed in scripture in the masculine form because of his power and strength.

But when talking about His tender love, God many times, compares Himself to the love of a woman towards her child. He said in Isaiah:

Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. (Isaiah 49:15)

He compared His love to that of a mother because, on earth, there is no greater love that we know, than that of a mother. In fact His love is more than a mother's love!

Further down in Isaiah God compares Himself again to a mother. He said:

As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem. (Isaiah 66:13)

When Jesus talked about the protection and shelter that He wanted to offer Israel He used a symbol of a female creature: He wept and said:

How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! (Matthew 23:37)

So we clearly see, sometimes, God compared Himself to the tender love and affection that is more seen in women, than in men.

Now, going back to the sacrifices in the Old Testament--even before God instructed Moses about offering a “female” animal for sacrifice, we see God instructing the father of faith, Abraham, about it as well.

And he said unto him, take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. (Genesis 15:9)

A “heifer” is young female domestic cattle, or a young cow. And a “she” goat was also offered. So you have both, the male and female sacrifices, being used, even before the Leviticus system began.

It is interesting to note that for certain ordinances only a male offering was required and for certain other ordinances only a female offering would do, and for a few others either a male or a female was fine. And for people who could not afford to buy these animals they could bring fine flour (for sure, there is no gender here!). But whatever it was, male or female animal, one thing was common—the sacrifice.

Also, it had to be “without blemish” as they symbolized the spotless Son of God. And if it was not a blood offering it had to be without leaven. (For example, see Leviticus 1:3; 3:1; 4:2; Exodus 12:18).

It is interesting to note for which occasion a male was required, and for which occasion a female would do, and for which occasion gender specificity of the

sacrifice did not matter. For all the great Jewish annual feasts, only male sacrifices were to be offered (See Leviticus 23).

Look at the Passover for example. It was only a male sacrifice that was required here. God said:

Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats. (Exodus 12:5)

It is interesting to contemplate on what could be the reason for only a male sacrifice to be chosen during the Passover. As we know, Passover directly prefigured the death of Jesus on the Cross for our sins, to the very day. When Jesus died it was the day of the Jewish Passover (See John 13:1).

John the Baptist, at the time of Jesus' baptism, addressed Jesus as:

The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

Paul, talking about the death of Jesus, wrote:

Christ our passover is sacrificed for us. (1 Corinthians 5:7)

Jesus was the Passover Lamb in reality. It was on the Cross the fierce battle was fought. And it was when Jesus died as the Passover Lamb He defeated the devil.

Paul wrote of the battle between Jesus and the devil on the Cross. Talking about Calvary the apostle wrote:

Through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. (Hebrews 2:14)

Since Passover directly prefigured the battle on Calvary, to the very date of the event in reality, God chose to have a male sacrifice to typify it—as male denotes physical strength and power!

The story of Abraham going to offer Isaac his son on Mount Moriah, like no other story in the Bible, prefigured the heavenly Father offering His only begotten Son on Mount Calvary. And since this event in the life of Abraham directly symbolized Calvary's sacrifice, the substitute animal that God showed him, and which he offered in Isaac's place was a "male" offering. It was "a ram" (Genesis 22:13). A ram, as we know, is a matured male sheep. So you see, since that sacrifice directly represented Calvary, it was a male sacrifice. Yes, father Abraham laid Isaac, his son, on the wood symbolized the heavenly Father offering up Jesus His Son on the wooden Cross.

Leviticus Chapter 4 deals with the sin of ignorance. Here God talks about four groups of people committing this sin of ignorance—the priest, the congregation, the ruler and the common man. When the priest committed this sin, a young bullock was required (See Leviticus 4:1, 2). And a bullock, as we know, is male. When the whole congregation committed this sin, again a young bullock was required (Leviticus 4:13, 14). When a ruler committed that same sin, "a kid of the goats, a male" was required (Leviticus 4:22, 23). But when a common person committed that sin, "a kid of goats, a female" was sufficient (Leviticus 4:27, 28).

Now, why was there a difference in sacrifices for the same sin of ignorance? Let's try to analyze. A bullock is a bigger animal compared to a goat. When the priest sinned it was a bullock, a male one, to be offered. Since a priest holds an important position, as spiritual leader of the congregation, a bigger sacrifice was required. (As also today, if a pastor commits a crime, it has more serious consequences than a church member committing the same crime!).

And if the whole congregation committed the sin of ignorance it was equal to the priest's offering—a bullock.

If a ruler did it, it was only a goat—a smaller animal compared to the bullock—but a male one, as a ruler is also an important person but does not carry the equal weight of the priest.

If a common man did the same thing, only a goat, a female, was required.

Though man and woman are equal, in that both are made in the “image of God” (Genesis 1:27), there is a hierarchy that God established for the smooth functioning of the family. Paul wrote,

But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthians 11:3)

Also in the husband-wife relationship, though both are equal, God has established for one to submit to the other based on divine principles.

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. (Ephesians 5:22)

A “female” goat was sufficient for the common man in his sacrificial offering as it denoted “submission” to the will of God.

If they were poor, a pair of turtledoves or pigeons was sufficient, as they were not holding a weighty office as the priest was. If they were still poorer and couldn't afford a bird sacrifice, only a small amount of fine flour was sufficient. This just reveals what an understanding God we serve!

The poor man's fine flour symbolized the crushed body of Jesus on the Cross, like the broken bread of the New Testament during the communion service. And the rest had to offer either an animal or bird

sacrifice, and the blood of these scarifies symbolized the blood of Jesus which shed on the Cross, like the New Testament symbol of the wine (grape juice) in the communion service.

Yes, God had a reason when he specified the kind of sacrifice that was required for different occasions. Whether male or female, whether bullock, goat, heifer, ram or lamb—all had one thing in common—they all had to be without blemish, that's what really mattered. Each of these sacrifices was highlighting the different dimensions of the plan of salvation in symbolism.

If I may say so, God was sensitive to the feelings of women too. He didn't want women to feel sad when He gave the gospel in symbolism! God used not just the male animals for sacrifice but sometimes a female animal was used as well, according to the situation in demand.

But one might say: when the “reality” of these symbols, Jesus Christ, came, He came as a “man” and not as a “woman”! That is true. Jesus is called the “Son” of God, and the “Son” of man. But, please remember, God used a “woman” to bring forth His Son into the world and no man played a part in it! He had no human father, only a human mother. And if I may add (to the joy of women) it was only the men who were directly responsible in crucifying Jesus! (Though we all know it was the sin of mankind—men, women and children—for which He died). But it was basically the “men” who were bloodthirsty and demanding His death.

As many men were bloodthirsty for His life many women were weeping for His death. Luke writes,

And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep

not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. (Luke 23:27, 28)

So God has taken care of the sentiments of all—male and female—in His great plan of salvation!

Finally, in Jesus, we are all equal as far as salvation is concerned and the benefits of it. Paul writes:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

15

Please explain 2 Samuel 24:13 & 1 Chronicles 21:11, 12. They mention about the same event but give two different numbers of years for the famine!

Let us look at the texts concerned. The writer of 2 Samuel records:

So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land. (2 Samuel 24:13)

And the writer of Chronicles records:

So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Choose thee Either three years' famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else three days the sword of the LORD, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. (1 Chronicles 21:11, 12)

Indeed there are two different numbers given for the years of famine—"seven years" (2 Samuel 23:13) and "three years" (1 Chronicles 21:12). But when you look at the background and the broader picture of the famine problem, you will see that there is no contradiction.

Before we look into the “number” problem please note that both the verses, though talking about the same incident, are recorded not identically, though the message is the same. The two writers put it in their own style and not, probably, the same way the message was communicated to them. This is not a problem either because the Bible is “thought” inspired not “word” inspired. Even if we compare the Gospels we find the gospel writers word many similar stories a little differently one from the other.

Coming back to the story of David—was it “seven years of famine”, or, “three years’ famine”? Well, it should be three years of famine for his folly. “Three” is most likely the number as the other judgments are also in the number “three” option—three months and three days.

But one might say: how come Samuel’s record has the number “seven”? Let us look at the two verses again. “So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land?” (2 Samuel 24:13.) “So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Choose thee Either three years’ famine” (1 Chronicles 21: 11).

Talking about famine there is an interesting passage in scripture that Samuel records prior to this incident:

Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David enquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites. (2 Samuel 21:1)

Saul committed sin and the land was suffering “in the days of David three years, year after year”. Three years got completed and David wanted to know from

God why this was happening. And God revealed the cause for it. Immediately David looked to set right the situation so that the famine might stop. And when David did it, the Bible says:

And after that God was intreated for the land. (2 Samuel 21:14)

That is, sometime in the fourth year of famine the Lord stopped it.

Not far from there, this time king David himself does something wrong and one of the options God gives him is the punishment for the land through famine. The people just suffered severely for more than three years of famine (the fourth year it was stopped), and can you imagine another three years! That would make it a seven-year famine for the land in total!

One record reads:

So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Choose thee Either three years' famine. (1 Chronicles 21: 11)

That is, for David's sin—three years of famine.

And the other record reads:

So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? (2 Samuel 24:13)

That is, the land would now suffer for a total of seven years—4 years that were just finished for Saul's sin and 3 new years for David's sin!

So the texts of 2 Samuel 24:13 and 1 Chronicles 21:11, 12 are in perfect harmony, given from two different perspectives!

16

How could God command His prophet to lie? 1 Kings 13:18 says, “He said unto him, I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But he lied unto him.”

The story of the two prophets in 1 Kings Chapter 13 is a very interesting one. The “man of God” was deceived by an “old prophet” and was destroyed by a lion. We have in this story—a *prophet who lied and a prophet who died!*

The young “man of God” obeyed the voice of the Lord and prophesied against Jeroboam the king of Israel for all the evil he was doing. And the king got furious and commanded to hold him for which the king’s hand was “dried up” (1 Kings 13:4). Realizing that only the prayers by the same man of God would restore him, the king pleads with him to entreat the Lord to have mercy on him. And the young prophet responds positively:

And the man of God besought the LORD, and the king’s hand was restored him again, and became as it was before. (1 Kings 13:6)

King Jeroboam desired to reward the man of God, and wanted him to come to his palace and refresh up, for which he refused as the Lord had given him a clear command. He testified:

For so was it charged me by the word of the LORD, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink

water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest. So he went another way, and returned not by the way that he came to Bethel. (I Kings 13:9, 10)

Then, an interesting twist takes place. An “old prophet” who heard of what happened to king Jeroboam comes seeking after the “man of God”. When he finds him taking rest under an oak tree he bids him come to his house and eat bread. The man of God is quick to tell him that God instructed him not to do so. Listen to what the old prophet had to say to this:

He said unto him, I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But he lied unto him. So he went back with him, and did eat bread in his house, and drank water. (1 Kings 13:18, 19)

The Bible is clear that the old prophet “lied” to the young prophet! The question actually is not—how can God command His prophet to lie, but rather, whether the old prophet was a prophet of God, in the first place?

We know God is “truth” (John 14:6) and truth is the complete opposite of lie. The Bible is clear about the righteous character of God. It is written,

God is not a man, that he should lie.
(Numbers 23:19)

It was impossible for God to lie. (Hebrews 6:18)

To shew that the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him. (Psalm 92:15)

The Bible addresses the younger man as a “man of God”, but the older one is referred to as “an old prophet”, and not as “a man of God” or as “a prophet of God”. There lies the key!

Many times in the Bible we come across false prophets who are just called “prophets” without the adjective “false”. And one of the common things that these so-called “prophets” do, is lie!

The devil is the father of lies (John 8:44), and it is with his lies he deceived our first parents, too, who were not just man and woman of God, but more than that. They were directly shaped by the divine hand in the “image of God”! (Genesis 1:26, 27; Genesis 3:1-6).

Look at two different prophets confronting each other during another period. Jeremiah the true prophet and Hananiah the false prophet—both are called “prophets”!

Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; The LORD hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie.

(Jeremiah 28:15)

One was a true prophet of God, while the other was false. And you see it was lies that he was propagating, just as the “old prophet” did.

As Adam and Eve, who were the children of God, were tested and fell to the lies of the devil, (who pretended to be someone else) in spite of God warning them not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, this young “man of God” was tested and he failed the same way to the lies of the devil through his agent the false prophet (who pretended to be someone else) and he ate when God told him not to.

The “man of God” was sure what God told him as we see him standing resolute when king Jeroboam offered him to come to his palace and eat. How could

he believe the “old prophet” who claimed to be a prophet of God, but whose fruit of the lips blatantly contradicted God’s explicit command! He finally lost his life for disobeying God’s plain Word. A lion tears him to death while he is on his way home.

The “man of God” had no major problem when he was with the king. But he fell into a deadly trap when he was with a “prophet”! This tells us that “religious men”—who do not fully preach the Word—are more dangerous than corrupt rulers of the land! The devil doesn’t give up his attempts to get us down. He will try till he succeeds.

Interestingly we have another twist to this exciting episode when the “old prophet” prophesizes the death that was awaiting the “man of God” for disobeying God’s direct word to him!

And it came to pass, as they sat at the table, that the word of the LORD came unto the prophet that brought him back: And he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the LORD, and hast not kept the commandment which the LORD thy God commanded thee, But camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place, of the which the LORD did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers. And it came to pass, after he had eaten bread, and after he had drunk, that he saddled for him the ass, to wit, for the prophet whom he had brought back. And when he was gone, a lion met him by the way, and slew him: and his carcase was cast in the way, and the ass stood by

it, the lion also stood by the carcase. (1 Kings 13:20-24)

The Bible says that the “word of the LORD came” unto the old prophet. The Lord did not speak directly to the “man of God” of his doom, but opted to use the one who deceived him to pronounce his curse!

This method of using the enemy was not really new. Remember Balaam who was hired by the enemies of God was used by God to bless Israel, and not curse it as he planned to? The Spirit of the Lord used him at that moment in time.

And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the spirit of God came upon him. (Numbers 24:2)

Even during the time of Christ we see the high priest, who was controlled by Satan to kill Christ, being used by God at a particular moment to prophesy the death of the Messiah. John records:

And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation. (John 11:49-51)

The man of God placed himself on enemy grounds when he went explicitly against the clear instructions of God, and the Lord couldn't protect him for his disobedience. If God intervened and protected him in his disobedience then king Jeroboam and the nation that was sinning against God would not fear the word of God that came through him. They would think that God's threatening is not to be taken seriously.

His death brought more conviction and proof to the king and the people that the young man was indeed a man of God and his prophesy against the king and his kingdom was from God. Unfortunately, he gave proof of his stature as a prophet in a very anticlimax way by his own death which came through his disobedience to the Word of God to him.

We do not know the eternal destiny of this “man of God”. Did he repent of his error as Adam and Eve did of theirs? Like Adam and Eve had to die according to the word of God so also this “man of God” had to face the natural consequences of his sin and die the first death. He had sometime to realize his mistake and repent and ask God for forgiveness so that he could escape at least the 2nd death.

The pride of hungry lions couldn't harm Daniel a faithful prophet of God but one lion was enough to destroy this unvigilant prophet. The warning of Apostle Peter was literally fulfilled with a literal lion devouring him. Peter wrote,

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

Even today we need to be careful in accepting anyone who claims to be a “prophet”. We are to test them by the reliable Word of God. Christ and the Bible writers predicted that the world will be deceived by “prophets” in the last days, which come in His name! Jesus said:

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves... Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done

many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity... And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand. (Matthew 7:15, 22-23, 26)

It is sad that the “man of God” was deceived by a false prophet. There is no doubt about the final punishment for the “old prophet”. He will be condemned in the last day judgment for being an instrument in misleading a precious soul! Paul wrote:

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:8, 9)

“Accursed” means eternally condemned. The old prophet said an “angel” spoke to him. We know that the devil can imitate anyone—an angel, or even Christ. It is written:

And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. (2 Corinthians 11:14, 15)

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am

Christ; and shall deceive many. (Matthew 24:4, 5)

The tragic story of the “man of God” is a lesson for all of us to adhere completely to the Word of God, and not believe the so-called “prophets” who come in His name. Satan is all out, through his false prophets, to deceive “If it were possible”, Jesus warned, “the very elect”! (Matthew 24:24)

Also it is a strong reminder for all of God’s people not to deviate from the clear instructions of God’s Word! Only in obedience is our safety!

17

Proverbs 26:4, 5 says, “Answer not a fool according to his folly Answer a fool according to his folly”. Do we answer a fool or not?

This is the only place, probably, in scripture where we have two seemingly contradictory verses given together. Let us read what it says:

Answer not a fool according to his folly lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit. (Proverbs 26:4, 5)

Since these two texts come one after the other we can conclude, without any doubt, that Solomon knew what he was talking about; and that he deliberately placed them together. Once he says—we should not answer a fool and then he says we should answer. He gives reasons for both.

We need wisdom to know when to answer a fool and when not to. When a fool is fooling others with his folly, don't let him have his way. Give him the taste of his own medicine!

Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit. (Proverbs 26: 5)

But when a fool is acting foolishly thus fooling his own self don't act that way! Let him alone! Solomon himself wrote:

He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it. (Ecclesiastes 10:8)

A fool talks his foolish mind out. He does not know what to say and when to say things. It is written:

A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him? (Ecclesiastes 10:14)

There is no point in advising a fool. It is like throwing pearls to a swine! What does a swine know but to trample the precious gems! So also a fool will do to the previous words of the wise.

Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words. (Proverbs 23:9)

The cue is when nonessential or light or negligible matters come out of his foolish mouth let him babble and don't interfere. At this time apply Proverbs 4:5—"Answer not a fool according to his folly lest thou also be like unto him." But if it's serious issues or about God or truth or salvation, then he needs to be confronted and reproved. At this time apply Proverbs 4:6—"Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit."

The Lord Jesus knew when to speak and when to keep silent. When He spoke people marveled and when He was silent people marveled too. Here is couple of verses:

When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way. (Matthew 22:22)

And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly. (Matthew 27:14)

He was a marvelous God indeed!

There is a time when a deaf ear has to be turned to the talks of fools, leaving them to reap of their own folly, and there is a time when a wise tongue should be

employed lest they think they are smart and wise in important matters when in reality, they are not!

18

Does God force our wills and decisions? If not, what about the stories of Jonah or Paul where God never let them do what they wanted to do?

The omnipotent God, who just by speaking can command life and matter into existence, does not force the will and the freedom of choice that He Himself has given to man. The only force He uses is the power of love. Paul declared:

For the love of Christ constraineth us. (2 Corinthians 5:14)

Love is powerful. The power of love is stronger than that of death. Death kills, but love gives life and a resurrection from the dead. God has delivered this world from the clutches of the devil with sheer love. God wins us back only with the power of love. For it is written:

For God so loved the world. (John 3:16)

God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

We love Him, because He first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

Can you imagine loving parents doing nothing when they watch their little child playing with fire and getting burnt? Don't earthly parents, who love their children, chasten them sometimes to bring them onto the right track? If man can do it because of love, can't

God, whose heart is only love, do it for His wayward children? Paul wrote:

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? (Hebrews 12: 6, 7, 9)

All of us having sinned are playing with fire— hell fire—and this fire is more dangerous than the fire we know. It destroys,

Both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28)

God in His mercy intervenes. He plucks us out of this devouring fire. God Himself declares:

Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?
(Zechariah 3:2)

That is our story—plucked out of the fire! Thank God for that divine act. We cannot pull ourselves out of the mess, only God can, and only God does! We don't even know the danger of playing with this fire. We think it is keeping us warm, but it is indeed eating us up as a worm.

God has the right to pluck us out of Satan's clutches, as He is our Creator, and He also paid a big price for our ransom on the Cross.

Let us see the case of Jonah. This man was already a prophet of God. He got a command from the King of the universe to preach a strong message at Nineveh (presently a part of Iraq), but he took a ship and headed towards Tarsus (in Southern Spain), some 2,200 miles from Joppa (that was more than three times the distance to Nineveh!)

God had a solemn message for more than 120,000 people of Nineveh. And this one man—the man of God—runs away. What is the duty of a prophet? As a spokesman of God he was to preach the Word of God and convey a divine message from the most High to the people. And he does not do his basic job! You think God has no reason to be upset with him, and convey His displeasure?

The most interesting story that children love to hear, over and over again, takes place. From the land to the ship... from the ship to the whale... from the three days “submarine” ride to the shore! Was God forcing him? No! Jonah could have refused it if he wanted to. But God knew that this man loved Him, but the fear of the people and envy of the gentiles held him back. While God was helping him to overcome his weakness of fear and faithlessness, God was, on the other hand, saving the fellow passengers of Jonah with His supernatural acts and miracles. The Bible records:

Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows. (Jonah 1:16)

As long as there is love for God in the soul, God will do His best to bring the best out of it. If He cannot reach us through reason and appeal in the quiet way, He will try to awaken us with tremors and earthquakes, storms and waves, just because His love for us is very strong.

God cares and feels even for the wicked man who turns his back to Him. Look at God’s appeal to the wicked:

Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil

ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? (Ezekiel 33:11)

And even when everything is dark and over, see the anguish of God. When there was nothing more He could do to the tribe of Ephraim, God was broken-hearted. He said:

How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? (Hosea 11:8)

Look at Jesus, the Son of God, weeping for the desolation of His people and His beloved city Jerusalem.

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it. (Luke 19:41)

Let us now analyze the story of Paul: Saul (as he was called before His conversion), was a spiritually blind Pharisee on the road to Damascus to slaughter God's saints. God had to give this man a chance to "see" the Gospel and the Christ of the Gospel. God doesn't just do this to Johan and Paul but does it to everyone when needed.

It was Saul's turn and God had to knock him down to pick him up. He was so blind spiritually that real bright and dazzling light from Heaven was required to make him see clearly. This was his chance. He obeyed and fell in-line. God did not force him; He gave him an opportunity. If Saul wanted, he could have refused it, as did Pilate, who had so many opportunities, but turned it down. But Saul decided for God—and you know the rest of the story of the man who took the Gospel to many parts of Europe and Asia.

Yes, God never gives up that easily on anyone. Even if we are stubborn, if there is hope for a change, God will do His best. For love will not give up if there is a possibility to bring the soul back to the ways of life!

19

Does God hate people? He said, “I loved Jacob, And I hated Esau” Wasn’t God unfair to allow Jacob to inherit the birthright when it naturally belonged to Esau? (Malachi 1:2, 3)

The Lord Jesus spoke the most famous text of the Bible, which says:

For God so loved the world. (John 3:16)

When Jesus was hanging on the Cross of Calvary, He even prayed for His murderers. He said:

Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. (Luke 23:34)

Does God hate anyone? If Jesus did not hate His own murders, He could hate no one else! Jesus came to reveal the Father’s character. The Lord Himself declared:

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:44, 45)

God’s love for man does not change—whether we love Him back or not. His love is constant. He loves the whole world. But, please remember, that Heaven is only for those who love Him back as that is a place of love where God is enthroned and anyone who does not have this principle of love in their hearts will not be permitted there, for their own happiness sake and for the happiness of the rest.

Paul quotes prophet Isaiah in his letter to the Corinthians. He wrote:

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. (1 Corinthians 2:9)

Yes, God loves all on earth but Heaven is “prepared for them that love him”.

Now, why did God say that He “hated” Esau? The prophet Malachi records God’s words:

I loved Jacob, And I hated Esau. (Malachi 1:2, 3)

To understand the statement we need to go back to the story of Jacob and Esau, and the selling of the birthright. The birthright naturally goes to the eldest son. But when the eldest was not loyal to the high calling of God, it was given to the son who deserved it.

Look at Cain and a few others. Cain was the firstborn of Adam. But he proved to be a murderer of his own brother. Therefore the blessing of the birthright went to Seth. He became the chosen instrument through whom the Messiah would come. Also we see Reuben was the firstborn of Jacob. But because of his unfaithful deeds the birthright got divided among some of his brothers who proved more faithful. Joseph got the double portion of the inheritance; Judah got the blessings to be the progenitor of the promised Messiah who would come through his lineage; and Levi got the priesthood.

We know the famous story of the selling of the birthright by Esau to Jacob. Esau was a skilful hunter and a good cook, while Jacob was a simple man.

And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob. (Genesis 25:28)

Though both were twins, Esau was the first to be born and Jacob was born second.

Jacob would have heard his mother telling him later about the prophecy of God to her:

And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger. (Genesis 25:23)

Instead of letting God fulfill the promise in His own way and time, Jacob decided to “help” the Lord, and he messed it up. Through shrewd business tactics he made his brother sell his birthright and got the coveted blessing that comes with it. Later he cheated his blind father, by lying, with the help of his mother, to gain the blessing of the dying father.

Coming back to the selling of the birthright by Esau to Jacob—for sure God was not pleased with the actions of Jacob and the tactics he employed to get it. He had to be reprimanded for this act and, more so, for the deception he played on his father to get the complete blessing, finally. Jacob had to leave his home and stay with his uncle for twenty long years! In the process, he never saw his dear mother again. She died while he was away.

There is a price we all have to pay for our “wise” ways. But God in His great mercy does not punish us eternally. On the other hand, God was more upset with Esau for his utter negligence and carelessness to such a great privilege of the birthright. For Esau, a bowl of soup was more important than the blessing of God through the birthright!

And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? (Genesis 25:32)

“What profit”? His stomach was more important to him than his soul! His life was more important than the promised blessing of God. His God was in the wrong place! This scripture rightly fits him,

Whose God is their belly. (Philippians 3:19)

He wanted to satisfy his hunger and did not mind losing his blessings. The Lord Jesus said:

He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

(Matthew 10:39)

Would Esau have died if he did not get the red pottage? Our Lord fasted for 40 days and did He die? Daniel abstained from basic foods for 21 days! Saul, who became Paul, went hungry and thirsty for three full days (See Matthew 4:2; Daniel 10:3; Acts 9:9). None of them died of hunger.

Esau treated the divine privilege lightly. The appetite of his tongue was stronger than the desire to fulfill God's divine plan through him. God had to withhold the covenant blessings he was supposed to receive. In this context, He loved Jacob and hated Esau.

The Lord loved Jacob because this man knew the value of the birthright and the blessings of God. His desire was appreciated by God, his yearning for divine things were to be applauded, though he was hasty and did not wait upon God for which he had to be disciplined, which God did.

Paul comments on Esau in the book of Hebrews. This is what the apostle wrote:

Profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of

repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears. (Hebrews 12:16-17)

Paul called him a “profane” person; that is, someone who had no regard for sacred things. Since he showed his profanity in the birthright privilege, he had no place to receive the blessings of the covenant from his father, even though he sought it with tears.

When God said, “I hated Esau”, He had a reason apart from Esau being negligent and showing carelessness. When Jacob got his father’s blessing by fraud, Esau was mad at him. He decided to kill his brother for this (as did Cain), which would have surely displeased God.

And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob. (Genesis 27:41)

Isn’t the rule of God clear? What we do to others God will do it to us. Jesus said:

But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses. (Mark 11:26)

Esau “hated” Jacob. And what did he expect from God? He got the same response from God to him! Not that God hated Esau as we sinful humans hate each other sometimes, but God preferred Jacob over Esau. We get the meaning of the word “hate” when we compare two passages of scripture in the New Testament. Jesus said:

If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26)

Elsewhere He said:

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. (Matthew 10:37)

To “hate” our parents does not literally mean to hate them in the sense of despising them, but that we need to love God more than them. The same way God loved Jacob more than Esau; that is, he preferred Jacob to Esau because Esau proved himself unworthy.

God blessed Esau too, materially. Esau later told Jacob, who sent him gifts,

And Esau said, I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself. (Genesis 33:9)

As far as the choosing of the two brothers in the context of bestowing the covenant blessing was concerned, Jacob was loved and Esau was not; but as far as God's love in regard to salvation goes, all stand an equal chance. Peter said that,

The Lord isnot willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

20

Jesus said in Matthew 7:1—“Judge not, that ye be not judged”. Does this mean that we need to suspend all our judgments?

Let us read what the Lord Jesus said in His first great sermon, the Sermon on the Mount.

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? (Matthew 7:1-3)

We know that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. If we are quick in judging the faults of others God will be quick in showing us that we are no better. And this judging—the fault of others—is not for correction, but to show “I am better than you”, the “holier than thou attitude”. That is why Christ called such people “hypocrites” (Matthew 7:5). Hypocrites do that very thing while passing judgment on others (hoping that, since they condemned it in others, God will forgive their very act!). Paul, too, wrote the same:

Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things... And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou

shalt escape the judgment of God?

(Romans 2:1, 3)

Look at another text where our Lord talked about nearly the same thing:

Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven. (Luke 6:36, 37)

The Bible is also clear that we all will be judged by God—the good and the bad. Paul wrote,

But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. (Romans 14:10)

So when Jesus said, “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged” He didn’t mean we won’t have to appear before the judgment seat of God, but what he meant was we won’t be condemned in the judgment.

Since Jesus said, “Judge not, that ye be not judged” do we therefore stop judging anything? No! Jesus also said, “Condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned.” But that doesn’t mean we don’t condemn anything. We are called to condemn sin, but not the person. The person has to be given hope but his sin has to be condemned, and not condoned or accepted. God said to the prophets of old:

Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. (Isaiah 58:1)

Though the sin is condemned, the sinner is not. He has to be pointed to the Savior. Paul wrote to young Timothy:

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. (1 Timothy 1:15)

We are not to judge a person by condemning or ridiculing him. But we are to use our judgment in the sense of discerning things. Jesus himself commended Simon when he rightly judged a matter in the sense of discernment. Jesus said:

Thou hast rightly judged. (Luke 7:43)

And on some other occasion, Jesus said:

Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment. (John 7:24)

Judgment based on the Word of God is “righteous judgment” as the Word of God is righteous. Jesus tells us how we need to judge, and how we should not judge:

Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man.

And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me. (John 8:15, 16)

Judging righteously is not wrong, but judging as a hypocrite does, is wrong. Righteous judgment is basically, judging the act of sin as a sinful without condemning the person committing it all the while knowing that this judgment is to a reminder of how important it is to keep God’s laws and that the person doing the judging is also a sinner and not righteous in himself except through Jesus Christ.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus warned us of false prophets. He said:

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good

tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. (Matthew 7:15-20)

Jesus wants us to be aware of them, lest they deceive us. He wants us to inspect the fruits of their lives, and of the words they speak. When it is not in conformity to God's Word, He said you must test and know if they are false using God's Word as the standard for testing. So we have got to be "fruit inspectors" and make righteous judgments, otherwise we will be deceived. We need to use our God-given judgment and not fall into the enemy's trap. The apostle wrote:

Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. (1 Corinthians 14:29)

Judging in the sense of discerning is important, but judging in the sense of condemning is wrong.

The apostle to the gentiles wrote an important text in his epistle to the Hebrews:

But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Hebrews 5:14)

God wants us to use our senses and discern what is right from wrong, who is true and who is false. We need to judge righteously and truthfully. It is written:

Come now, and let us reason together. (Isaiah 1:18)

We are made in the image of God. We have been given reasoning capacity and God wants us to use it well, for we are on enemy territory!

21

How did Peter recognize Elijah and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration? (See Matthew 17:1-7)

Let us read what Peter said to Jesus on the Mount:

Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. (Matthew 17:4)

For sure Peter did not have the photographs of Moses and Elijah to recognize them! So Peter recognizing them on his own was an impossible task.

One of the possibilities is when they appeared on the mount talking with Jesus, if they addressed each other by name then Peter would have had no problem to recognize them!

Let us see how, on another occasion, Peter recognized a greater Person than Moses and Elijah. This is found in the very preceding chapter. Here Jesus asked His disciples to confess as to who He was:

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 16: 15-17)

Peter got it right while the others didn't. He easily identified who Jesus was—"the Son of the Living God".

But Peter got heavenly help. It was the heavenly Father who revealed it to him!

Yes, Peter got it right again in identifying Moses and Elijah. Obviously the Father revealed it to him through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, if Moses and Elijah didn't identify themselves on the mount.

The same Peter said that it is the Holy Spirit who reveals things to God's people. He wrote:

Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. (2 Peter 1:21)

22

John the Baptist said about Christ: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). If Christ took away the sins of the world, then why is there sin still in the world?

The Greek word for “taketh” is “airo”, which means—take up; take away; bear on oneself; carry; etc. On Calvary Jesus bore the sin of the whole world, He paid the penalty for everyone, from Adam’s sin to the last sinner on earth.

Isaiah wrote:

The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6)

The penalty or the wages of sin, what Jesus paid on the cross, is death. The Apostle Paul wrote,

The wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23)

As he took away the “sin of the world” He paid the penalty of sin, which is death, for everyman. The apostle wrote,

He by the grace of God should taste death for every man. (Hebrews 2:9)

In the Bible there is more than one death mentioned. Jesus Himself said,

He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. (Revelation 2:11)

If there is a “second death” then logically there has to be a first death too. The first death is what we all experience in this world at the end of our lifespan. This is experienced by all—believers in Christ and unbelievers, the good and the bad. The second death is the eternal death, the wages of sin, which will be on

the day of the final judgment, only reserved for those who have rejected the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Christ paid the wages of sin, which is the 2nd death, on the cross. That is why He offers the ones who accept Him as Lord and Savior, and who overcome sin by His grace, the opportunity of being not “hurt of the second death” (Revelation 2:11). But those who reject Him and those who continue to sin, 2nd death awaits them on the last day. John wrote,

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.
(Revelation 21:8)

Jesus plainly told his followers about possessing eternal life now and passing over death, the 2nd death, even now when we believe in Him because of the provision of the cross.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. (John 5:24)

Even though we die the first death the believers in Jesus have already passed from death, 2nd death, unto life, eternal life.

Those who don't understand about the 2nd death concept are bound to misunderstand this topic as many in Jesus days did. On one occasion when Jesus mentioned about it, the Pharisees totally misunderstood Him and accused Jesus of being

demon possessed for making such statements. John recorded,

Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death.
(John 8:51, 52)

Jesus was referring to the 2nd death and not the first death as He said in Revelation, “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death”. (Revelation 2:11), but they didn’t discern that.

On the cross Jesus was paying the penalty of sin, which is the 2nd death, which He has taken away by the sacrifice on Himself. And those who believe in Him can now escape it, but those who reject His offer of salvation will have to pay for their own sins and die the 2nd death in the lake of fire.

If on the cross Christ took the sins of the world away (and not the penalty of sin away which is the 2nd death) then yes, sin and death, as we see it now, should not exist after the cross. If that happened, then those living after the cross would be living essentially in a sinless world, with a sinless body, where there would be no sin, sickness and all the results of sin, including death. Then all who lived after Calvary would not need to believe in a Savior as they would be forever saved and secured. But that is not what that text of John 1:29 meant and that is not what the Bible teaches about the plan of salvation.

Though the devil was defeated on the cross and the works of the devil were essentially destroyed, the devil and his works are still seen, but stand defeated at the Cross.

That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. (Hebrews 2:14)

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8)

The work of Christ for our atonement began on Calvary as He paid the full penalty for our sins as the Lamb of God. But, Jesus has gone to assume another role in the plan of Salvation in the Sanctuary above, as our High Priest where He intercedes with His blood on our behalf. The apostle wrote,

Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. (Hebrews 8:1, 2)

Once He completes His work as High Priest, Jesus will return as Judge to execute His judgment, upon the living and the dead.

The Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom. (2 Timothy 4:1) (NKJV)

And finally, it will be time up for Jesus to execute judgment on the devil whom he defeated on the cross and physically destroy him and his works and his kingdom, thus putting an end to it all. The scripture declares this will happen on the last day, when Jesus executes His judgment:

And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. (Revelation 20:10)

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. (Matthew 25:41)

And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. (Revelation 20:14)

Once the devil and sinners and sin and all the works of the devil are totally and physically and permanently destroyed from the face of the earth God, creates everything new.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away. (Revelation 21:1)

In this new earth nothing of the old earth will ever again surface. Behold this amazing verse,

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. (Revelation 21:4-6)

All this is possible because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross when He as the Lamb of God paid the penalty of sin and triumphantly declared,

It is finished. (John 19:30)

23

Doesn't Paul give contradicting reports of his Damascus experience? In one place he says his companions heard the voice from heaven, and in another place he says they did not hear the voice! (See Acts 9:7 and Acts 22:9)

Yes, there are two apparently contradicting verses regarding Paul's Damascus experience. Though these two verses both appear in the book of Acts it was narrated by two different people—one was Luke's statement, the author of the book, and the other was Paul's statement, the one who experienced the incident. Let's look at both the texts. Luke wrote,

The men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. (Acts 9:7)

Paul said later,

They that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. (Acts 22:9)

Though it appears contradictory, logically analyzing it we should realize it cannot be so because both are from the book of Acts. Obviously, Luke knew exactly what he was writing down.

Let us now examine what exactly happened, Luke wrote:

Hearing a voice, but seeing no one. (Acts 9:7)

This voice was the voice of Jesus to Paul from Heaven.

When Jesus was alive on earth the Father spoke publicly at least on three occasions—once at Baptism, another time at the Mount of Transfiguration and yet another time just before His death (See Matthew 3:17; Matthew 17:5; John 12:28). Let's read one passage and kindly notice the different views of the people when the Father spoke just before His Son's death. It is written:

Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him. (John 12:28, 29)

The people heard the voice from Heaven, and said, "It thundered", while others said, "An angel spake to him". Though the Father spoke, some could not understand who it was, and what was spoken, but they heard a sound and were wondering from whence it was and what was said.

This is exactly what happened on Damascus' highway when the Son of God spoke to Paul from Heaven. Paul understood every word that was spoken as it was addressed to him. In fact he was having a dialogue with Jesus in the "Hebrew tongue" (Acts 26:14). Only Paul knew whom he was speaking to and what Jesus said to him. The rest were just spectators. They saw him fall to the ground and the heavenly light focused on him which was so powerful that Paul turned blind for three days, which blindness was restored with miraculously.

Luke wrote the about the people who accompanied Paul:

Hearing a voice, but seeing no man. (Acts 9:7)

That is true. They heard a voice rumbling down from Heaven but did not see who it was that spoke.

Paul, many years later, tells of his experience to the Jews and also the experience of his companions, who:

Saw indeed the light. (Acts 22:9)

This is no problem at all. The previous passage said they saw “no man”. They saw the light streaming from Heaven but did not see Jesus!

Paul declared, “They heard not the voice”. What did Paul mean by this? Listen to Paul a little previous to that:

And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. (Acts 22:7-9)

Paul said he heard the voice. What did the voice say?—“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.” The rest of his companions heard not the voice, meaning, they did not hear what was spoken, though they could hear some sound. Probably they thought it “thundered” like the Jews thought when the Father spoke to Jesus. That is why Luke said earlier, they “stood speechless, hearing a voice”. They heard someone speaking to Paul, but did not know who it was and what was spoken.

The Greek verb “akouo” which is translated as “heard” or “hear” can mean different things depending on the context. When it is accompanied with a noun in the genitive case it means—simple perception. This is

like hearing a thunder but not understanding anything beyond it. And this is what it was in Acts 9:7 they heard something. And when the verb “akouo” is paired with a noun in the accusative case it means more than a perception, it means understanding what was said.

Paul’s companions perceived the voice but didn’t understand it!

When Daniel had a vision on the banks of the great river Hiddekel, there was a similar experience. Daniel writes:

And I Daniel alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. (Daniel 10:7)

Yes, the companions of Paul too felt the manifestation of divinity but only Paul was in the thick of it. They saw the light, but did not see the Person; they heard a voice but did not hear or understand what the voice said.

The two reports are in perfect harmony!

24

Wouldn't it be fair, if God made everyone on the same platform—All having equal riches, opportunities, privileges and trials and tests?

There are some who are born rich and some who are born poor; some are more privileged and some are not. Some have better opportunities to excel and increase in wisdom and knowledge, but some don't. Now all this is because we are living in a sinful world where everything has gone topsy-turvy. There are some natural laws that take over. And God does not alter this law, because God is a God of order and sequence.

If parents are brilliant, their children will most likely be brilliant too; the same is true when parents are not too intelligent. Similarly, when parents are rich, the riches are passed on to their children and they stand a better chance to do well in life than the child of a poor man.

Whatever the background of anyone—rich or poor, brilliant or not, educated or uneducated, having opportunities or closed doors—does not matter in the sight of the Lord on the final Judgment Day. Only according to the light and opportunities one has received he will be judged. In one of the parables, Jesus said:

But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have

committed much, of him they will ask the more. (Luke 12:48)

Again the Lord said:

He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. (Luke 16:10)

The principle is clear. In the final reckoning God will take into account all things that pertain to our life. Our problem is not about what we don't have, but it's about what we possess and how we have utilized it. Our problem is not what we don't know, but it is what we do know and are not performing accordingly. We are held accountable only for what we have, and not for what we have not.

If you cannot help someone because of your poor or helpless situation God will not hold you responsible for it. But if it is in your power to help and still you neglect a poor, helpless person, you stand guilty before God. It is written:

Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee. (Proverbs 3:27, 28)

James the apostle added:

Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. (James 4:17)

It does not matter if we are not all that privileged in this world as this is only a temporary world. All the advantages a better-off person has are only a passing one. Paul wrote:

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen:

**for the things which are seen are temporal;
but the things which are not seen are
eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:18)**

Some are tested more, because they can bear more, and some are tested less as they can take only a lighter test. God is fair not to allow trials and temptations that will be beyond our capacity to bear. A beautiful text from Paul is really comforting as we go through any hard time. The apostle wrote:

**There hath no temptation taken you but
such as is common to man: but God is
faithful, who will not suffer you to be
tempted above that ye are able; but will
with the temptation also make a way to
escape, that ye may be able to bear it. (1
Corinthians 10:13)**

The truth is plain—whatever position we are in, it does not matter as far as eternal things are concerned. Whatever trials and temptations we face, we can bear it by the grace of God; He will not permit us to be tried more than we can bear. In the final Day of Judgment, God will consider everything that we had, and had not, and make a perfect judgment. Even where we were born, the background, advantages and disadvantages, are all written in the record book of Heaven. The Psalmist wrote:

**The LORD shall count, when he writeth up
the people, that this man was born there.
(Psalm 87:6)**

But one might say: If we are born rich in this world, we stand a better chance to be more positive, as there will not be this extra pressure of financial burdens that pulls us down! Well, that needn't be true. In fact riches can be a snare to get us on the wrong side! Jesus warned about it. He said:

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. (Matthew 19:24)

That does not mean rich people will not be in Heaven—Abraham, David, Job were rich (See Genesis 13:2; 2 Samuel 3:1; Job 1:3). But riches could be a stumbling block for many, as “the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). It is not money that is the root of all evil, but the love of money, the scripture declares. If God wants to make a person rich or poor, He can do it. The Bible declares:

The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. (1 Samuel 2:7)

It is the Lord who gives talents to man. To some He gives:

Five talents, to another two, and to another one. (Matthew 25:15)

Even the various gifts of the Spirit are given to each one according to the decision of God. It is written:

But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. (1 Corinthians 12:11)

Whatever we naturally possess at birth, and whatever talents and gifts God bestows by and by, we have to make the best use of it and glorify God. Also we are all bound by the heavenly principle of sharing and caring for the lesser privileged. It is written,

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2)

To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the

hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

(Isaiah 58:6, 7)

A stronger brother has to support the weaker one; this is a moral duty God requires of each of us.

God has permitted inequality to exist (which is a result of sin) so that we could be channels of blessing to one another—some in giving and some in receiving. Both are tested differently. The richer are tested to see if they are selfish, and if so, to overcome it by giving to the poorer one. And the poorer are tested to see if they have ego issues in receiving help. At the same time we all give and receive from each other not just material blessing but help and services too. This is God's plan as to why He has permitted this unevenness to exist.

It does not matter at all, as far as salvation is concerned, about the “advantages or disadvantages” one might have. In Christ there is no disadvantage. He said:

My grace is sufficient for thee, for my power is made perfect in weakness. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

One day very soon when sin, sinners and Satan are destroyed, the unevenness that sin has brought in will be gone and the platform will be leveled and the privileges will be same for all, for all eternity. Praise God!

25

Can the death of one—Jesus Christ—atone for the sins of all humanity. How can that be proportionate?

The Bible clearly presents that Jesus did take the sins of the whole world on Himself. John the Baptist testified:

Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

John the apostle put it this way:

And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2)

In Romans Chapter 5 to see the gravity one person can have on the rest. Paul here talks about two persons—Adam and Christ. Didn't the sin of one man, Adam, affect all human beings? The apostle wrote:

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. (Roman 5:12)

You see the act of one man, Adam, affected all of us. The reason is he was the first man on earth; he was the ruler of this planet. When the head of the race fell, all fell with him!

Adam was no ordinary man, he was a unique one; he was shaped by God's own hand. He was different from all of us in that sense. And the second One that Paul talks about is greater than Adam. He wrote elsewhere:

The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:47)

The Lord God, the King of kings—that is who Jesus is!

If the disobedience of Adam could affect the whole human race because of whom he was, how much more, then, the obedience of the King and Lord of the whole universe can restore it!

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. (Romans 5:19)

When we know who that one man is, all questions about if it is possible for one person to save all mankind is gone.

If we want to know the value of a single human being, listen to Jesus,

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matthew 16:26)

One single person is more worth than the wealth of the whole world, or the whole world with its riches, because we were made in the “image of God”. Now, guess what could be the value of God Himself the Creator of this world and the universe? Put the whole universe on one side of a balance, and put God on the other side of it, and would you think the whole universe could match the value of God? There is no price tag for God, dear friend. He is the Creator of all things. He is infinitely invaluable!

The death of Jesus, the Son of God, is more than enough, not only to save the entire human race, if needs be, to save the whole universe, and beyond! God said:

To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? Saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. (Isaiah 40:25, 26)

God preferred to see His Son die the eternal death than see billions of human beings being lost forever. Oh! What infinite love. A price beyond measure for the ransom of humanity, and this tiny world!

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