

# 8 Steps to Reading Your Bible More Effectively



Jim Dillingham

# Eight Steps to Reading Your Bible More Effectively

## Introduction

1. The Two Greatest Obstacles to Effective Bible Reading
2. The Presumption of Familiarity
3. Listening for Bible Echoes
4. The Divine Rules for Understanding Prophecy
5. How to Find Answers for Ourselves
6. What Does That Word Mean?
7. Mystery? What Mystery?
8. What In The World Does That Mean?

## Introduction

You might ask why we chose eight particular steps to improve Bible reading effectiveness. Surely there could have been a simpler four or even a legitimate twenty five steps to reading our Bibles with greater comprehension... or perhaps the ever popular seven steps for some level of success. Eight was chosen because of its highly symbolic significance in scripture. This explanation will unveil just a glimpse at the incredible intentionally hidden depth, beauty and symmetry in the Bible.

Even people that are not familiar with the Bible are aware of the relationship between the number 666 and evil. We have seen this relationship presented by Hollywood , novelists, and a steady stream of goofy end-of -the-world doomsayers. The understanding originates in a prophecy found in the last book of the Bible. In a prophecy concerning the anti-Christ and his exercise of abusive political powers, found in Revelation 13, this enemy of Christ is identified by the number 666.

*Revelation 13:16-18 And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: 17And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. 18Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is **Six hundred threescore and six** (666).*

This relationship between the number 666 and this man of sin is commonly understood in our society, emphasized through myth and legend. What is **not** commonly understood, but is presented in the Bible, is the relationship between the number 888 and the man of righteousness, Jesus Christ. Eight-eight-eight is the number of the name of the Son of God. The evidence for this is not demonstrated by any superhuman leap of imagination with an elastic sense of reasoning frequently demonstrated by the veritable ocean of Bible experts. It is quite simple, obvious and irrefutable. However, this relationship cannot be seen on the surface of the Bible with a casual reading. There are certain issues we need to be familiar with first.

The Bible was originally written in the Hebrew and Greek languages. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament was written in Greek. When we read from the King James or Revised Standard or other versions, we are reading from translations out of the book's original languages. One of the interesting features of both of these languages is that their alphabets were also used as their numerical systems. In Greek the first letter of their alphabet (alpha) was also understood to represent the number 1. Beta, the second letter of the Greek alphabet also constituted their number 2. We see the evidence of this practice even today when we use Roman numerals. However, unlike the Hebrews and the Greeks, the Romans did not use their entire alphabet as their numerical system. In Latin there were originally only six letters that also served as numbers. I=1; V=5; X=10, L=50, C=100 and D=500. Perhaps we have heard the common way of referring to a hundred dollar bill as a 'C' note, as it is in older movies. This practice was inspired by the Latin letter C being equivalent to the number 100. Although we rarely see Roman numerals used in this high speed computer age where more and more of our reading is done from an illuminated screen, they were frequently used by past generations when the reading format was limited to paper.

The significant issue in our consideration is that the New Testament was written in Greek where each letter also had a numerical value. It is interesting to note that when we spell the name Jesus in the Greek language we find that the Greek letters making up his name add up to 888. In Greek the name Jesus is spelled IOESUS. When we identify the numerical value of each Greek letter and add them up we come to a total of 888 for the name Jesus.... I (iota) = 10; H (eta) = 8; S (sigma) = 200; O (omicron) = 70; U (upsilon) = 400 and S (sigma) = 200.  $10 + 8 + 200 + 70 + 400 + 200 = 888$ . The number identifying the man of sin is 666. The number identifying the man of righteousness is 888.

This may seem like just a cutesy observation at first... a mildly interesting tidbit to be shared in a Bible class or office water cooler chit-chat among Christians. This is really just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. The first of our eight steps will caution Bible readers against underestimating the Bible. There is a divinely intentional camouflage in the Bible, hiding its greatest lessons, inspirations and self-affirming evidence. The divine author will not accommodate the casual observer who is only willing to afford a bemused glimpse at his book. The mind of the Creator and Sustainer of the universe will not be so easily discovered. There is abundant surface fodder in the Bible for all those looking for contradictory evidence so that the moral implications of this book can be ignored and we are free to worship ourselves. This is not accidental. That surface fodder disappears when one spends more time with the Bible, accepting the challenge and stumbling through the mental obstacle course God has prepared for all those dedicated to finding Him. There are always answers. This principle will be presented in step one.

Any great issue in the Bible will be confirmed repeatedly and through many different applications, visible only to those who are willing to exercise the rules of reading it effectively. When we apply the lesson of the third step in reading our Bibles effectively (Listening for Bible Echoes) we begin to see how the number 8 is repeatedly associated with Jesus in his Bible roles as Messiah, king, savior and ultimate sacrifice for sin.

Let's look at just a few examples to see the greater depth and repetitive use of this relationship between the number eight and Jesus.

Noah is recorded as the man by whom God saved mankind from total destruction in the flood. The apostle Peter, oddly, refers to Noah as the eighth person.

*2 Peter 2:5 And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly.*

Doesn't that seem odd?! Wouldn't our instincts suggest he should have been number one? There were eight people that went into the ark (Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives). Why would Noah be called the eighth when he was the one God chose to build the ark? In fact we are told Noah was called for this responsibility 120 years before the flood came upon the earth (Genesis 6:2). Noah didn't have any sons until 20 years after he was notified of his responsibility to build this ark. Therefore why would Peter, inspired by God to write that particular part of the Bible, refer to Noah as the **eighth** person?

Because Noah, in his role as saviour of the world, was an echo of the man who would ultimately and completely save mankind.... Jesus, the man of eights. Noah was an echo of Jesus. They were both saviors, but Noah was simply a reflection of the greater savior. While Noah was the eighth man, Jesus is the 888 man.

This observation serves as an application of how the number eight is associated with Jesus in his role as savior. Let's look at another Bible echo, with an application concerning his role as the ultimate sacrifice.

According to the law God gave to Moses, animal sacrifices were required during that dispensation of God's progressing plan. Specific animals would have to be offered on a particular bronze altar. All of these offerings pointed to different features and lessons involved in the ultimate sacrifice of the Messiah. There were many restrictions concerning these offerings. One of them was that they were totally unacceptable to God until the eighth day of their life (Exodus 22:30). On the eighth day a sacrificial animal could be brought to the tabernacle or temple where it would be acceptable as an altar offering under the divinely ordained law of that age. Jesus, the man of eights, was the ultimate sacrifice. The eighth day of a lamb or goat or bullock life linked them with what they were shadowing, the man of eights. Here is a Bible echo of the ultimate sacrifice of the man of eights, Jesus.

When Mary was informed she would give birth to the son of God by the power of the Holy Spirit the angel prophesied to her that the child will be named Jesus (numerically equivalent to 888) and that he would inherit the throne of his ancestor David, the greatest king of the nation of Israel.

*Luke 1:31-33 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.*

Jesus was often referred to as the son of David throughout his ministry. This title would identify him as the long awaited Messiah that would save God's people. It should be interesting to note that David was also an eighth man. He was the youngest son of a man called Jesse. Jesse had eight sons (1 Samuel 16:10-13). David, the eighth man, was a Bible echo of the only king who would eventually be greater, his descendant Jesus, the man of eights.

There is application after application... circumcision (the cutting off of the crown of flesh) was divinely required to be performed on the eighth day of a boy's life (Genesis 17:10-12). The cutting off of the flesh in the act of circumcision echoes how the man of eights would defeat the temptations of the flesh, cutting them off and executing sin in his transgressionless body on the cross at Calvary.

There were eight parts of the covenant between heaven and earth recorded in Genesis 15 where the father of the faithful (Abraham) is instructed by God to take six halves of earthbound animals and two whole birds (representing the heavenly party of this covenant), thereby making eight components for this covenant between heaven and earth. Jesus, the man of eights, is the appointed mediator between God and man, between heaven and earth. He is also expressed in the Bible as being given as a covenant to the people (Genesis 15:8-10).

There were eight stone surfaces upon which God wrote the words of the covenant, the ten commandments. Moses shattered the first set of two stone tablets (upon which the finger of God had written the ten commandments on both sides) at the base of Mount Sinai as the children of Israel worshipped the golden calf. Moses was instructed later to return up to the mountain where God would give him another set of two stones upon which the Creator had written his words on both sides. There were two sets of two stones written on both sides, adding up to eight stone surfaces upon which the word of God was written. Jesus, the man of eights, defined as the word of God made flesh (John 1:14) was also defined as the stone which the builders rejected, the chief corner stone, and the living stone (1 Peter 2:4-6). The eight stone surfaces upon which the word of God was written shadows the 888 man who was the word of God made flesh.

The parallels between Jesus, whose name is numbered as 888, and the number eight as applied throughout parables, prophecies, laws and historical events recorded throughout the Bible have certainly not been exhausted. This brief glimpse below the surface of scripture is intended to simply serve as the barest taste of what can be experienced if we will learn and apply the eight steps to reading our Bible more effectively.

That is why **eight** steps were chosen as opposed to four or twenty five.

## Step One

# The Two Greatest Obstacles To Reading Your Bible Effectively

Underestimating the Bible is as common as breathing in our world. Dust covered copies sit in our bookcases and libraries. Even those who pay some attention to the book most often look for the quick answer or motivational phrase while ignoring the difficult language, the strange expressions and the confusing laws. Many pay some attention to limited parts of the book, drawn by its power and fame but unwilling to respond more than minimally to that compelling power. Even seminary college courses deal far more with serving people than in developing Bible familiarity. We have to read the Bible for ourselves. Others can help, but the responsibility and the opportunity is individual. These eight steps can benefit, but are powerless without determined, consistent application.

Critics of the Bible abound. We can find them at every corner of the globe, spanning every social, political and financial level. Developing new Bible criticisms is a common shortcut to notoriety. The masses are instinctively drawn to the suggestion that our only standard of morality can be the ever-descending levels of political correctness. If the Bible is discredited, then the moral responsibilities in the book can be ignored. Man becomes the highest form of life in existence and we are free to worship the mirror. Critics of the Bible are never lacking in numbers or enthusiasm and always draw an eager audience.

Sometimes these criticisms are limited to foolish closed circle reasoning where one assumes his conclusion as a foundational point in order to arrive at his conclusion, smugly satisfied but oblivious to his blundering thought process. I remember a conversation I had on a job a couple decades ago with a co-worker who was always happy to tell others how smart he was. He participated in chess tournaments and was quite familiar with historical facts. I overheard one conversation where he claimed the Biblical story of the flood was self-defeating. Very familiar with the scripture account, I asked how he came to that conclusion. He said that if all but one family were killed on the planet then first cousins would have to marry in order for generations to continue and history proves that practice would have produced a human race of insane descendants. Unfortunately, I broke out laughing. I admit it was rude, but a child could see the shallowness of that argument and yet he offered this tidbit of knowledge as evidence of his superior intellect. I asked him how he could start with the presumption that an all powerful Creator that had the capacity to create a human being from dirt and cover the earth in water would somehow be incapable of preventing Noah's grandchildren, forced to marry their first cousins, from a future of insanity? The entire structure of his reasoning was built on the idea that this all powerful God couldn't perform the simplest little deed. This is an example of closed loop reasoning where one takes for granted their conclusion in order to prove the desired conclusion. I admit I am sorry to this day that I couldn't stifle my laugh.

However, this closed loop reasoning is not always the case with Bible critics. There are also those who read the book with the professed intention of determining its validity for themselves, but are happy to toss it down at the first hint of inconsistency. They underestimate the Bible. This is one of the two greatest obstacles to reading our Bibles effectively.

Interestingly, the Bible intentionally accommodates this form of critic. The scriptures supply an abundance of surface contradictions and supposed inconsistencies.... on purpose. The effect is to filter out the shallow approach while inviting dedicated attention with real answers, perfect consistency and complex symmetry.

### The Critic's Choice

Let's examine one popular example. Initially, there appears to be an inconsistency between the Mark and the Luke accounts of the women who bought and prepared spices to attend the burial of Jesus Christ.

Mark 16:1-2 *And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. <sup>2</sup>And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.*

Timing is the critical issue to examine here. Note that **after the sabbath was past** these women purchased spices with the intention of anointing the dead body of Jesus. Luke's account of this same incident is curiously different.

Luke 23:55 through chapter 24:1 *And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. <sup>56</sup>And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment. 24:1 Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.*

In this account Luke tells us the women **prepared the spices before the sabbath**. The critic's supposedly legitimate point is to ask how these women could prepare these burial spices before the sabbath (as Luke records) while not even purchasing them until after the sabbath (as recorded in Mark's account). The critic smiles haughtily noting that these sad Jewish zealots couldn't even collaborate on the simplest details to try to keep their stories straight.

Is the critic right? If this is a valid contradiction then how could an omniscient Creator have inspired this book and had it carefully composed over many centuries? In fact this is an example of how the Bible is written in such a way as to repel the casual observer hunting briefly for an excuse to reject it in order to free their conscience from the Bible's moral restraints. The Bible is written in a way to filter out pompous readers but invite and support humble dedication.

What the Bible critic is unaware of is that there were **two** sabbaths that week. There was the weekly seventh day sabbath beginning at sunset on Friday and continuing to the end of light on Saturday. The practice of beginning and ending a Jewish day from sunset to sunset, still practiced today, is based on the order of creation established in Genesis chapter one. Each day of creation ends with a similar phrase... the evening and the morning were the first day .... the evening and the morning were the second day.... the evening and the morning were the third day... etc. Since their God began the day in darkness and ended in light, this established the Jewish pattern as well. In fact this

progression offers an insight into a powerful theme weaving through scripture of creation's progression from darkness to light and ignorance to enlightenment and from death to life, as bound up in the ultimate plan of God revealed in the Bible. This type of lesson will be examined in the step expressed as listening for Bible echoes. The Saturday sabbath was constant but was not exclusive. There were other sabbaths that would take place throughout the year that didn't occur on a Saturday. They would take place at the beginning and end of the divinely appointed feast weeks, like the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (which always immediately followed Passover). These sabbaths were called "High Days." God told Moses that the first and last days of each of these feasts had to be a special day of rest, a sabbath. The day following the death of Jesus Christ was not a seventh day sabbath but a High Day sabbath. This is made clear by John's gospel account.

*John 19:31 The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an **high day**.) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.*

### The Time Line

The day immediately following the death of Jesus Christ on the cross was not the weekly seventh day Sabbath. It was the High Day Sabbath that always began the Feast of Unleavened Bread ... which, without exception, immediately followed Passover. Jesus died on Passover day. Passover was required by God to always be observed on the 14th day of the first month of the Jewish year, which could be any day of the week. Here is the time-line:

Passover Jesus dies	High Day Sabbath	The day between the Sabbaths	7th day Saturday Sabbath	Jesus rises from the dead
First night and day in the grave	second night and day in the grave	third night and day in the grave		

This time line answers more than one critic. Jesus prophesied that he would be in the grave for three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40) before he would rise to life again. If we incorrectly assume that he died on a Friday afternoon and rose on Sunday morning then he was only in the grave for 2 nights and one day. We have to conclude that either Jesus was mistaken and that we know better than the son of God... or perhaps we are the ones that are wrong about when he died and how long he was in the tomb.

In fact, there were two Sabbaths between the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The first was the High Day Sabbath on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This was the day after the Passover, being the day Jesus died on the cross at Calvary. The second Sabbath was the standard seventh day Sabbath observed every Saturday. There was a day between these two Sabbaths, which was Friday, the second of the three days and three nights Jesus Christ said he would be in the "*heart of the earth*." This is the answer to how the women could be reported in one gospel account as



purchasing the spices after the Sabbath while in another gospel account being reported as preparing them just before the Sabbath and then resting on the Sabbath.

Jesus died on Passover late in the afternoon, as sunset approached. Sunset would bring the beginning of Thursday in the Jewish timeframe. This would be the approaching High Sabbath, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, lasting a week. The women rested on this day, according to the Jewish law as given by God through Moses. The next morning (Friday), following the High Sabbath, the two Mary's went to the market and purchased the burial spices they would need.... accurately described by Mark as purchasing the spices after the Sabbath. They returned from the market that afternoon. That same afternoon, before the quickly approaching seventh day Sabbath that would begin at sunset, they prepared the spices they had purchased earlier that day. Then they rested on the seventh day Sabbath. On the next day they brought the spices to the tomb of Jesus, only to find he was not there. Eventually they discovered that he was alive again.

This progression of events satisfies every prophecy and historical detail in scripture. Unfortunately for the Bible critics, it exposes their reasoning as insufficient to the task of discrediting the Bible. This is one example of how the Bible intentionally repels the casual observer. The Bible is the greatest treasure in existence. It is within everyone's reach, but the price of understanding is high, as is the case with all great treasures. The Bible requires a concentrated, serious and dedicated approach if one truly expects to uncover the divine mind.

### **It's Not As Easy As We Might Think**

The second greatest obstacle to reading our Bibles effectively is related to the first obstacle but with a slightly different focus. It is oversimplifying the Bible.

The Bible is a very large book. There is a lot of difficult language, confusing names and laws and rituals, incredible miracles and odd sounding prophecies. We human beings like simplicity, not complexity. We prefer tight little alliterative phrases that roll off the tongue in a dramatic fashion, few words that supposedly say everything. We buy the condensed versions of books. We wait for the movie to come out rather than buying the book. We want slogans and acronyms. Give it to us short and give it to us sweet. The Bible is neither short nor sweet. It is intentionally arduous and often unpalatable, with reports of whole city annihilations, rapes, incest, unjustified imprisonments, whippings and men with as many as 700 wives and 300 concubines.

Why is the Bible so difficult to read? Why is there so much confusing symbolic language? There is a definite reason for this. Let's look at the way God communicated with men before the entire Bible was finished. One of the men God spoke with was Moses. Anyone who has been through Sunday School or watched Disney movies is familiar with the story of the baby saved out of the Nile River by the Egyptian Princess and then grew up in the court of Pharaoh. He hid in exile for 40 years after killing an Egyptian, working as a shepherd. God spoke to Moses out of a burning but unconsumed bush and told him to free the children of Israel enslaved by Pharaoh. Moses led the slaves out of Egypt over a year later after the 10 plagues devastated the people of Egypt. Moses led the children of God between walls of water on the dry seabed of the Red Sea only to witness the sea's water walls

collapse on the elite Egyptian cavalry hotly pursuing them. God communicated to Moses very differently than all other men. This can provide an insight into the manner in which God communicates and why He uses that particular approach

### **Sibling Slander**

There is a fascinating incident recorded in Numbers chapter 12 where the older brother and sister of Moses (Aaron and Miriam) are slandering Moses because of his choice of wife.

Numbers 12:1 *And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman.*

God is very upset with Aaron and Miriam and demands their presence at the tent of meeting where he will address them. This is what the text tells us:

Numbers 12:5-9 *And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth. <sup>6</sup>And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. <sup>7</sup>My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. <sup>8</sup>With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? <sup>9</sup>And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and he departed.*

Pay particular attention to how God distinguishes his method of communication with Moses as being different from all the others he has communicated directly with. God speaks plainly and clearly with Moses, not using symbols and difficult expressions or pictures. God speaks to Moses like a man would speak with a friend, evidently and plainly.... unlike all other men God communicated with.

### **What Was So Special About Him?**

This tells us that God intentionally communicates in a manner that is difficult to comprehend with everyone... except for Moses. When we ask what was so unique about Moses that God would not employ this confusing form of communication we do not have to look any further than the same chapter. Here is what we read about Moses in verse 3: *Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.* Moses was the meekest man on the planet in his generation. That certainly doesn't mean he was a coward, simply that he was humble. He was not arrogant or pompous or constantly shoving his personal agenda in people's faces. He did not have an aggressive personality. He was not what we would call a born leader or a gifted public speaker. Yet here he was leading over two million former slaves through the desert to a land of promise.

### **A Behavior Modification Tool**

This is the feature of Moses that afforded clear communication from God. Moses was the meekest of all men. This observation also explains why God spoke to all the others through dreams and visions and dark sayings. They weren't humble enough for simple divine communication. God employs symbolic and difficult language as a behavior modification tool. As human beings, we are too

pompous and self-serving and self-centered to understand divine communication. We will be unable to witness the incredible beauty and glory and truth in the Bible until the natural arrogance of mankind is voluntarily stripped away. This is the primary behavior exhortation found in the Bible... that we must abandon a selfish, self-centered focus and adopt a sacrificial lifestyle.

Jesus taught in exactly the same fashion as his heavenly Father. Anyone familiar at all with the Bible knows Jesus spoke in parables. He told stories designed to emphasize a certain lesson. Aesop's fables are an example of the same teaching method. Jesus told the famous parable of the sower. This was about a farmer who threw seed on four categories of earth which yielded crops in varying degrees. Later, when he was alone with his disciples, he explained what the parable truly represented. People often think Jesus peppered his lessons with these parables in order to clarify issues and offer examples of what he was saying. The truth of the matter is exactly the opposite.

The life and ministry of Jesus Christ is recorded in the Bible books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These men were all disciples of Jesus. They were his students. He was their teacher, their master, their mentor.. Matthew and Mark both tell us that Jesus exclusively taught the general population with parables.... but only explained what those parables represented to his disciples privately.

*Mark 4:33-34 And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.*

His disciples did not understand why Jesus taught in parables. They were confused as to why he would not speak plainly. They asked him why he spoke in parables in Matthew 13. His answer is fascinating.

*Matthew 13:10-15 And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? <sup>11</sup>He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. <sup>12</sup>For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. <sup>13</sup>Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. <sup>14</sup>And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: <sup>15</sup>For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*

### **The Confusion Barrier**

**Jesus** explains to his disciples that his message is limited. First he explains that those to whom the parables alone are presented are not given to know the mysteries of the kingdom. However, the disciples to whom he would explain his parables privately, were given to know the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom. (*Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given*). Jesus continues his explanation with the statement that those who have will

be given more, while those who have little will have that little taken away from them. Jesus is referring to understanding. Those who have true knowledge are going to be given more, while those who refuse God's perspective are going to have what little they actually possess taken from them. Jesus is simply restating the principle of God, that God will reinforce our chosen perspective. If we choose absolute truth with all the obstacles and challenges and difficulties in that path, He will reward us according to our efforts. If we choose the simpler, self-satisfying, more comfortable path of blissful ignorance, then he will reinforce that chosen perspective as well. The parables were designed to maintain God's teaching and communication pattern. An example of this is well expressed by the apostle Paul in his second letter to the believers in Thessalonica:

*2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. <sup>11</sup>And for this cause **God shall send them strong delusion**, that they should believe a lie: <sup>12</sup>That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

God promises to reinforce the chosen perspective of ignorance, preferring the convenience and accommodation of delusion to the responsibilities and challenges of truth. This is the purpose of the parables.

### **I Don't Want To Hear It**

In the next part of Christ's answer concerning why he spoke in parables he explains the difference between the two focuses. He says he speaks in parables because the listeners have eyes but they don't see and they have ears but they don't hear. He explains that people consciously shut their eyes and close their ears and refuse to understand. If they didn't, then they would see and hear and be converted and Christ would heal them. The parables were an obstacle to overcome. Those who sacrificed their ambitions and responsibilities and followed him as disciples were rewarded with explanations. Those who witnessed the miracles but were rebuffed by the confusing stories were allowed to wallow in their preferred ignorance.

God communicated in dark sayings and dreams and visions. Jesus taught in parables. The Bible is intentionally difficult. The divine mind will not be easily exposed or casually approached. If we try to oversimplify the Bible we are blinding our eyes and deafening our ears. We must approach our reading of the Bible with an understanding that this book is not simple and it has protective layers on it to shield its beauty and glory from the critic looking for an excuse to reject it and unshackle their conscience. Their focus will be reinforced. Those who will approach the book humbly, accepting that we won't get all the answers immediately or easily and having the tenacity to search for those answers until they are found.... will be rewarded with understanding.

### **The Ultimate Game of Hide And Seek**

This principle of God hiding truth is presented throughout the Bible.

King Solomon wrote in Proverbs 25:2

*It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.*

The apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth:

*2 Corinthians 4:3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:*

Jesus thanked his heavenly Father for hiding truth:

Luke 10:21 *In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.*

The Bible is written in an intentionally difficult manner as a behavior modification tool. Those who approach the book with a pompous or arrogant attitude will be automatically repelled from its symmetry, beauty and glory. The humble and persistent will be rewarded with greater understanding. God makes it very clear in the Bible that He intends to deny enlightenment from those who worship themselves.

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 *For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup>For it is written, **I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.** <sup>20</sup>Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? <sup>21</sup>For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. <sup>22</sup>For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: <sup>23</sup>But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; <sup>24</sup>But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup>Because **the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.** <sup>26</sup>For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: <sup>27</sup>**But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;** <sup>28</sup>**And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:** <sup>29</sup>That no flesh should glory in his presence. <sup>30</sup>But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: <sup>31</sup>That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*

### **The Only and If Problem**

Unfortunately there are an abundance of self-proclaimed Bible experts who want to over-simplify the Bible messages. We live in an age where speed and convenience are the most valued commodities. Everything has to be easy and it has to be fast. The technology of the saddle lasted for thousands of years. In our generation a particular technology has a life expectancy of a little more than a year. If it's faster it has to be better. If it is more convenient, we want it. People approach the Bible that way also. People read certain verses as if the word "only" were part of the text. The text might read "those who believe and are baptized will be saved." Some try to read that with an emphasis that suggests "**only** believe and be baptized and you will be saved." The text never reads that way but some will try to oversimplify the Bible message by suggesting one reference or another is all we have to be familiar with in scripture. There is no divinely approved, abridged version of the Bible. There are no shortcuts. Unconsciously inserting an "only" where it doesn't exist terminates any effective comprehension when it comes to reading the Bible.

As frequently as Bible commentators love to insert the word “only,” people frequently ignore the little word “if.” This is a conditional word. In other words, we can qualify for this blessing **if** we perform this responsibility. The “ifs” get ignored on a regular basis. It is a feature of the natural urge to oversimplify the Bible, disengaging the effectiveness of our reading. Here is an example:

1 Corinthians 15:1-2 *Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, **if** ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.*

The word “if” is a very powerful part of this statement. It establishes a condition upon being saved by the single true gospel. Limiting conditions are never a very popular feature of an offer. Our society, like everyone before, craves something for nothing. This is why con-men are so abundant and successful. This is why lotteries and gambling are so successful. No one likes that little word “if” that wedges all the limiting conditions in front of the benefits.

Ignoring the word “if” is a feature of our natural urge to oversimplify the intentionally complex Bible. Mentally inserting the word “only” reflects the same natural urge to oversimplify. Unfortunately these practices derail the effectiveness of our Bible reading.

### **The Step One Capsule**

The first and most significant step to dramatically increase the effectiveness of our Bible reading is to recognize the challenge. The book is intentionally difficult, abounding with misdirections intended to divert the self-satisfied, wise in one’s own eyes, smugness of humanity. The treasure is very great. It is the greatest of all treasures. It offers answers to the greatest secrets of the universe, but they are hidden well. The cost of greater understanding and reading comprehension is losing our natural arrogance and overconfidence, accepting that God is always right. A tenacious persistence with a thirst for accurate understanding will be rewarded.

Jim Dillingham  
bible888@aol.com

## Step Two Presumed Familiarity

Did you begin your education in grade seven... or kindergarten? If you want to understand the complexity of calculus do you skip algebra, geometry and trigonometry? When it comes to the Bible do we think we can just read through the book of Revelation for the first time and figure out exactly what it means right away? Do we think we can understand the New Testament books of the Bible without a strong familiarity with the Old Testament books? Bible readers & commentators who try to oversimplify this amazing book try to do exactly that. Trying to read the New Testament effectively without a familiarity with the Old Testament is like sending your five year old child to Junior High School to begin their education. They will be out of their league and totally bewildered, but if everyone else in their class is in the same condition they will think this is the way this is supposed to be. When a student enters seventh grade it is presumed they have graduated from sixth grade. It is presumed they know how to read and write, and understand basic mathematics.

The New Testament is written with a presumption of a reader's familiarity with the Old Testament.

? What good does it do to know Jesus is the son of David if we don't even know who David was or why Jesus would be specifically identified with that particular ancestor above all the others?

? What good does it do to read that Jesus comes again in the clouds if we are unfamiliar with the significance of being associated with the clouds?

? How will we understand Christ's parable of the vineyard if we are unfamiliar with God's parable of the vineyard from Isaiah chapter 5, upon which Jesus based his parable?

? Paul makes the very harsh statement that the believers in Ephesus were without God and without hope prior to enlightenment, when they were strangers to the covenants of promise? What does he mean by the covenants of promise? Exactly what are these "covenants of promise," since ignorance of these issues leaves one without any hope. According to the Bible the extreme significance of this presumed familiarity is very clear.

? How are we supposed to know what the dragon/beasts of Revelation chapters 13 and 17 represent when we are unfamiliar with the original beast in Daniel chapter 7 in the Old Testament?

The New Testament is written with a definite presumption of the reader's familiarity with the people, stories, promises, laws, rituals, history, prophecies and symbolic precedents of the Old Testament.

For example: At the trial of Jesus by the Jewish authorities they were frustrated by his unwillingness to respond to their questions. He was silent. In the past he had been the one silencing them with their stupid trick questions intended to expose the weakness of his teaching or give them grounds for charging him with anti-government propaganda. When they snuck up on him with the question about whether or not to pay taxes, he exposed their false reasoning. When they tried to undermine his teaching about the necessity of a resurrection he exposed their unfamiliarity with the Jewish scriptures. Soon, the under-miners were afraid of asking him questions for fear of personal

embarrassment. Now, in this trial for his life he was totally silent and they couldn't get him to answer their charges. Yet when the High Priest addresses Jesus directly, Jesus ends his silence and responds... why?

*Matthew 26:63-65 But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. <sup>64</sup>Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. <sup>65</sup>Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy.*

Questions should be popping out as we read this text.

1. Why did Jesus answer the High Priest all of a sudden at this time when he wouldn't respond to his questions before this moment?
2. Why would the High Priest label the response of Jesus as "blasphemy?" Even though the High Priest asked if Jesus thought he was the Christ (the official title of the Messiah) and the son of God, Jesus did not answer directly and even referred to himself as the son of **man**. So what is so terribly blasphemous about saying he would come *in the clouds*?

The answers are all found in the Old Testament. The reason Jesus ended his silence and responded to this particular question of the High Priest is that if he had not he would have committed a sin. Jesus had never sinned in his entire life to this point and he wasn't going to start now. His status as a sacrifice for sin and the salvation of mankind depended on his perfect behavior. Jesus was responding to the law of a sworn witness based on God's law as given to Moses at Mount Sinai.

*Leviticus 5:1 And if a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness, whether he hath seen or known of it; if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity.*

The High Priest demanded an answer from Jesus on the basis of the living God, that Jesus witness to his professed claim. This is why Jesus broke his silence at this particular moment. We are even given advance knowledge of his silence at his trial in a fascinating prophecy of the Messiah in the Old Testament book of Isaiah.

*Isaiah 53:6-7 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. <sup>7</sup>He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet **he opened not his mouth**: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so **he openeth not his mouth**.*

### **Coming In the Clouds**

Our second question concerns what would be so blasphemous about Jesus saying he would *come in the clouds*. Remember, the only Holy Scriptures at that time were the Old Testament. The New Testament was not written yet. They were living it. The High Priest and the members of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish political/religious council, all knew there was only one who "came in the clouds." That was God. Shielded in a cloud, God led the children of Israel through the wilderness after their escape from Egyptian slavery. When He came down to His sanctuary He instructed them



to build, He would descend on this tent structure shrouded in a cloud. Repeatedly we read throughout the Old Testament of how God identifies Himself with clouds, even the dark clouds of judgement and discipline. Therefore although Jesus did not accommodate the High Priest by answering yes I am the son of God, he identified himself with the power and divine authority of the clouds. Therefore the High Priest felt he was perfectly justified before all these scripture scholars that Jesus of Nazareth had uttered blasphemy.

For dramatic effect the High Priest drove his performance over the top when he ripped his clothes as he screamed his rhetorical question... *what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy.* This particular act was illegal and sinful. God forbid the High Priest to ever intentionally shred his clothes ... in his entire life. Caiaphas, the High Priest, wanted Jesus convicted of a capital crime at all costs.

Leviticus 21:10 *And he that is the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, **nor rend his clothes.***

The New Testament is written with the presumption of the reader's familiarity with the Old Testament. To be unfamiliar with the Old Testament and expect to understand the New Testament is like expecting to qualify for the Olympic trials in an event we have never even participated in before and never read the rule book.

Additionally, many dramatic features of this particular incident would be overlooked without a familiarity with the Old Testament. The richness of the story is in the unrecorded details with which the author assumes we are already familiar. Familiarity with features of the Old Testament present a desperate drama where politically powerful men will go to incredibly hypocritical lengths in order to eliminate a perceived threat to their wealth and influence and an offense to their egos.

These Jewish religious leaders were supposed to be the final answer for what was correct or incorrect concerning God's laws. The Jewish Sanhedrin was the final court of appeal. They were the experts on divine law. At least they were supposed to be. They broke divine law after divine law when it came to achieving a guilty verdict in the trial of Jesus.

### **Desperately Lawless**

It begins with the arrest of Jesus. According to God's law it was the witnesses who were supposed to arrest the accused (Deuteronomy 17:7 *The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death.*).

Additionally when the witnesses testimony did not agree these witnesses were actually supposed to have done to them what they intended to have done to the accused. That would mean that they should have been executed for their false testimony.

Deuteronomy 19:15-19 *One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established. <sup>16</sup>If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong; <sup>17</sup>Then both the men, between whom the controversy*

*is, shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days; <sup>18</sup>And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; <sup>19</sup>Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you.*

This was a high crimes trial where the accused would be executed if found guilty. Yet in the trial of Jesus there was a parade of false witnesses who walked away unmolested. This strictly contradicted the Law of Moses that these Bible experts so prided themselves upon its detailed observance.

*Matthew 26:59-60 Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none.*

We might wonder why the witnesses were unwilling to arrest Jesus and bring him to the trial. In fact, everyone was afraid of this gentle man. When it came time to have him arrested it was done in the dark of night by a band of men armed with weapons and torches. They were led directly to Jesus as he was isolated in the garden of Gethsemane on the side of the Mount of Olives beside Jerusalem. When these men arrived and Jesus was identified in the dark by the greeting kiss of Judas Iscariot they made no move to take him, despite their greater numbers and weapons. They hesitated. Jesus asks them who they are looking for. They answer that they are looking for Jesus of Nazareth. When he tells them it is he that they are looking for the record tells us they all take a step back and fall down on the ground (John 18:6 *As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground*). He had to ask them a second time, “*Who are you looking for?*” They picked themselves up off the ground, surely rather embarrassed and answer a second time, “*Jesus of Nazareth.*” He again explains that he is the one they are looking for. When it appears this man who could bring the dead back to life and make the blind see and the deaf to hear was not going to call lightning from heaven down upon them or strike them all with leprosy these jackals found the courage to come forward and secure him, no doubt rather roughly as payback for their self-inflicted humiliation.

Everyone was afraid of Jesus. We might presume from the Bible text that Pontius Pilate, the Roman Procurator, was a wishy washy milktoast of a man by the way he kept trying to avoid making any decision concerning Jesus. History tells us Pilate was politically ambitious and frequently ruthless. When a mob of Jerusalem residents demonstrated against him for having taken temple money to build an aqueduct he disguised armed soldiers and sent them among the crowds. When they refused to disburse he gave the signal and his soldiers butchered large numbers of the unarmed protestors. Pilate was not a meek, mild mannered man. But he certainly was afraid of Jesus of Nazareth.... just like everyone else who considered doing this man any harm.

The gross illegality of the trial of Jesus is further underlined by the simple fact that it was operated before dawn. God’s law required all capital punishment trials to be conducted during daylight hours. The New Testament text presumes the reader is aware of this fact and therefore doesn’t offer that information.

Repeatedly these Jewish masters of the law violated that very law they supposedly cherished in order to convict Jesus. This kangaroo court swatted aside one law violation after another in order to eliminate this threat to their egos and influence. The enhanced drama of this incident is lost without familiarity with the Old Testament, a familiarity that was presumed by those who recorded these events.

### **The Gospel is Hesitatingly Offered to the Common and Unclean Non-Jews**

Another example of the imperative value of Old Testament familiarity is demonstrated during a trance the apostle Peter experiences on the rooftop of a friend named Simon. The account is found in Acts 10 when the gospel is finally offered to the Gentiles. A Gentile is anyone that is not Jewish and does not share a common Jewish lineage from the same ancestors. Until this time the gospel of Jesus Christ had only been offered to the Jewish community. After Peter travels at the command of the Lord to preach to the household of Cornelius, a Roman soldier, he still must return to Jerusalem and defend his actions to the leaders of the Christian church for having the audacity to share the gospel with non-Jews.

During this trance Peter sees a vision. The vision depicts a four cornered sheet descending out of heaven with what is described as *all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air*. The command came from heaven, *Rise Peter, kill and eat*. Peter objects. He doesn't object to killing these animals. He objects to eating them, saying *Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean*.

One might wonder what Peter's objection is based upon. Peter wasn't a practicing vegetarian. He made his living as a fisherman. Besides, God gave permission for men to eat meat when Noah and his family came out of the ark. Why would Peter refer to these animals on the sheet as common or unclean? Peter's objection was based on the dietary laws God gave to the Jewish people through Moses. In Leviticus chapter 11 we can read of the restrictions God placed upon the Jewish diet. They could only eat four footed animals having cloven hoofs and chewing the cud. They could only eat sea life that had both fins and scales. There were specific insects and birds that could and could not be eaten.

Peter had been commanded to kill and eat animals that had been divinely defined as being unacceptable to ingest. Peter was instinctively repelled by this thought. He had been trained from youth to avoid eating the variety of meats that the Gentiles ate. The vision was repeated three times. The repetition of three was for divine emphasis. The message's threefold repetition declared that the lesson could not be reversed and noncompliance would be unacceptable.

At the conclusion of the last vision sequel Peter is instructed to leave with the men that have just arrived at his friend Simon's home asking for him. This alone would have been a challenge for Peter, since they were Gentiles. The social structure in Israel was that interaction with Gentiles was kept to an absolute minimum and would have had to be defended if an image of fraternity was perceived. Many years later the apostle Paul makes mention in the book of Galatians of Peter's willingness to

socialize with Gentiles openly until Jewish believers from Jerusalem visited and he avoided Gentile contact (Galatians 2:11-12).

### **Rise Peter, Kill and Eat**

Peter is escorted by these Gentiles from Simon's home, along with other inquisitive Jewish gospel believers, to the home of a Roman Centurion named Cornelius. He was a military officer responsible for 100 soldiers. He had significant authority and a measure of wealth. But he was a Gentile, therefore viewed by the Jews of that age as *common and unclean*, just like the animals in Peter's vision of which he had been told to partake. As Peter preached to the household of Cornelius God's Holy Spirit filled these Gentiles with the miraculous ability to speak in languages for which they had never been trained. The Jewish men who had accompanied Peter were stunned at this development. Their reservations about Peter's vision and accompaniment with these Gentiles were now denied any legitimacy. The Lord approved of these *common and unclean* Gentiles being welcomed into his church. Peter recounts this observation of the miracle of the languages when he is called to Jerusalem to answer for this severe breach in protocol by preaching to non-Jews.

*Acts 11:2-4;15-18 And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, <sup>3</sup>Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. <sup>4</sup>But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying... <sup>15</sup>And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup>Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. <sup>17</sup>Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? <sup>18</sup>When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*

Today there are far more Gentile gospel believers than Jewish. This is where it all began for us Gentiles. It took a vision from the Lord to Peter, identifying us as common and unclean animals that were acceptable to partake of, to prompt the Jewish Apostle to preach the life saving gospel to people like you and I. Without familiarity with the dietary laws of the Old Testament we might wonder what this vision Peter experiences has to do with his being sent to the home of Cornelius. The text doesn't explain it. We are expected to know this already. The reader's familiarity with the Old Testament is presumed by Luke, the writer of the book of Acts. This principle of presumed familiarity must be applied all through the New Testament if we are going to understand this divine communication known as the Bible. The book of Hebrews is a perfect example with commentaries on the divine principles intended to be seen in the laws God gave to Moses with their animal sacrifices, blood offerings, priesthood requirements along with the abundance of detailed and significant rituals. Without familiarity with what the writer to the Hebrews is commenting on, how do we expect to understand what is truly being said? If we trust our instincts we will always be wrong. Our instincts are human and not divine. They spring from the heart that scripture defines as deceitful above anything else in existence (Jeremiah 17:9).

**Step Two Capsule:** We need to read the whole Bible, not just bits and pieces or favorite parts. The richness of the New Testament is in understanding the issues that the New Testament writers

presume we are already familiar with because we were expected to have repeatedly read and reread the Old Testament. Just like we can't skip basic math and go straight to calculus we can't skip the Old Testament and think we can mine the rich beauty and depth and glory of the New Testament. We have to understand that the writers of the New Testament presume our familiarity with the characters, history, prophecies, laws, rituals and symbols of the Old Testament.

Jim Dillingham  
bible888@aol.com

### Step Three

## Listening For Bible Echoes

The Bible is an incredible book. It disposes of the doubtful critic who only gleans their self-affirming contradictions in brief glances off the Bible's surface... like raindrops from a windshield. Yet it camouflages the tremendous value within for those who will persistently return to the book to confidently mine its gems of truth and wisdom and comfort and hope.

One of the greatest tools for mining the Bible gems is the practice of listening for Bible echoes. Despite the fact that this book was selectively compiled from the writings of a number of different people from very different social, educational & financial backgrounds and spanning a period of well over 1,500 years there is an amazing consistency of expressions running throughout the Bible. Many commentators have referred to this phenomenon as continuous golden threads that weave through different books of the Bible presenting single lessons confirmed in many ways.

### **The Early and the Latter Rains**

In order to demonstrate the value of listening for Bible echoes let's listen to a comment by James, believed to be a half-brother of Jesus, being the son of Mary and Joseph. James writes: *Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain* (James 5:7). A husbandman is a farmer. James suggests that as we wait for the return of the Lord we take a lesson from the farmer who waits patiently for the early rain as well as the latter rain. This is a Bible echo. If you are familiar with the Old Testament you might ask yourself where you have read about the early and the latter rains. Using the tools explained in step five we could very quickly find every Bible reference that mentions the early and latter rains. We would find that this is not the only place in the Bible comparing the coming of the Messiah to the rain and even the early and latter rains. We would also discover the law of the early and latter rains that God gave to the Jewish people just before he brought them into the promised land.

On the last day of the life of Moses he recounted to Israel a number of the events they had experienced and the laws God had introduced to them. This is the book of Deuteronomy. At the end of this day and the end of this book God ordered Moses, then 120 years old, to ascend Mount Pisgah from which he would not return alive. In the eleventh chapter of Deuteronomy Moses reminds them of God's law concerning the early and latter rains. God explains to the children of Israel (through Moses) that the promised land is very different from the land of Egypt where they had been slaves. An Egyptian farmer would make irrigation trenches stretching from the Nile River to water their crops. However, the promised land was very different geographically. Successful farming was entirely dependent on rainfall. This rain would be divinely provided as long as they were religiously loyal. Here is how the text reads.

Deuteronomy 11:10-17 *For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs: <sup>11</sup>But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: <sup>12</sup>A land which the LORD thy God careth for: the*

*eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year. <sup>13</sup>And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>14</sup>That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, **the first rain and the latter rain**, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. <sup>15</sup>And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full. <sup>16</sup>Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; <sup>17</sup>And then the LORD'S wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you.*

Their food supply was based upon receiving the first and last rains, the spring rain that coaxes the plantlife from the earth's womb as well as the harvest rain that plumps up the fruits and vegetables and brings them to the stage of a productive harvest. Without the provision of either the early rain or the harvest rain there would be a greatly reduced food supply. God made the condition for the provision of these rains their loyalty to Him. If they ignored Him and worshipped the false pagan gods of their neighbors then famine would be the result. The lesson was basically that if they would obediently respond to His words they would be given the rain from heaven, the early and the latter rains.

Building upon this relationship between waiting for Jesus and receiving the early and latter rains we look to Psalm 72. This is a prophetic Psalm concerning what the Messiah would accomplish and the eventual extent of his authority. Interestingly it tells us he will come to us like the rain:

*Psalm 72:1,6 Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son..... **He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth.***

The King's son would be the Son of God. The prophecy states that he will come like the rain, like the showers that water the earth.

Hosea was an Old Testament writer who prophesied during the times just before the Jewish kingdoms of Israel and Judah were about to be extinguished by the Assyrians and Babylonians. The prophet Hosea also parallels the coming of the Lord to the early and latter rains.

*Hosea 6:1-3 Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. <sup>2</sup>After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. <sup>3</sup>Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and **he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.***

James, in his letter to first century gospel believers, is echoing an expression used repeatedly by other Bible writers. Presumably unaware, he is inspired by the Holy Spirit to write word for word and letter for letter what will be a feast of information to the persistent who are attuned to Bible echoes but an empty plate for those looking for an excuse to reject the book.

Jesus came the first time, almost 2,000 years ago, as the early rain. He came as the spring rain, the planting rain, coaxing the seeds of faith to rise up above the dust reaching for the heavens. We wait for his return when he will come as the latter rain, as the harvest rain. Just like the children of Israel, freed from slavery and ushered into the promised land, were offered the early and latter rains to enrich and extend their lives, so we too can respond faithfully to God's word and the latter rain of Christ will come for us to extend our lives richly in the kingdom of God. James tells us a great deal more if we are listening for the echoes in his words.

### **An Ominous Echo**

Even though Jesus had made the blind to see, fed 5,000 people with just five loaves and two fishes, healed leprosy, raised the dead and made the lame to walk, he was harassed for more and more miraculous proof to confirm his authority. This is the common attitude of those who refuse to respond to what is personally inconvenient... what have you done for me lately?! On one occasion Jesus responded with a statement that was both a prophecy and a severe warning.

*Matthew 12:39-41 An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: <sup>40</sup>For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup>The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.*

The greatest sign that Jesus would offer to prove his status as Messiah would be his return from the grave after being dead for three days and nights. He refers to this as the sign of the prophet Jonah. When we examine this echo there are interesting similarities that reach even deeper.

### **Forty Days to Repent or Die**

Jonah was a prophet who initially rejected his commission. God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh, the capital of the enemies of Israel and give them an ultimatum of repentance or destruction. Jonah tried to escape this responsibility by going to sea. Even non-Bible students are familiar with the story of how Jonah was swallowed by a whale. Three days and nights later he was regurgitated and found himself on dry land. After 72 hours in the stomach of a whale the gastric juices would have turned the body of Jonah into a horrible, deathly white color. This fact has been proven by at least one American whaling ship that cut open a whale to find the dead, white body of the man they had lost overboard the day before. As Jonah made his way through Nineveh to its center he would have appeared like a walking dead man or even a corporeal ghost. The divine message he had been instructed to offer was equally chilling... repent within forty days or the God of Israel would destroy the city and every person and animal in it. While Jonah waited outside the city to witness its fate, the residents of the city repented with humility and shame. Forty days later the city and its residents remained, having responded to the sign of life out of death and the message to repent.

Jesus warned his taunting critics that the only sign they would be offered was the sign of Jonah, which had been life out of death after three days. Perhaps there was a deeper, accompanying



warning. Jonah warned the Ninevites they had forty days to repent or destruction would follow. Was Jesus camouflaging this dire warning for those with ears to hear? History says yes. However, unlike Nineveh, Jerusalem was given forty **years** to repent before its destruction. The children of Israel had been given forty years in the Sinai wilderness before they were allowed to enter the promised land. They had to contemplate their initial rejection of the promised land when the spies returned after forty days of clandestine research. Now they would have forty years after the Messiah rose from the dead before they would be removed from that promised land. It was forty years after Christ rose from the dead that Jerusalem was judged for its refusal to repent at the sign of Jonah as displayed in the man who was greater than Jonah. In AD 70 the Roman army destroyed the city. Many died in the city before the Roman army entered. Those who survived were enslaved.

History shows us that it initially appeared Jerusalem would be destroyed in 39 years as opposed to 40, which would have contradicted Christ's parallel to Jonah. The Roman General Vespasian laid siege to the city in AD69. However, he pulled his army away and travelled to Rome ambitious to take advantage of an opportunity to become the next Caesar when Nero died. Nine months later his son Titus, also a Roman General, returned to Jerusalem with the Roman army bringing complete destruction. It was forty years after Jonah's sign of life out of death after three days as demonstrated in the Messiah.

#### **Forty Days Into Forty Years**

If the difference of 40 days as opposed to 40 years appears troublesome, there is another Bible echo to employ. The prophet Ezekiel was paralyzed by God so that he would lie still for 40 days to represent the time God had determined for the judgements against the unfaithful in the land of Judah would take place. He told the prophet he would be forced to lie on his right side for forty days to represent those forty years.... a day for a year.

*Ezekiel 4:6-8 lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each **day for a year**. <sup>7</sup>Therefore thou shalt set thy face toward the siege of Jerusalem, and thine arm shall be uncovered, and thou shalt prophesy against it. <sup>8</sup>And, behold, I will lay bands upon thee, and thou shalt not turn thee from one side to another, till thou hast ended the days of thy siege.*

When we listen closely to the echo of Jonah's experience and message we hear more of what Jesus was saying to the whiners who hounded him for more entertaining miracles. He wasn't simply identifying the greatest sign he would offer. He was presenting a dire warning. He was telling them: You may ignore all the miracles I perform now but if you ignore the greatest miracle you will be judged on the same terms as the enemies of our nation. The one accommodation provided was to allow them forty years to repent before judgement, as opposed to forty days.

Extending this echo forward we might ask ourselves if we have personally responded to the sign of the prophet Jonah. Our generation has witnessed Jonah's sign of life following death.

Fortunately our generation did not have to suffer with a forty year ultimatum, since the current generation "sign of Jonah" took place in May of 1948. At that time the nation of Israel (whose

residents God chose, whose borders God established, whose laws God proclaimed, whose capital God chose and whose king God appointed) had come back from the dead. Their land was within the borders of the original country. The descendants of the original residents formed the renewed nation in 1948. The formerly dead Hebrew language was adopted as the state language. Eventually even the same capital of the nation was re-established in Jerusalem. The dead nation that was formed by God was reborn again. This gets really interesting when we remember that the Jewish people were identified by God to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, as God's first born son.

*Exodus 4:22 . And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: <sup>23</sup>And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn.*

The Bible claims that the final days before the return of Jesus Christ to the earth will see the rebirth of the nation of Israel. Isn't it appropriate that the raising of the firstborn son of God (the nation of Israel in 1948) would be the official herald for the return of the resurrected firstborn son of God (Jesus Christ)?! It is insignificant that they reformed this nation in unbelief. Fortunately for us it has been more than 40 years since the nation was recognized again on the earth.

Bible echoes will start out as faint whispers to those who the Lord describes as having *ears that hear* but with consistent reading of the entire book these echoes will become louder and more repetitive and eventually as obvious as a morning trumpet

**Step Three Capsule:** Listen for Bible echoes as you read scripture. Ask ourselves, where have we heard that expression before? The effectiveness of our Bible reading will be greatly improved if we note the similarities and relationships between different parts of scripture. The Bible was written with intentional difficulty to filter out the tire kickers. Be more than a tire kicker. Be an effective reader. Listen for the Bible echoes.

Jim Dillingham  
bible888@aol.com

## Step Four The Divine Rules for Understanding Prophecy

Bible prophecy can be fun, confusing, captivating, bewildering, exciting and definitely scary. The problem is that there are frequently 42 different opinions on what a prophecy means. That's bad enough, but then there is always someone who suggests that we can all enjoy our own opinions as long as we each draw out something of value for ourselves. Politely stated, that suggestion is entirely inappropriate and completely false. God didn't go to the trouble of having his prophecies recorded so that they could be considered all things to all people. His prophecies are targeted and specific. He also gives us the rules for understanding them.

### 1. Prophecy Isn't Intended for Everyone

We learned in our first step that the Bible is written with an intentional difficulty to filter out the self-absorbed who presume they are wise while also repelling the casual observer who thinks they can understand God with just some light reading. Divine prophecies are recorded with this same separating-out procedure. The persistent reader is rewarded with God's rules for understanding his prophecies in order to achieve specific value.

The Bible's targeted audience for prophecy is the **true** believer, not the casual observer or the excitement junky capable of only momentary attention. I have a specific acronym to describe this condition where one merely glances at prophecy... BADD (meaning Biblical Attention Deficit Disorder).

The Apostle Paul defines this rule of prophecy targeting when he addresses abuses within the church in the city of Corinth in Greece.

1 Corinthians 14:22 *Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.*

Paul explains that the divine use of prophecy was intended as a valuable service for believers, but not for non-believers. Prophecy was intended for a select group. Therefore we know up-front that prophecy will be presented in a way that only the true believers will benefit by its application.

### 2. Personal Preferences Will Not Be Accommodated

Rule number two is a big one and difficult to digest. Scripture tells us we don't have the right to be wrong. We are not free to presume that 42 different opinions are acceptable or valuable. The Apostle Peter makes this abundantly clear in his second letter.

2 Peter 1:19-21 *We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day stars arise in your hearts: <sup>20</sup>Knowing this first, that **no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.** <sup>21</sup>For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*

Peter confirms the value of prophecy but also makes it clear we are not free to come up with any interpretations we happen to feel like at the moment. Whims are of no value.

### 3. Being Wrong Can Be Dangerous

This is one of the basic rules we live by.... being wrong can be dangerous. This is rule number three. This is how innocents as well as the unprepared and overconfident get injured and even die. I remember one High School Chemistry experiment that brought a rapid exodus from the lab when the room filled with a malodorous smoke. When questioned, the wide eyed lab partners didn't know that this particular mixture of ingredients would produce such an anti-social effect. They were wrong because they just didn't know, but the chemicals still had the same reaction when combined. We child-proof our homes to prevent accidentally harming our babies and toddlers, because they don't know what is going to hurt them. Being lost in the woods in deep winter without the knowledge of how to survive is very dangerous. Education is not simply beneficial. Frequently, the knowledge of what is the right procedure or behavior can save our lives.

Let's extend this principle into the area of Bible prophecy. Let's look at some examples of how understanding Bible prophecy 'correctly' saved lives. During the last few days before Jesus died on the cross he was teaching and prophesying in Jerusalem. When his disciples commented on the incredible architecture and construction of the temple Jesus told them it was going to be destroyed so completely that not one stone would be left on top of another. The disciples were aghast at this thought. After they left the city and made their way up the Mount of Olives on the east of Jerusalem and directly opposite the temple mount, four of his disciples asked him questions concerning when the temple would be destroyed along with what signs would herald his coming and the end of the age. Jesus answers these questions with a series of prophecies that center around two time periods. The first would be when the temple would be destroyed in AD70. The second would be when he would come to judge the world.

#### Stating the Obvious or a True Prophecy?

In the context of his prophecy concerning the destruction of the temple Jesus offers a time sensitive warning to the true believers of that age. He tells them when to get out of Jerusalem to avoid the destruction that would eliminate the temple. Here is how he presents the prophecy:

*Luke 21:20-22 And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. <sup>21</sup>Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. <sup>22</sup>For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.*

This statement surely confused the disciples. Jesus instructed them to wait until Jerusalem is surrounded by armies and that was the signal to leave. That's certainly a little different. The disciples probably wondered why he couldn't have shared with them when they should leave **before** the armies came. What good is it to try and leave after they were surrounded? Anyone attempting to desert those within the besieged city would have been dealt with very harshly. If they actually made it over or under the walls during the siege they would be immediately arrested, if they were able to

live that long. There was no Geneva Convention to protect prisoners of war during this period of history and those who escaped a besieged city could expect severe treatment, such as torture for information and even evisceration if it was presumed they had smuggled out valuable gems by swallowing them. This warning by Christ may not have been perceived as being a very valuable prophecy since it wouldn't take a genius to figure out that when you are surrounded by hostiles it's a good time to leave. Therefore when the time came in AD 69 that a Roman General named Vespasian surrounded Jerusalem with his army there may have been a few believers who questioned the value of this prophecy.

### **The Rest of the Story**

What happened next is what separates the true believers from the casual observers. During the siege Vespasian abruptly stops the siege, pulls his army back and heads for Rome with the ambition of becoming the next Roman Caesar, filling the office vacated by Nero.

Imagine how that retreat looked to those familiar with the prophecy of Jesus Christ concerning when the temple would be destroyed. He had instructed them to leave and not come back when they saw the city surrounded by an army. Here was their chance. But what about all the others who felt the threat was over and they had won. Their egos told them that they were just too tough for those wimpy Romans. Besides, now they would be safe to live in their homes and go about their jobs. Food was being brought into the city again and life was getting back to normal. Many would have questioned the need to leave the city after the Roman army presumably retreated. They might have spouted the technicality that since the city was no longer actually surrounded by an army this wouldn't be the time Jesus meant for them to escape. There have always been people who would interpret Bible prophecy to suit their immediate convenience and comfort. However, personal preferences about prophecy (rule 2) will not be accommodated and being wrong about Bible prophecies is always dangerous (rule 3).

General Vespasian did become the next Caesar. Vespasian's son Titus, also a general, brought the Roman legions back to Jerusalem and set up the siege the very next year. The final result was that those who weren't killed by starvation or infighting or the Romans were sold into slavery. Titus wasn't distracted. He finished the job. Christ's prophetic warning was stated absolutely perfectly, if not initially confusing... *when you see the city surrounded by armies get out and don't come back.*

It was dangerous to misunderstand Christ's prophecy about when to leave Jerusalem and stay out. Those who stayed after Vespasian left suffered horribly for their mistake. It is always dangerous to be wrong about Bible prophecy.

### **God's Witnesses**

In our society, when we want to determine the truth of a dispute, we go to the courts. The truth of a matter is determined by examining evidence and witnesses. Why shouldn't we apply the same procedure to prophecy?! The evidence is easy enough to determine. This would be a combination of the Bible and history. But who are the witnesses?

God has actually appointed witnesses for Himself. They are provided for the world to examine and test the words of the Creator. God identifies his witnesses for us.

*Isaiah 43:8-11 Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears. Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled: who among them can declare this, and shew us former things? let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified: or let them hear, and say, It is truth. Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour.*

When God says “*You are my witnesses*” it should be understood that he is addressing the Jewish people. This can be determined from the first verse of this same chapter. God offers the Jewish people as his witnesses. Since this is the case we should be very much aware of the Jewish presence in Bible prophecies. They are the witnesses He offers to validate our confidence in the Bible. In the last hundred years we have seen multiple Bible prophecies unfold before the world’s eyes in dramatic fashion. Since the Jewish people are the divinely appointed witnesses of God let’s limit our brief examination to prophecies fulfilled within the last 100 years concerning the Jewish people. The greatest of them all would be the resurrection of the nation of Israel between November of 1947 and May of 1948. The official state was declared on May 15, 1948. However, immediately after the United Nations Palestine partition vote approved the establishment of a Jewish state the Jewish people in Palestine were fighting for their independence and promised national constitution. They were not simply re-organizing their country where they had been expelled from almost two milleniums ago by the Romans, they were defending their families, homes and promised nation from annihilation by the Arabs surrounding them. Many of the Jewish people in Palestine were recently arrived, having escaped the Nazi hunters in Europe and evaded the British trying to prevent their entry into Palestine. The Nazis, nor the British, nor the Arabs could prevent the will of God from bringing the dead nation of Israel back to life at the appointed time.

The most graphic and detailed of the several Bible prophecies concerning the resurrection of the nation of Israel is found in Ezekiel chapter 37. As is God’s pattern, he uses symbolic language and then defines some of it to illuminate a path of correct understanding for those who will exercise the patience and tenacity to look beyond the surface. Here is how the fourteen verses of this prophecy read:

### **Setting the Prophetic Stage**

*Ezekiel 37:1-14 The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, <sup>2</sup>And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. <sup>3</sup>And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest.*

### **The First Prophecy - Bones to Bodies**

*<sup>4</sup>Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. <sup>5</sup>Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: <sup>6</sup>And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and*

*cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. <sup>7</sup>So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. <sup>8</sup>And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them.*

### **The Second Prophecy - The Murdered Live Again**

*<sup>9</sup>Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. <sup>10</sup>So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.*

### **God's Explanation**

*<sup>11</sup>Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. <sup>12</sup>Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup>And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, <sup>14</sup>And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD.*

God presents us with a picture of a certain valley full of long dried out bones. The fact that it is a valley would suggest the presence of surrounding mountains looking down on this initially morbid scene. God commands the prophet Ezekiel (whose name means God Strengthens) to prophesy twice. In the first prophecy the bones strewn across the valley floor join into skeletons with organs and muscles and finally skin forming around the skeletons to reproduce the very bodies that these bones had come from. At this point the activity ceases. From the surrounding mountains these bodies far below would appear as either people sleeping or dead.

God commands Ezekiel to prophesy a second time. Ezekiel addresses the four winds and commands them to fill these bodies with breath. It should be noted that God refers to these bodies as having been slain, or murdered, as opposed to dying of old age or disease. God then provides the key to understanding this two stage prophecy. He tells us that these bones represent the whole house of Israel. Therefore, at some time beyond Ezekiel's generation the nation of Israel would cease to exist. It would be murdered. After all, this is defined as a prophecy, events that will happen in the future. In order for Israel to be represented as dried out bones from bodies that had been slain the nation of Israel would have to die violently.

Where a mountain of a nation had once stood, only a valley full of dried out bones would eventually be seen. The fact that the nation of Israel is depicted as disjointed, dried up bones tells us there would be no nation of Israel for a long, long time before it would appear again. Through this prophecy God promises He would bring the nation back from the grave. What the nation had once been would still be visible from the mountain nations of the world. Accordingly the Jewish people maintained a distinct and separate visibility wherever in the world they were driven. Unlike all other

peoples who had their nations destroyed and disappeared into the societies where they found themselves, the Jewish people did not lose their distinct identity. The evidence of what they had once been would be present in all subsequent generations, until the dried out bones of the nation of Israel were reformed and reconstituted into a body. God's witnesses would be required to maintain their witness status.

God presents this prophecy in the terms of a resurrection. In the context of a people that speaks of themselves in these terms... *Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts*, God says he will bring them out of their graves and bring them into their own land again, the same land where they had once been a powerful nation dominating their region militarily and economically under the reigns of David and Solomon.

### **History Parallels the Prophecy Perfectly**

Historically the details match the prophecy perfectly. The Romans murdered the nation of Israel. The Romans had *slain* or murdered the nation between AD66 under Nero and finishing with Hadrian in AD135 when Jerusalem was plowed like a field (fulfilling the prophecy in Micah 3:12). This fact historically qualifies the use of the word *slain* in relation to the dried bones on the valley floor. The fact that the only visible reminder of the nation of Israel were the severely dried out, disjointed bones is historically portrayed in the more than 1,900 years it took from the destruction of the nation to the time of its divinely orchestrated rebirth from the grave, as the Jewish people maintained their identity throughout the various nations they were driven to.

The Zionist movement was dedicated to reclaiming the Jewish nation, which is frequently referred to as Zion in scripture as this was one of the two mounts upon which the city of Jerusalem was constructed. This Zionist movement began in earnest at the first Zionist convention in Basle Switzerland in 1897. This initiated a trickle of the direct descendants of Israel's original residents into Palestine. In 1917 Great Britain took control of Palestine from the Turks and published the Balfour Declaration, inviting the Jewish people to immigrate to Palestine with the intention of creating a Jewish state. More of the direct descendants of the original inhabitants of the land moved to Palestine. However, in the mid 1930's the trickle of Jewish immigrants became a raging torrent as the Jewish people fled Europe from the growing Nazi influence. The nation of Israel sprang from the Jewish graves of Europe in exactly the way in which this prophecy depicts. The United Nations voted to partition Palestine in 1947, thereby creating a Jewish state. From the date of that vote the Palestine Jews were fighting for their lives and for the nation they wanted to be reborn. In May of 1948 the British left Palestine. The nation of Israel came back to life for the first time since the Romans murdered it. God gave this prophecy to Ezekiel to write down approximately 600 years before the Romans would slay the nation of Israel and over 2,500 years before the rebirth of the nation from the grave.

Many alive today witnessed the resurrection of the nation of Israel, dead for almost two millennia. The direct descendants of the original inhabitants have returned to the same land using the same name for their country. They have adopted the same original Hebrew language, long dead, as their official state language. Since 1967 they rule their reborn nation from the same capital,



Jerusalem. This is miraculous, not even considering the fact that the terms of its resurrection would be detailed 2,500 years before this prophecy would unfold before the eyes of the world.

### **His Good Name**

We might ask the question as to why God would do this for the Jewish people when they rejected his son and participated in his execution along with the Roman authority. Many people have wrestled with this question. The answer is that God's motivation has nothing to do with the righteousness of the children of Israel, or the lack of righteousness. It has to do with maintaining the glory of God's name and His integrity. We can let God explain for himself in the verses previous to this dry bones prophecy .

Ezekiel 36:20-24 *And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the LORD, and are gone forth out of his land. <sup>21</sup>But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went. <sup>22</sup>Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but **for mine holy name's sake**, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. <sup>23</sup>And **I will sanctify my great name**, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. <sup>24</sup>For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.*

God comments that wherever the Jewish people would go throughout the world after their expulsion from Palestine they would bring shame to His name. But He will sanctify His name when He brings them back into the land He promised them, when He will gather them from all nations. God's motivation for this activity is not the righteousness of the Jewish people but His own glorious name that He testifies they will have profaned everywhere they would go.

### **God Asks: Have You Heard What These People Are Saying?**

There are Christian instructors who unfortunately claim God has abandoned the Jewish people and that Old Testament prophecies dealing with the Jewish people now apply to Christian organizations. This is not possible. God Himself comments to the prophet Jeremiah on how upsetting this thought process is to Him.

Jeremiah 33:23-26 *Moreover the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, <sup>24</sup>Considerest thou not what this people have spoken, saying, The two families which the LORD hath chosen, he hath even cast them off? thus they have despised my people, that they should be no more a nation before them. <sup>25</sup>Thus saith the LORD; If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; <sup>26</sup>Then will I cast away the seed of Jacob, and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them.*

God asks the prophet... *Can you believe it? There are people that actually claim that I am through with the descendants of Jacob* (whose name God changed to Israel -Genesis 32:28-29). The two families he refers to are the two nations he divided them into during the reign of the grandson of

King David. In response to these people who would have the audacity to claim God will abandon the genealogical descendants of Jacob, God tells Jeremiah that as long as the sun comes up in the morning and sets in the evening and as long as the atmosphere surrounds the earth He will keep his promises to them and cause them to return to where He removed them and will have mercy on them. When God makes an unconditional promise He doesn't go back on this word, no matter how anyone else behaves. His integrity will never be violated, despite the failures of anyone else's integrity.

We do not have the freedom to ignore God's appointed but certainly reluctant witnesses, the Jewish people. If we wish to read our Bibles more effectively we have to recognize the Jewish presence within many of the prophecies within the Bible. However, it should be noted that this prophecy in Ezekiel 37 is presented in two stages. In the first stage the bones become bodies. In the second stage the wind fills them and they becoming living breathing beings. In application we have only witnessed the first stage. We have seen the political rebirth of the nation of Israel. The disjointed bones have formed political skeletons which have been covered with military muscle and structural organs and eventually skin. However, the second stage of the resurrection has not yet taken place. The filling of their bodies with breath indicates their repentance and the acceptance of their true Messiah. This stage of the prophecy has yet to take place.

### **The Spirit Wind of Repentance**

It should be interesting that the Hebrew word originally used by God with Ezekiel that has been translated into the word 'wind' for our convenience and enlightenment is the same Hebrew word that is translated breath and also spirit. It is the Hebrew word *ruach*. The Jewish people will yet be filled with a new spirit from God. At that time they will repent and accept the man they pierced. A complementary prophecy is found in the writings of Zechariah in chapter 12 and verse 10 *And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.* This prophecies of the day when the house of David, which would be the nation of Israel since David had been their greatest king, would repent when faced with the one they had pierced, the one who was their firstborn. This "firstborn" notation refers to significance, not chronology. It defines the prominent status of that first born son and not the chronological order of birth).

God offers the Jewish people as his witnesses when we are weighing the evidence of divine existence, divine orchestration and control in the matters of our world. God presents all the detailed prophecies we need to powerfully validate His existence and His authorship of the amazing book we call the Bible.

### **A Global Canvas**

Besides the fairly obvious prophecies that have been miraculously portrayed before us over the last two generations we should be attuned to the subtle prophetic evidence God provides also. As we read our Bibles repeatedly, listening for echoes and paying particular attention to what is below the surface of the Bible's words we should listen for the Bible's echo from the Newspapers and current event chroniclers in print and screen. Let's examine divine evidence of a more subtle nature, painted

across the world's canvas that is visible only to those who will sacrifice the time and effort to read their Bibles effectively.

One of the celebration rituals God commanded his followers to observe was called the Jubilee. It was the law of the fiftieth year, the year following seven sets of seven years. This would be a special year when everyone would regain their ancestral inheritance. Land could not be sold forever in the nation God designed and established. The land would always revert, without lien or mortgage, to the ownership of the family that had inherited it when the land was first divided and awarded by Joshua the political leader of the children of Israel along with Phinehas the High Priest and their religious leader. Here are the terms in which God instructs them about the Jubilee.

*Leviticus 25:8-11,13 And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years. <sup>9</sup>Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. <sup>10</sup>And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family. <sup>11</sup>A jubile shall that fiftieth year be unto you .... <sup>13</sup>In the year of this jubile ye shall return every man unto his possession.*

Under the divinely appointed law of the nation of Israel, God wanted them to understand the relationship between the 50th year and their returning to their ancestral land along with the principles of freedom and liberty. Additionally, all indentured service ended in the Jubilee year. If anyone had sold their services for a certain period of time they were automatically set free, without further debt, in the Jubilee year. If their entire family was in service then the entire family went away for free. It was a year of freedom and liberty and debt elimination and the return to the ancestral inheritance. The 50th year would be a jubilee. Let's parallel this divine policy with events surrounding the resurrection of the nation of Israel over the last hundred years or so. Since God offers the Jewish people as his witnesses to the world, perhaps we can see this Jubilee lesson applied in our age as a witness to the Creator's orchestrating of historical events to convert his prophecies into realities.

### **The Zionist Jubilee**

Our first significant event takes place in August, 1897 when the world witnessed the first Zionist convention in Basle Switzerland, explaining their position as "Zionism seeks to establish a home for the Jewish people in Palestine, secured under public law". Following this momentous occasion Theodore Herzyl (The prime motivator for this convention) wrote the following month... "Were I to sum up the Basle Congress in a word it would be this: At Basle I founded the Jewish State. If I sounded this out loud today, I would be answered by universal laughter. Perhaps in five years, and certainly in fifty, everyone will know it."

This date and event qualifies as an **invitation** to every Jew returning to their ancestral land with a strong association with freedom and liberty for these appointed witnesses of God. Fascinatingly, exactly 50 years later the reality unfolds before the nations. The United Nations votes on whether or not to partition Palestine into a Jewish as well as an Arab state. The UN resolution is passed.

Incredibly, Russia reverses its longstanding anti-Semitic policies and votes in favor of the partition plan. The world is stunned. The Palestinian Arabs immediately attack Jewish settlements in Palestine with the intention of eliminating any possibility of the appearance of a Jewish state. The war of Jewish independence begins violently.

Fifty years following the invitation to Jewish freedom, liberty and the return to their ancestral lands the invitation becomes a reality. These historical events reflect perfectly the divine lesson of the Jubilee, the fiftieth year celebration when God commanded the Jewish people to return to their ancestral inheritance and experience freedom and liberty. But there is more.

### **The Jerusalem Jubilee**

Another highly significant event plays out in 1917. Great Britain militarily wrests control of Palestine from Turkish authority in November of 1917 during World War I. Jerusalem is taken in miraculous fashion without even one shot being fired. General Allenby walked into Jerusalem at the head of his British troops totally unmolested. It was reported to the population that Allah Bey (meaning the prophet of God) was leading an army to Jerusalem. Allenby sounded a lot like Allah Bey and the rumor spread rapidly. In Biblical fashion the British army entered the wide open gates of Jerusalem without resistance and without any damage to this holy city. In England, Lord Balfour issues his famous declaration in a letter to Lord Rothschild indicating that “His Majesty’s government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.” The news echoes across the continents. It is the invitation to Jewish freedom and liberty and the return to their ancestral inheritance.

The reality of freedom and liberty and the return to Jewish ancestral lands followed the invitation by exactly fifty years. In June of 1967 the nation of Israel was in severe jeopardy. Egypt, Jordan and Syria were preparing to attack and destroy Israel. This war lasted all of six days. Israel defeated all three countries along its southern, eastern and northern borders. They expanded their borders in all directions to areas that had been part of the original kingdom of Israel under the reign of King David. The primary victory was Jerusalem. The old city of Jerusalem was now under Jewish political control for the first time since before the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This freedom and liberty and return to Jewish ancestral inheritance happened fifty years after the invitation in 1917, echoing all the principles and promises of the fifty year Jubilee.

### **Explosion of Sight and Sound But No Substance**

The Jewish people planned to control Jerusalem in 1948 when their war of independence was concluding. They took for granted that they would possess the city at that time. God’s timing would not accommodate their presumptions. They were so confident they would possess the city before the ceasefire would begin that they had an entire interim city government organized, with money printed and posters printed. It was reported that David Shaltiel, the man who would be the city’s political head, even practiced his acceptance speech the night before their final assault. All they had to do was breach the walls. Ammunition and food supplies were very low in the Arab controlled old city of Jerusalem. The plan was flawless. At the appointed time a diversion would be created with an attack at a gate on the opposite side of the city from the true attack. This would draw what little military

resources the Arabs had away from the true target. A 300 pound bomb had been designed by a renowned physicist. The bomb had to be carried up Mount Zion from the Valley of Hinnom in the dark through a hastily dug trench under rifle fire from the city walls. The bomb was finally placed next to the wall and the men pulled back to a safe distance, awaiting the explosion that would give the invaders access to the city and control within hours. There was an incredible flash that shot up to the night sky. The men rushed forward through the smoke to enter the city... and bounced off the still standing wall. The huge bomb had exploded. The star chasing flash and the ear shattering boom had been witnessed for miles around. But, the now blackened wall was still intact. Bewildered, the previously confident Jewish force retreated. They didn't understand that their plans contradicted God's timing. The UN cease fire took effect the next day. They wouldn't enter Jerusalem for almost 19 more years.

Once was not enough. Twice the lesson of the Jubilee year was portrayed for those who read their Bibles effectively, accepting God's rules for understanding prophecy. If we ignored the Old Testament we would never see this powerful but hidden testimony. If we try to ignore the Jewish people as the divinely appointed witnesses of God (as reluctant as they are to fill this role) these observations would escape us. God provides evidence and witnesses exclusively for the faithful to recognize so that they can be confident that He is actively involved in world affairs, orchestrating events to eventually fulfill His will completely at the appointed time.

**Capsule Four:** We can read our Bibles more effectively if we recognize and apply the basic divinely appointed rules for understanding Bible prophecies. We don't have the right to personal opinions when it comes to interpreting Bible prophecy. Prophecy was intended for true believers, to provide a solid foundation for faith. The Jewish people are God's appointed witnesses and act as a great key to understanding Bible prophecy.

## Step Five How To Find Answers For Ourselves

This step will show how to use reference books where we can find answers to questions we don't even know we have yet. There are basic reference books that can come in very handy such as a Bible Concordance, a Lexicon and a Bible Dictionary.

A concordance is a reference book that lists every word found in the Bible with the corresponding Hebrew or Greek word from which it was translated and every reference where that English word can be found in the Bible. We may read the exciting story of how the teenage shepherd boy named David defeated a 9 1/2 foot tall giant soldier named Goliath with a smooth stone slung at bullet speed into the giant's forehead. We may want to know more about David. We can look up the name David in our concordance where we will see that his name means 'beloved' and is found over 1,000 times in the Bible. If we want to know what to do in order to be saved we can look for all the places in the Bible where the words save, saved and salvation appear. This is some of the value offered by a concordance, whether we are looking for 'the rest of the story' or a more complete understanding of deep principles.

The most common concordance we will find is Strong's Exhaustive Concordance. These are readily available in both print and as part of various computer Bible software programs. The Bible was originally written in the Hebrew and Greek languages and then translated into English as well as many other languages. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament was written in Greek. The Strong's Concordance will assign a number to each Hebrew and Greek word. This is helpful when we understand that one word may have multiple meanings and be translated into various English words. We have this challenge in the English language also. The word 'right' can mean a variety of things such as 1). correct 2). as opposed to left 3). moral judgement 4). a political position. A similar example from the Bible would be the Hebrew word that translated 'spirit' (as in the "Spirit" of God) is ruach. Besides being translated as 'spirit,' it is also translated wind, breath, mind, blast, air, anger and even courage. Sometimes it can be very helpful to know exactly how a word is used in a language to determine the full flavor of the word.

In elementary school when I was taught how to spell and define words I was required to use that particular word in five different sentences. The teacher would be able to tell from my use of the word whether or not I understood the word correctly. If we are ever curious about how a Bible word should be understood we can use our concordance to look up every Bible reference where the original Hebrew or Greek word is used, no matter which way it is translated. This may be what I prefer to call "excessive information." Very few Bible readers are going to do extensive word searches. But at times a brief examination can be very informative and entertaining. For example let's look at the word 'love.'

### **The Three New Testament Words for Love**

In the English language our word love can refer to many different categories of love. These categories have a common theme but very different applications. A love for our parents is very

different than a love for our wife or husband. A love for our friend is very different from a love for our children. A love for chocolate is very different from the erotic application of making love. In the original Greek language of the New Testament there are three primary, yet different, words for love that are all translated into the one English word love. There is one word indicating a friendship or brotherly love (*phileo*). There is one word indicating an erotic love (*eros*). The last Greek word translated love indicates a deep, powerful love of total commitment (*agapao*). This inability of the English language to capture the uniqueness of these different categories of love removes a measure of the drama from the text. We have a commonly used phrase that applies here when we say that there was something “lost in the translation.” Advertisers have to be very careful when they are translating their advertising into the languages of the countries where they want to sell their products. I read in a business journal how a certain global carbonated beverage manufacturer had a lot of apologizing to do in a certain middle eastern country when their slogan was translated and the locals understood it to mean the American company was claiming their cola would bring ancestors back from the dead. The same principle applies in the translation of the original Greek and Hebrew languages into our Bible. Translators can make mistakes and misapply their personal preferences to project an understanding that is misleading. I call this “translators whim,” which can be crippling when accurate Bible understanding is our goal.

Let’s say we are reading along in the Bible and we come to an incident centering on love that draws our attention and we want to understand it better. We can consult a concordance to identify which word ‘love’ is used in order to learn what level of love is being referenced. Is this love a deep, powerful, compelling love... or a more casual fondness, as for a friend... or the more sensual and physical application of the word. When we open a Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance to find this out, we see that the word love is given number identifications. For example we would see the number 25 used. We would then look up the number 25 in the Greek Lexicon, which is in the back of a Strong’s Concordance. The box below presents one way the information might be displayed:

**25 ἀγαπάω** [agapao /ag·ap·ah·o/] v. Perhaps from **agan** (much) [or cf 5368]; TDNT 1:21; TDNTA 5; GK 26; 142 occurrences; AV translates as “love” 135 times, and “beloved” seven times. **1** of persons. **1A** to welcome, to entertain, to be fond of, to love dearly. **2** of things. **2A** to be well pleased, to be contented at or with a thing.  
(1*Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995.)

The Lexicon tells us the Greek word that is translated love, how to pronounce it, what root word it may have been derived from, the total number of times and ways it has been translated into English and the various applications of the word. If we have an electronic concordance we should be able to generate a listing of every Bible reference where this particular Greek word is used, indicating a deeper and more meaningful love.

Let’s look at a story where an understanding of which original Greek word for love was used when the conversation occurred would enrich our understanding and enhance the effectiveness of our Bible reading.

After Jesus rose from the dead he was not constantly with his disciples. He would come to them at various times over a period of a little more than five weeks before he rose to heaven from the Mount of Olives. Christ's third visit is when seven of the disciples had gone fishing at Peter's suggestion one night on the Sea of Galilee. After hours of net fishing from their boat in the dark of the night they had caught nothing. As dawn approaches signaling the end of their fishing opportunities, a man calls to their boat from the shore asking if they had been successful. At this time they don't realize it is Jesus calling to them. They shout back that they have caught nothing. He tells them to throw their net to the right side of the boat and they would definitely catch fish. The fishermen comply with a cast to the right and an incredible number of fish are snagged in the net, exactly 153 of them. John either instinctively knows or is able to recognize that this man on the shore is his beloved master Jesus. John tells Peter the man on the shore is Jesus. The boat is probably still a few hundred feet from shore but Peter is anxious to be with his Lord, probably still feeling the sting of his three denials on the night of the trial of Jesus at the home of the High Priest. He covers himself up and dives into the water to swim to shore, leaving the beaching of the net filled with fish to his friends. When the boat reaches shore Peter hauls the net up onto the beach. With 153 fish in this net this suggests Peter is certainly not a 98-pound-weakling. Being a net fisherman by trade he would have had to be quite physically fit, but to haul a huge net of fish out of the water and onto land would suggest he could embarrass a lot of the early morning gym enthusiasts of our age.

Jesus has prepared breakfast for these seven men. He offered bread and fish. I remember when I was in Israel a few years ago and saw fish on the breakfast buffet at my hotel, the Eilon Tower in Jerusalem. It has never been my preference to eat fish for breakfast, but apparently it still is the practice in Palestine almost 2,000 years after Jesus offered fish for an early morning breakfast to his disciples. To be fair, I would imagine the Jewish palate would be equally uncomfortable with my preference for a breakfast of bacon and eggs.

Our lesson begins after they are finished with breakfast. Jesus asks Simon Peter a rather penetrating question, *Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me more than these?* We might ask, with whom or what is Jesus asking Peter to measure the intensity of his love. Is Jesus asking Peter if he loves his master more than these other disciples? That would seem rather out of character for the son of God, to incite bickering and competition among his followers. During his ministry he had discouraged their debate concerning which of them would be the greatest. It seems odd that he would now reverse his position and encourage such competition. Perhaps Jesus was asking Peter if he loved his master more than he loved fishing, gesturing to the large pile of fish by them on the shore as he asked Peter if he loved him more than 'these.' Peter was a leader. He inspired others to follow his direction. When he declared he was going fishing, six other disciples quickly followed him to the small boat in the middle of the night.

If our Bible reading is increasing in effectiveness we may hear a faint Bible echo repeating in our mind from the beginning of Christ's ministry recorded in Mathew and Mark. Jesus had promised to make Peter a fisher of men about three and a half years before when he invited this fisherman and his brother to leave their boat and follow him ... *And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were*



*fishers. <sup>19</sup>And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. <sup>20</sup>And they straightway left their nets, and followed him* (Matthew 4:18-20). Quite reasonably this is the moment at which Jesus wants Peter to make the transition from fishing for an aquatic harvest to a human harvest... *Do you love me more than these?* The value of our understanding of the words translated love becomes valuable in this dialogue between Jesus and Peter. Jesus has asked the question... do you *agapao* me... do you love me deeply and powerfully. What is interesting is that Peter responds with a different Greek word that is still translated into the same English word "love." Peter says "Yes Lord, you know that I love you," but does not respond with the word *agapao* that Jesus used, but *phileo*. This indicates a different category of love. It may be that Peter's masculinity encouraged him to avoid the very intimate & powerful word for love that Jesus had used. Peter appears uncomfortable with the question in the first place insisting, *You know that I love you*. By stressing the understanding that Jesus should know Peter's affection, Peter is confused as to why the question should be asked. In Peter's mind he is firm in his love for Jesus. Peter is avoiding the comparison aspect of the question, as to whether he loves Jesus **more** than his love for fishing. But Peter does not respond with the same Greek word for love. Peter responded ...*You know that I love (phileo) you*. This is significant that Peter does not answer with the same word Jesus asks with. If a woman asked her boyfriend if his love for her were *agapao* and he responded that his love was *phileo*... that would be a kiss-off. The boyfriend would be saying that he loved her like a friend or like his sister.

Jesus is asking Peter if he loved him deeply and with a greater commitment than he loved fishing. Jesus then responds... *feed my lambs... give up fishing and become a shepherd... lead my flock of believers*. Jesus surprises Peter by asking a second time; *Peter do you love/agapao me?* Peter again answers that he does *love/phileo* Jesus. Jesus answers: *feed my sheep*. To Peter's great distress Jesus not only asks a third time, Jesus changes the word and says Peter, *do you love/phileo me?*

Jesus has downgraded his third inquiry, as if to say... Peter, do you only love me as a friend? Is your love of me just a fondness? The third repetition of the question alone would have distressed Peter on two levels. To ask a third time would be to say... are you really, really sure of your answer. We would probably become rather defensive if we were asked the same question a third time after having already answered it the same way twice. In addition Peter would remember how the Lord had prophesied to his adamant denials that Peter would deny him three times on the night of the Lord's betrayal. Three times he denied any familiarity with this Jesus of Nazareth who was on trial for his life at the home of the High Priest in the middle of the night. And now, just a week or two later, Jesus asks him for the **third** time if Peter loves him. Jesus additionally downgrades his inquiry from an *agapao* love to a *phileo* love. Simon Peter was understandably grieved. The Bible reads: *Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee*. Peter doesn't want to hear the upsetting question again. This time Peter adds the phrase *You know all things* and then repeats his adamant contention that Jesus already knows he loves him. Jesus responds again with *Feed my sheep*. This exchange is where Jesus is asking Peter to demonstrate the love he claims by changing his profession, to leave the fishing that he loves and apply his leadership skills in the service of this man he professes to love even more by caring for the flock-like believers of the Son of God. Jesus is telling Peter, *If you love me as you say you do, then feed my sheep*.

The sense of drama and emotion may be lost if we are unaware of the different words used for love between these men who have been two of the world's most influential men over the last 2,000 years. This is an example of how a concordance can enrich our Bible reading, enhancing the effectiveness.

### **The End of the World?**

Let's look at a different kind of example of how valuable it can be to be able to reference a Bible Concordance and Lexicon. The Bible is the most powerful of all books. It can excite as well as comfort. It can induce fear as well as love. It can elevate our confidence and it can crush our ego. Improperly applied, it can incite to anger and violence. Properly applied, it can overwhelm us with wonder and admiration. Ineffective reading can leave us empty, disillusioned and primed for the manipulative influence of people with a hidden agenda, what the apostle Paul calls 'wolves among the flock' (Acts 20:28-30).

Improper and ineffective reading of the Bible can create unnecessary fear. We may have heard or read of the stories in the last century where self-proclaimed prophets have professed to know the exact day when the world would end. There have been historical incidents where people have sold all their goods and travelled to remote areas expecting to escape certain catastrophe only to be disappointed when life simply continued on in the same fashion. We have read of mass suicides of religious groups, having previously claimed unique insights into Bible prophecy. We may not even look twice when we witness an unshaven, poorly attired, mumbling street person strolling up and down Main Street wearing a sandwich board advertising that the end of the world is coming Tuesday. However, if a well dressed, articulate, sensitive, apparently moral person with a certain Bible familiarity suggests impending doom we may think twice. What does it mean in the Bible when we read of the end of the world? Once again we can open our concordance and find a large measure of comfort while increasing the effectiveness of our Bible reading.

### **Which World?**

First of all let's consider about how we think of this word 'world' in the English language. We can certainly apply this word to the planet earth. However, that application is definitely not exclusive. A circle of commonality is considered a 'world.' For example, there is the Wide World of Sports. This phrase doesn't indicate another planet in our galaxy named "Sports"... although some wives might be tempted to challenge that statement as they pry their spouse's attention away from that "world" with such phrases as "Earth to husband, come in husband." We refer to the 'world of finance' and the 'world of high technology.' There are many worlds within our world.... or spheres of common activity and expressions within our one planet. In the original New Testament texts which were translated into English there are several Greek words which are translated "world." The two primary Greek words are *kosmos* (meaning the physical earth, our planet) and *aión* (meaning an age or time period). Interestingly, whenever the New Testament speaks of the end of the world the word *kosmos* is never once used. This would indicate an end to our planet-world. We never read of the end of the "*kosmos*" or planet. The word that is always used is *aión*, indicating an end of a particular age or a certain era. When we understand that every single reference to the end of the world in the New

Testament refers to the end of an age then any fear of the divine destruction of our planet justifiably disintegrates. Effective Bible reading can provide a calming confidence in our lives.

We also have to be careful when reading the Bible as there are a number of beginnings and a number of endings. There is the beginning which refers to creation. There is also a beginning that refers to the Jewish world that began at Mount Sinai when God gave them the law and a priesthood and a government and brought them to the promised land and made them into a kingdom. The end of that Jewish world took place in AD 66-70 when the Roman army advanced through Palestine suppressing the Jewish rebellion and eliminating the Jewish way of life. Eventually the Jewish people were scattered across the known world, expelled from their divine inheritance. Their temple-centered lifestyle ended with the elimination of that temple. The end of their 'world' had come upon them. Another 'end' scripture refers to is the time when God will not allow life to continue as it has for thousands of years on this planet. It is the time of the end when he will judge the world. Let's look at some Bible verses where this word 'world' is translated from these two Greek words and see how much more effective and accurate our Bible reading becomes when we know particularly which 'world' is being referred to... our planet or an age.

Jesus explains one of his parables to his disciples in Matthew chapter 13. Let's listen to his explanation and identify which word he uses each time he says "world."

Matthew 13:38-40 *The field is the world (kosmos = planet); the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; <sup>39</sup> The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world (aion = age); and the reapers are the angels. <sup>40</sup>As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world (aion = age).*

Jesus refers to the end of the world but not the end of the planet. He is prophesying of the end of an age, the end of an era or timeframe. The disciples recognize this lesson. Later, after Jesus has told them that the magnificent Jewish temple at Jerusalem that impressed them so much would be destroyed so completely that not one stone would be left on top of another, they ask this question: *Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world (aion = age)? ... Matthew 24:3.* The disciples are not asking when the planet (kosmos) would be destroyed, but when will the end of the (temple) age come.

The book of Hebrews uses both Greek words in a single verse which beautifully expresses the difference between both words and how the end of the world would not mean the end of the planet.

### **The End of the World 2,000 Years Ago**

Hebrews 9:26 *For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world (kosmos = planet): but now once in the end of the world (aion = age) hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.* We know the planet did not end when Jesus Christ hung on the cross as a sacrifice for sin. Therefore the end of the world that is referred to here cannot mean the end of the planet. There was an end of a world that took place at the death of Jesus, about 2,000 years ago. It was the end of an age.

We can take great comfort from this understanding when dangerously self-serving Bible commentators fuel our fears with warnings of the end of the world. We can ask the question, which world is going to end? Perhaps it's the Wide World of Sports they are referring to, but I doubt it. A concordance and Lexicon are wonderful reference tools we can use easily and frequently when we are unsure of what the Bible is saying... or we want to find another place where something similar is said... or we want to know more about a particular place or ritual.

For example we might read the fascinating story in Genesis 22 of how God instructed Abraham to take his son Isaac and offer him to God as a human sacrifice. This was a test of Abraham's faithfulness as God eventually prevented Abraham from killing his son. We read that God had this particular place in mind where Abraham had to perform this deed, a place known as Moriah. We might be curious about this place called Moriah. Why would this particular place be so significant to God? When we look up the name Moriah in our concordance we would find there is only one other place the name is mentioned. In 2 Chronicles 3:1 we read: *Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the LORD appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.* This tells us that the temple Solomon built in Jerusalem (the house of the LORD) was built on Mount Moriah, the exact same place God told Abraham to take Isaac to sacrifice him. Isn't it interesting that God instructed Abraham to take his son Isaac, the son of promise miraculously born to a ninety year old woman no longer capable of giving birth, to be sacrificed at the place where God's son, the son of promise and born of a virgin, would be sacrificed as well?! Abraham proved he was willing to do for God what God was willing to do for Abraham and all mankind. In fact, just as God's son would be raised from the dead, Abraham believed that God would bring Isaac back from the dead also. The only reason Abraham was willing to offer his beloved son's life is that he was confident God would give that same life back to Isaac. This is evident by what Abraham said to the servants who accompanied him and his son. When Abraham told the servants to remain back he specifically told them both he and Isaac would return to them.... *Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you* (Genesis 22:4). Some cynics might suggest Abraham was lying to his young men. Unfortunately some people work hard imagine their particular failings are shared by everyone else. Liars think everyone lies. Thieves think everyone steals. Exceptionally immoral people presume everyone is down at their level. Abraham is given the title Father of the Faithful in the Bible. He was an exceptionally faithful man. He firmly believed God would bring Isaac back to life, since God had promised Abraham's immeasurable descendants would come specifically through Isaac. Abraham believed God's promise and believed both he and Isaac, raised from death, would return to the young men who stayed behind with the pack animal.

If we use our concordance to look up other places in the Bible where the name Ornan (the Jebusite who owned the threshingfloor where Solomon built the temple) is used we would find the record of the incident mentioned in Chronicles as to why Solomon built the temple at Moriah. King David, the father of Solomon, had bought Ornan's threshingfloor and oxen. This was the very location where the angel who was inflicting a deadly plague on the nation had stopped at God's command. David

then offered the oxen as a burnt and peace offering to God on that very spot. When David prepared these offerings, fire came down out of the sky and consumed the offerings. David decided this had to be where God's temple would be built, where death was stopped. It was also where Abraham had been sent to offer his son to God and very close to where God would eventually offer his son, Jesus, as a sacrifice to benefit faithful people like Abraham and David. The concordance would also tell us the meaning of the name Moriah: "chosen of God." Today the Moslem memorial known as the Dome of the Rock rests on this site. The Moslems contend that Abraham was actually instructed to offer Ishmael (their ancestor) and not Isaac (the Jewish ancestor). The rock inside the mosque is supposed to be the rock Abraham used as an altar. This may or may not be the case. The literal rock is absolutely insignificant. It is not a talisman and has no mystical power of its own. It is the word of God that is powerful and living, not the artifacts mentioned within.

These examples offer just the barest glimpse of the incredible symmetry and hidden glory of God's word that can be discovered by using the Bible reference tools available to us to make our scripture reading more effective.

**Step Five Capsule:** The Bible was originally written in the Hebrew and Greek languages. Each English translation loses something in the translation. There are also quite a number of translations that flavor words and thoughts along the lines of specific opinions. Frequently we can improve our understanding by using a Concordance and Lexicon to find the true meanings of words and the other ways they are translated. These reference books are also helpful in finding the verses we can't seem to recall by looking up a word from the elusive verse in our concordance.

## Step Six What Does That Word Mean

We have all heard the humorous stories and probably seen the movies and television sitcoms that are founded on miscommunications. The famous television series I Love Lucy was constantly playing upon the humorous angles of miscommunications between Lucy and the Ricky. It is a standard humor formula for Hollywood. People jump to conclusions based on misunderstanding a word or perhaps hearing only part of what was said and then a series of events follow based on this misunderstanding. Viewers are both entertained and frustrated by the fact that no one asks for clarification as the bumbling and fumbling and eyes-wide false conclusions continue. The embarrassing climax at the end of the performance follows enlightenment and understanding. They would not have suffered through the embarrassment and the silly shenanigans if each party simply understood exactly what the other party had said. While these antics may be entertaining we wouldn't want to experience the embarrassment ourselves. Clear communication is as important to our happiness and peace of mind as healthy food and drink is to our body.

The Bible uses words that we assume mean one thing when they may actually mean something else. This creates a barrier of understanding and severely limits the effectiveness of our Bible reading. It doesn't even matter which Bible translation we may choose to read. Before we consider how to define Bible words let's examine the different Bible translations and paraphrases.

The Bible was originally written in the Hebrew and Greek languages. In 1611 AD the English Monarch, James, commissioned the publication of an English translation from the Hebrew and Greek texts that were available at that time. This is the most widely owned translation. It is commonly referred to as the "King James" or "Authorized" version. It is a very good translation but certainly not perfect. It can be difficult to read since it employs 17th century English. For example we understand the word "let" to mean: to allow. However, out of the 1,511 times the word "let" appears in the King James version it sometimes means exactly the opposite of 'allow.' For example, in the following verse found in the Apostle Paul's second letter to the believers in the Greek city of Thessalonica the word let actually means to prevent or restrain... *For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way* [2 Thessalonians 2:3]. This verse is in the context of a prophecy of the time when the true gospel would no longer be accepted and distortion and delusion would saturate church doctrine. The Greek word translated *letteth* and *let* each truly mean the opposite. The true meaning of the original Greek text is "For the mystery of iniquity does already work; only he who now *prevents* will continue *to prevent*, until he be taken out of the way." We can refer to another official Bible translation to verify this understanding. Here is a quote of the same verse from the Revised Standard Version, published in 1952: *For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now **restrains** it will do so until he is out of the way.*

This is an example of how the 17th century English that is used in the King James Version of the Bible can inhibit our effective reading. However, it is still a better translation than many more modern translations and is infinitely more valuable than any paraphrased version of the Bible. A

paraphrased version of the Bible, where someone has changed the wording to convey the message they personally happen to think is correct, is the greatest of all barriers to effective Bible reading. These thoughts are no longer God's, but are filtered through the minds of flawed and egotistical men who think they can improve on God's words. If you truly want to know what God is trying to tell us, avoid any Bible that is not a direct translation from the original Hebrew and Greek languages. My personal favorite is the Revised Standard Version of 1952. I find it is by far the most accurate. Unfortunately it is not popular and not available everywhere. Whichever version you choose to read from, make sure it is a translation. Make sure it offers the closest proximity to God's word and the farthest from any of mankind's twisted versions of God's thoughts.

God thinks differently than we do. We are limited and finite. We have a beginning and an ending. God is not limited and He is infinite. He had no beginning and will have no ending. We get dizzy when we try to mentally fathom eternity and infinite space. The Bible is the presentation of the mind of an infinite Creator to His finite creation. He thinks differently than we do. He is asking us to change the way we think and to think the way He thinks. If we try to read the Bible from our own personal point of view we have blocked the mind of God from affecting our lives. We have blunted the incredible power of God's word. We have to be asking what God is trying to tell us and not what do we want to hear.

Let's take a couple of basic concepts and examine how our perceptions may be opposed to what the mind of God is presenting. In the first example we will look at society's commonly accepted definition of a word and see how differently the word is defined by God. The second example is a very common Christian word that has several different meanings in the Bible. We will also consider how we can determine the true meanings of Bible words so that the effectiveness of our reading is improved.

### **God's Peace is Not Society's Peace**

Peace is a very basic desire of the great majority of society. While a very few who seem to love conflict can cause a great deal of hardship and sorrow and anxiety, most of us cherish peacefulness. Peace is a word defined in our dictionary as meaning the absence of aggression, the absence of disturbance and the absence of conflict. This definition highlights how the human mind is in direct opposition to the divine mind. God defines peace very differently. God does not see peace as an absence at all. He sees peace as a presence, while viewing conflict and disturbance as an absence. God defines peace as the presence of harmony and not the absence of disturbance. God's concept of peace is not calm and quiet opposition, but perfect agreement. God's peace is not the respectful diversity of many. It is how many are one in purpose and mind.

My mother may have separated my older brother and I when we were children and told us to sit there peacefully, giving her a moment of peace. That would have been an inappropriate use of the word, as defined Biblically. While our separation would have created an absence of aggression and an absence of disturbance there was certainly no presence of harmony. That came many years later when we both had matured and were no longer competing for our parent's attention along with everything else.

Here is how peace is defined in scripture:

*For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace [Ephesians 2:14-15].*

God sees peace as making two into one, not separating the two distinct, independent units. This chapter in the book of Ephesians speaks of how Christ joined Jew and Gentile (anyone who is not Jewish) through his sacrifice on the cross. The repeated use of the word peace here presents a picture of the presence of harmony, not the absence of aggression or disturbance. A partition is removed and a fusion takes place. This is peace in the mind of God. God's concept of peace is far beyond the simple concept of society where independent parties simply restrain the noisy or violent expressions of their differences. God's concept of peace is when these parties agree, not simply cease to disagree loudly or violently.

### **What is Truly Real?**

A great deal is revealed in the different definitions of peace. Society sees aggression and disturbance as the reality and peace as simply the absence of that reality. God sees peace as the reality (the presence of harmony), while disturbance and aggression are viewed as the temporary absence of peace. The simple definition of the word peace reveals a deep difference in philosophy, concerning what is real and permanent and what is temporary and will eventually vanish away.

What is real and what is an absence of that reality is a basic relationship in creation that we witness every day. Upon examination we will find that the laws and relationships of creation perfectly reflect the divine laws and relationships presented in scripture. Light is a reality. Darkenss is an absence. We can create light but we cannot create darkness. All we can do is remove light and what remains is what we call darkness. Darkness is an absence, just like disturbance and aggression (from God's point of view). The positive feature of creation is what has a real existence. Light is necessary for life and indicates understanding and wisdom (enlightenment).

Life is another reality. Death is the removal of life. Peace, like life and light, is the reality in God's mind. A husband and wife can create a new life. No one can create death. It is merely the removal of life. The positive features of God's creative activity are the things that are real and not an absence.

Heat is another reality. Heat can be generated. We cannot create cold. We can only remove heat. This is the principle that refrigeration is based upon. A refrigerator or freezer or air conditioner does not create cold. They simply remove heat. Warmth is what is substantial and real. It is necessary to sustain and enrich life. Cold is merely the absence of the reality of heat.

Interestingly each of these realities have positive relationships within the Bible. Life and light and warmth are very positive issues in God's word. Death and darkness and cold are very negative issues in the Bible. In the same sense peace is a very positive scriptural issue while aggression and



disturbance are very negative issues in God's word. These issues of light and darkness, heat and cold, and life and death are principles in the laws of creation (or "nature" as some prefer the word that suggests the absence of divine architecture and construction). These creation principles reflect the divine thought process that is presented in the Bible.

Society sees peace as an absence and a temporary condition with disturbance as the normal condition. God sees peace as a presence and eventually the permanent condition. If we read the Bible with society's viewpoints we will be blunting the power and effectiveness of the word of God in our lives. Once we understand the truth about peace we can begin to understand the many hidden lessons about peace in the Bible. Before Christ's sacrifice changed everything, God's law was the law that Moses passed on to the Jewish people. One set of those laws involved what was known as the 'peace' offering. It was an animal offering that was presented to God on the bronze altar placed next to God's sanctuary. Out of the six categories of altar offerings it was only the peace offering where everyone participated. God received a portion of this animal on the altar. The officiating priest and the priesthood each received portions of this animal sacrifice. The peace offering was the only animal offering category where the person donating the animal actually received a portion of this sacrificial animal. This is why it was called the "Peace Offering." The sense of this offering is one of peace, where all three parties fellowship together with one meal... God, His priesthood and the offerer. This unique feature confirms the Biblical definition of peace, which is the presence of harmony... unity in multiplicity. The divine institution of the family unit is an example of unity in multiplicity. There is a single family comprised of several members.

### **Dictionary Dangers**

If we look at the way a word is used throughout the Bible we can get a greater understanding of its definition. We should define words in the context of the Bible and not accept the dictionary as a final authority for what a Bible word means. This will inhibit the effectiveness of our Bible reading. For example the word "heaven" can actually refer to several different places and concepts presented in the Bible.

When we hear or read the word 'heaven' in the context of the Bible we probably think of God's home, in a region inaccessible to mere mortals. However, if we applied that understanding every time we read the word heaven in the Bible we would be crippling the effectiveness of our Bible reading. An example of this is when we read in the book of Daniel about a disturbing dream the Babylonian emperor wanted his advisors to explain. King Nebuchadnezzar described a massive tree that could be seen from every point on earth. It towered above every mountain and reached into what is described as "heaven." This use of the word suggests the understanding of heaven representing the atmosphere and not the Creator's residence. Additionally we are told that the "fowl of heaven" nested in this dream-tree. Unless we are willing to believe that God has a pigeon problem in heaven the only reasonable conclusion we are allowed is that the word heaven here in Daniel chapter four simply means the sky or atmosphere of our planet... not the Creator's home. Daniel goes on to interpret the emperor's dream, explaining that the tree represents Nebuchadnezzar himself, whose influence and glory extended across the nations. He was the massive tree that visible all across the world. He was this tree that nurtured and overshadowed his empire, looking down from the political

heavens. This tree would be cut down and banded for seven time periods. It was a prophecy of the seven year mental illness Nebuchadnezzar would experience because of his arrogance. The “fowl of heaven” expression shows us another understanding of the word *heaven* as used in the Bible. This shouldn’t be surprising as we use the word heavens in our society to represent the sky and atmosphere with such phrases as ‘the clouds drifting through the heavens’ or ‘the heavens opened with a soaking rain.’

### Political Heavens

So far we can see that heaven can mean God’s home or the simply the sky. We are nowhere near through. Just as the word heaven can refer to the sky above us it can also metaphorically represent the sector of society that is politically elevated... as it appears to be used in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. This would be a logical extension of the word and one example of where we find this is when the Apostle Paul describes an aspect of his preaching mission to the believers in Ephesus.

*Ephesians 3:8-10 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto **the principalities and powers in heavenly places** might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.*

If “heavenly places” simply refers to God’s home then why would the apostle to the Gentiles (people who are not Jewish) be sent to God’s home to teach God and Jesus and the angels about the gospel. That would be one seriously ludicrous conclusion. Where was Paul sent that he would present the manifold wisdom of God to the principalities and powers in heavenly places? Paul preached the gospel to the political elite, the rulers of the people elevated by influence, responsibility and wealth. He confessed Christ before the Jewish Sanhedrin, Felix the Governor, King Agrippa and even the Roman Emperor Caesar. Paul revealed the hidden things of God to men in elevated positions of power and authority. There are political heavens spoken of in scripture as well as atmospheric heavens as well as God’s home. But we still aren’t finished with our context definitions of the word heaven.

### The Heaven and Earth Nation

More than once God addresses the nation of Israel as “heaven and earth.” Moses speaks to the nation on behalf of God in this manner:

*Deuteronomy 31:30 through chapter 32:2 And Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song, until they were ended. **Give ear, O ye heavens,** and I will speak; and **hear, O earth,** the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass.*

God also addresses the nation of Israel through the prophet Isaiah in this same interesting manner:

*Isaiah 1:2-4 **Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth:** for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are*

*corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.*

Why would God address the children of Abraham, Issac and Jacob as “heaven and earth?” This is where careful attention to wording, listening for Bible echoes and using our concordance can provide great dividends in witnessing the beautiful symmetry hidden in the Bible and only revealed to those with seeing eyes and hearing ears.

### **Count the Dust of the Earth**

The phrase ‘heaven and earth’ is used extensively throughout scripture, in promises and prophecy and warnings and condemnations. We may remember a Bible echo of heaven and earth in the context of promises to the Patriarch of the nation of Israel. This was a man named Abraham, who was the only man in all of the Bible ever described as the friend of God. When God promises Abraham that he will have many descendants he describes the quantity of these descendants in a very significant way.

*Genesis 13:16 And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number **the dust of the earth**, then shall thy seed also be numbered.*

### **Count the Stars of Heaven**

God promises his friend Abraham that despite the fact that he was currently 75 years old and his wife was 65 years old that he would eventually have an abundance of descendants (seed)... numerically paralleled to the dust of the earth. God defines the quantity of these descendants in one other way when he confirms this promise to his friend fifteen years later.

*Genesis 15:2-4 And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? <sup>3</sup>And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. <sup>4</sup>And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. <sup>5</sup>And he brought him forth abroad, and said, **Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them:** and he said unto him, **So shall thy seed be.***

God promises the father of the Jewish people that He would bless His friend with descendants that would be as heaven and earth for multitude. They would be like the stars of heaven and the dust of the earth for multitude... heaven and earth. The parallels don’t stop there. A famous grandson of Abraham was Joseph. As a teenager Joseph had two very significant dreams concerning his family. The heaven and earth theme continues perfectly through these dreams.

*Genesis 37:5-9 And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more. <sup>6</sup>And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: <sup>7</sup>For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf. <sup>8</sup>And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words. <sup>9</sup>And he dreamed*

*yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.*

### **The Heaven and Earth Dream**

In the first dream Joseph and his brothers are depicted as grain products harvested from the earth. In the second dream they are presented as heavenly bodies. These divinely inspired dreams maintain the heaven and earth theme of the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Joseph and his brothers constitute the 12 tribes of Israel. God had changed Jacob's name to Israel. Jacob's twelve boys are the children of Israel from which the nation of Israel descended. Joseph's divinely inspired dreams extend perfectly from the terms of the divine promises to Joseph's grandfather paralleling the children of Israel to the terms heaven and earth.

This understanding is significant when we read of the destruction of heaven and earth in the New Testament. Jesus speaks of heaven and earth passing away. The Apostle Peter writes of heaven passing away with a great noise and the earth burning up. Since God has promised the faithful specifically that he will never destroy our planet, we are left with the task of defining what constitutes the heaven and earth that will be destroyed. This is another example of how God has written the Bible with intentional difficulty and complexity to weed out the tire kickers and mildly curious and repel the egotistical naysayers. In order to understand what scripture means by the destruction of heaven and earth we have to recognize the answers will not be on the surface of scripture and we have to understand that the New Testament is written with a presumed familiarity with the Old Testament. What was the "heaven and earth" that passed away after Jesus and Peter made these prophecies? It was the Jewish nation that passed away and burned up at the spearpoint and torches of the Roman military juggernaut. Since God addresses the nation of Israel repeatedly as "heaven and earth" it is only reasonable that his son and the disciples of his son should use the same expression. This understanding does not contradict God's promise that the earth will abide forever, it blends perfectly with history, and it is confirmed by the consistent use of this Jewish national expression throughout scripture. If we make the mistake of thinking the word heaven only refers to God's home in the Bible then we would jump to the false conclusion that God's home would be destroyed and that God would break his promise about never destroying our planet.

This brings us to four different definitions for the single word heaven used in the Bible... 1) God's home, 2) the sky, 3) the political heavens and 4) the national heaven and earth of the Jewish nation. If we do not define the words used in the Bible, using the Bible as the primary point of reference, we will never be able to read it effectively. Exclusively applying dictionary definitions for Bible terms will cripple our reading effectiveness.

**Step Six Capsule:** Good communication is the key to understanding. It is **our** responsibility to understand God's communication. We have to think in God's terms, not society's. If we try to listen to God through society's ears we will not hear Him. This is a lesson that was taught to the prophet Elijah at Mount Sinai after he spent 40 days traveling there to speak with God against the religiously apostate nation of Israel. Elijah waited in a cave for God to speak to him. First came a wind so powerful it whipped rocks through the air, exploding as they hit the mountain. God was not in the

loud, violent wind. Next came an earthquake that shook the mountain. God was not in the earthquake. Third came a fire. I can't imagine what can burn on this high, rocky, desert terrain but the conflagration raged. God was not in the fire. Fourth came a still, small voice... a thin, crushed whisper. This was God. He was speaking to Elijah. God wasn't in the loud, in-your-face, dramatic hurricane or earthquake or raging fire. God was in the whisper. We have to listen intently to hear God. We have to think in His terms. This takes effort in understanding His words and expressions. This is where a Concordance and Lexicon can be invaluable in improving the effectiveness of our Bible reading.

## Step 7

**Mystery? What Mystery?**

Has this one been tried on you? When a Bible commentator is stumped or their conclusions clearly contradict Bible statements they respond to your inquiry by stating that this issue is a mystery and must be accepted on faith. It is actually a very popular defense among professional Bible commentators. By invoking the ‘mystery excuse’ the questioner is put on the defensive. The question then becomes, do you have enough faith to accept the Professional Bible commentator’s conclusions or are you faithless? The problem with this excuse is that it stifles Bible examination and blunts the effectiveness of our Bible reading. The New Testament portion of the Bible certainly refers to a mystery. Actually it refers to more than one mystery. However, each of the mysteries itemized have all been described as revealed and no longer qualify as mysteries.

The primary mystery mentioned was the fact that the long awaited Messiah would have to die and be raised from the dead. This was not anticipated by the Bible scholars when Jesus came to die on the cross. Not only did no one expect the Messiah to die before assuming the throne of David, his disciples actually refused to accept the notion when Jesus told them plainly.

*From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men (Matthew 16:21-23)*

No one expected the Messiah to die. It was a mystery. They didn’t understand the principle of the atonement, how sin had to be condemned and executed in a body without transgression.. But that mystery was revealed after Christ’s resurrection from the dead. It was no longer mysterious. This became the primary feature of the gospel taught by the apostles.

*Even the **mystery** which hath been hid from ages and from generations, **but now is made manifest to his saints**: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:*  
**Colossians 1:26-27**

The Messiah’s necessary death was once a mystery but no longer qualifies as one. This former mystery is now the focus of the gospel message... the death and resurrection of the Son of God. The evidence and the answers were always there in the Bible of Christ’s day (what we refer to as the Old Testament). The preachers of the first century church quoted extensively from the Old Testament scrolls to prove that the Messiah would have to die. Isaiah chapter 53 goes into a great deal of detail concerning the necessity of the Messiah to die and be raised to life again, his arrest, his trial, the reason for his death, his burial and his resurrection. In Isaiah’s prophecy we are told that he would not be socially popular, that he would not be an attractive man, that he would be severely physically abused including whipping, abandoned by his closest allies, silent at his trial, his execution and burial bringing him into contact with criminals and a rich man (he was buried in a rich man’s

sepulchre), that he would die as a sacrifice for sin, and that he would be brought back from the dead and rewarded greatly. These details are all itemized in just this one prophecy of the Messiah in the Old Testament, yet the professional Bible commentators of Christ's day were oblivious to the fact that the long awaited Messiah would have to die. Despite that fact that prophetic details concerning the death and resurrection of the Messiah abound throughout the Old Testament his death would be a mystery until after it was historically revealed. Hindsight makes what was once a total mystery appear to be a simple conclusion. Remove the hindsight and the mystery would continue even though the evidence would be still there.

This is why we should not accept the "mystery excuse." The mystery of the gospel referred to in the New Testament was revealed. It is no longer a mystery. Secondly the scriptural evidence was there all along, waiting to be discovered. If that generation of scripture scholars were willing to put aside their egos and the presumption that historically accepted doctrine was accurate, questioning everything, they would have seen the death and resurrection of the Messiah prophesied in the word of God.

### **The Gentile Invitation Mystery**

Another gospel mystery that was revealed to early Christianity was the fact that not only Jews would be offered salvation. It was presumed, even by Christ's apostles after the Lord's ascension to heaven, that the gospel was to be offered exclusively to the Jewish people. It took repeated visions, an angelic visitation and an outpouring of miracles to convince the early Jewish Christians that the Gentiles (anyone who isn't geneologically a Jew) should be offered the gospel of salvation. Acts chapter 10 recounts the dramatic events surrounding the Apostle Peter's visit to a wealthy Roman soldier's home to explain the gospel to his household. The power of God fell directly on these Gentiles as Peter spoke, confirming God's approval. In the next chapter Peter travels to Jerusalem to defend his actions. He recounts all the events and the conclusion everyone arrives at is stated this way in verse 18: *When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then has God **also to the Gentiles** granted repentance unto life.*

The fact that this was one of the revealed mysteries is confirmed in the Apostle Paul's letter to the Gentile church at Ephesus in Asia Minor.

*How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; **That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel** [Ephesians 3:3-6]*

Once again the Bible evidence was always there. Despite the fact that the inclusion of the Gentiles in the opportunity of divine salvation was a mystery and unexpected. The evidence for this was peppered throughout the Holy Writings of the Old Testament. Consider these references with the brightness of hindsight:

*And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a*

*light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.*

**[Isaiah 49:6-7]**

*I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. **[Isaiah 42:6-7]***

The distinction between Jew and Gentile is determined by the direct genealogical descent from the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The privileged position presumed by the Jewish people is the inheritance of the promises offered to these faithful men. However it should have been understood that these promises would be extended to all people in creation without genealogical distinction, since this issue is presented in the original divine promises to Abraham.

*Now the LORD had said unto Abram [This was prior to when God changed Abram's name to Abraham], Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: <sup>2</sup>And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: <sup>3</sup>And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

**[Genesis 12:1-3]**

Right in the context of the promises God made to his friend Abraham was the indication that this blessedness would not be limited to his genealogical descendents but would be extended out to all families across the globe.

With clear evidence like this it may seem odd that inviting the Gentiles to partake of the gospel message was a mystery. We are fortunate to enjoy the clarity of mind that comes with hindsight. The mystery of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the message of salvation was revealed in the first century. What was a mystery was no longer a mystery and the evidence had always existed for any who had eyes to see and ears to hear.

**Step Seven Capsule:** The word mystery is used in the New Testament in relation to certain issues of the gospel that were unknown during the Mosaic age. These mysteries were revealed by Christ and the apostles. The mystery that the Messiah would have to die in order to save people from their sins was not understood. It was a mystery prior to the death and resurrection of Jesus. The mystery of the inclusion of the gentiles in the salvation process was not understood before the apostles began preaching to non-Jews beginning with Cornelius the Roman Centurion. It was a mystery. But it was revealed. These were no longer mysteries.

No one is free to hide behind the mystery excuse. It is not a legitimate excuse. The answers are there and the mysteries mentioned in the New Testament are the ones that have been revealed. Do not let the effectiveness of your Bible reading be blunted by the mystery excuse. Keep looking, keep reading, keep asking, keep searching, keep wondering. The answers are there!

Jim Dillingham

bible888@aol.com



## Step Eight What In The World Does That Mean?

A shadow occurs when a bright light cannot pass through a physical object, thereby framing the form of that physical object against the point at which the light stops. The shadow of an animal trots along beside it on a bright, sunny day. If we can only see the shadow we are usually able to determine what is creating the shadow. The shadow of a child is very distinctive from the shadow of a tree or a dog. However, shadows are only two dimensional. There is no substance or color. We may be able to determine that a certain shadow represents a child but we may not be able to discern which child is being shadowed by simply viewing the child's light framed silhouette. God teaches shadow lessons in the Bible. He even defines them as shadows. He uses symbolic language to outline a principle without spelling it out unmistakably. God doesn't grab us by the lapels and shake us and shove our face into His word and demand that we understand. It is more of a challenging invitation to know Him than it is a loud blackboard lesson. Many issues are not dealt with directly. Sometimes we only have shadows to determine what God wants us to know about Him.

Step One explained how God presents His book with an intentional difficulty, designed to trip up the self satisfied, the ego driven, and the casual reader. One application of this principle is the divine use of symbols. We may only be able to see the shadow of a principle or truth, framed by light. The challenge for the ambitiously inquisitive, effective Bible reader is to distinguish between the shadow and the substance, between what is creating the shadow and the shadow itself. Hebrews 10:1 tells us the ineffectiveness of the shadow compared to the substance: *For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.* The verse tells us that the animal sacrifices God required during the time frame when the Law of Moses was in effect were only shadows. They were incapable of perfecting anyone. There was no true substance. These laws were shadows, designed as teaching tools. Unfortunately, when Jesus of Nazareth came to crucify sin in his body, the Jewish people were not ready to recognize a Messiah that would have to die to save them. The laws that Moses gave them were mistakenly considered to be an end in themselves, complete and lacking nothing. It was presumed these laws were substance and not simply shadows. They were certainly not viewed as simply a teaching tool for a limited timeframe. Yet within these laws the proof of their limitation was woven within the details and procedures.

### **Intentional Difficulty**

God teaches with shadows, reflections and veiled innuendo. The Creator expresses Himself with a great deal of symbolic language. Nations and empires are described as mishapen beasts such as a four headed, winged leopard or a fierce dragon with 10 heads and a horn with eyes as well as a mouth that speaks (each found in Daniel chapter seven). We are told mountains represent mothers (Galatians chapter five). We're told the number 666 identifies a man of great evil who is beast-like in his thinking (Revelation chapter 13). We are told blood represents life (Leviticus 17) and rain represents the word of God (Deuteronomy 32:2). We are told one prophetic day can equal a literal

thousand year period (2 Peter 3:8; Psalm 90:4). Symbolic language abounds in the Bible. How do we understand intentionally difficult language like this?

When people want to communicate in secret they speak in code. When communication is intended for a select few there is a proprietary form of communication understood exclusively by the parties intended. This is evident in varying fashions through all walks of life... from the mother and father who spell out words in front of their pre-school children to the teenagers with a street dialect that is like another language to anyone outside their tight community... to the military and intelligence communities with sophisticated communication procedures designed to filter out everyone but the approved.

### **Icons and Acronyms**

Beyond this issue we also use symbols constantly in our daily life. An icon is a symbol. An icon says a great deal in just a small space. We use acronyms constantly, trying to achieve clear communication with few expressions. USA is just a three letter string but everyone in the United States of America instantly recognizes these letters are representing the land of the free and the home of the brave, apple pie, and mom, but also income taxes. Corporations aggressively protect their corporate symbols with batteries of lawyers on retainer.

The Bible exhibits this same principle of symbolic language intended to filter out a certain group. That group would be those who want to translate everything into an image where they are the center of all activity. The ego is the greatest barrier to reading our Bibles effectively. The Bible's call is to self-sacrifice, not self-indulgence. The Bible requires personal subjugation not exaltation... humility and not self-glory... serving and not being served. Symbolic language permeates the Bible, often very subtly.

### **Breaking the Secret Code**

Any communication code can be broken. Archaeologists and linguists decipher ancient written languages that have been long dead. Military and communication analysts employ computer programs and mathematical whizzes to decode the secrets of others. Parents watch behavior, body language and listen for tones as they unravel the words and meanings of their teenagers. Toddlers learn the language of their parents at a very young age. The symbolic language of the Bible can certainly be understood.

Once we accept that there is an abundance of symbolic language in scripture and that the value of the book comes in layers waiting to be discovered we are capable of reconsidering the things that we read in a new light. The question then becomes how... how do we determine what is symbolic and what is not and what is the specific message that is being presented. Common sense is a very valuable tool when reading the Bible. For example, when we read in Revelation chapter 12 about a woman standing on the moon and wearing the sun like a dress along with a dragon like creature, sporting multiple heads and swinging a tail large enough to sweep a third of the stars in the universe to the planet earth... it is a very safe bet that this is symbolic language.

## Two Rules

There are two primary rules that need to be applied for deciphering symbols. The initial direction is to determine consistency. We must look at how a particular item is presented in every environment it is used throughout the Bible. This can be done using a simple Bible concordance as described in step five.

The second primary rule is an extension of our initial principle... to avoid oversimplification. We shouldn't let ourselves be distracted by the small picture while ignoring the big picture. We will use an example of numbers. This won't be a mathematical equation, although the mathematical symmetry of the Bible is as amazing as the mathematical symmetry of the universe. If we follow a number through its use in the Bible we will see an incredible consistency of application. The writers whom God inspired, spanning over 1,500 years, from different geographical areas and all social and financial levels of life, each display a consistent symbolic application to certain basic numbers. The number six is used extensively throughout the Bible. We would find this number used in an overwhelmingly consistent context associated with mortal man and death and sin and disease. Since we see the number six used in the context of sin we may incorrectly assume the number six simply represents sin metaphorically in scripture. That would be an oversimplified partial answer. By referring to all the Bible references where the number six is used we will find that it offers an umbrella representation of the curse of sin and death, with all its accompanying features, that was inflicted on mankind for our ultimate parent's failure in the Garden of Eden. Besides simply death being introduced into creation through sin, other features of the curse were child birth pain, hard work, frustration, disease and suffering. Therefore we will certainly see the number six associated with all the issues that are within the framework of that curse... mortality, sin, death and disease.

6 Man and woman were created on the 6th day or the creation week... the number of man

6 Noah was 600 years old when God's judgement for man's immorality flooded the world and death came to all but the eight people on the ark... the number indicating judgement for sin.

6 Out of the week there would be six days man would labor and toil through the Edenic curse of frustration and inhibited productivity. The seventh day was a rest from those labors.... six is also the number for labor.

6 A Hebrew indentured servant could sell their labor for a maximum of six years after which they went free with an abundance of goods for a fresh start... the number for our labors.

6 By divine law farmers worked their land for a maximum of 6 years and then the land rested and replenished itself during the seventh year... the number for our labors.

6 Goliath, the giant enemy of the children of God, was a man representing all those that opposed the chosen of God. He was identified by the number 6. His height was defined as 6 cubits. He had six pieces of armor and the head of his deadly spear weighed 600 shekels... the number indicating the enemy of God's people, war and the threat of death.

6 Understanding the principle of the number six, the Jewish priests carrying the holy Ark of God (recovered from the Philistines) to Jerusalem would stop every six paces and offer a sacrifice to God.

6 The golden idol Nebuchadnezzar commanded the Babylonians to worship under threat of incineration for noncompliance measured 60 cubits high by 6 cubits wide... the number associated with paganism and false worship.

6 During the crucifixion of Jesus Christ it is recorded that darkness covered the land starting from the sixth hour, which would be high noon. It was for the very curse of Eden Jesus was being crucified as darkness very appropriately swept across the land at the appropriate sixth hour.... the number for the curse of sin.

6 The anti-Christ office is identified by the number 666, the ultimate in opposition to Christ and the embracing of the terms of the curse... the number of the enemies of God's people and the mortal embodiment of sin.

These are a very few examples of the consistent associations between the number six and the features of the Edenic curse (sin, death, hard work, mortal mankind and opposition to God) presented in the Bible. There are many more that would require detailed explanation and would be inappropriate in the context of our introductory focus for enhancing Bible comprehension.

The challenge we face with Bible symbolism is that when we miss the subtle representations in the text, assuming there is no depth of meaning, the greatest value and the glory of its complex symmetry escapes us. Our reading is ineffective. A considerable amount of the ocean of Bible commentators frequently overlook the rich golden veins of meaning while concentrating on the pyrite (fool's gold) divinely intended to divert the attention of those who are slaves to their ego and looking for an angle instead of truth.

Consistent application within the Bible is the key to defining the Bible's symbolic language. Instinct, personal preferences and even dictionaries are obstacles to understanding God's communications. One fascinating category of the Bible's symbolic language is based on major themes in creation. This subject was touched on briefly in chapter three concerning Bible Echoes. It is interesting how the laws of nature reflect the principles displayed in scripture when the symbolic language is understood. Let's expand on this relationship to show the validity in extending Scripture's symbolic language.

### **The Witness of Creation**

Scripture tells us that even nature declares the truth of God, so that no one can have any legitimate excuse for not knowing the Creator. Paul writes: *Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse* (Romans 1:19-20). Paul continues, explaining that men failed to recognize the Creator in the things that He had made and instead worshipped the things made instead of the Creator Himself. They worshipped the sun, moon and stars. They worshipped animals and mankind and even blends of man and animal like the Sphinx in Egypt, Dagon in Philistia and the man, jaguar, eagle, serpent god of the Mayans of South America. They worshipped the features of creation that fed them like the sun and rain and earth and even agricultural instruments, but not the Creator that all of these things reflect. The Old Testament writings also confirm the testimony of creation.

*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. Psalm 19:1-4*

The heavens declare the glory of God. They speak to us every day but very few bother to listen. Although astronomers and mathematicians marvel at the balance and interdependence and complex precision of the universe, many of them remove the Creator from the equation, straining to make ludicrous explanations to hide the impossibility of this degree of perfect precision on such an immense scale being ... just an accident. The problem is that if this all wasn't just an accident and some incredibly powerful living and intelligent entity constructed and sustains all of this purposefully then a humble and moral response would be necessary. Man's ego is the barrier to this response of moral submission.

Taking this hint from both the Old and New Testaments that nature tells us about God, we are invited to listen intently to the symbols of creation in scripture as they tell us about God. The fascinating part is how each of these creation metaphorical symbols progress into and interact with each other in exactly the manner that the particular creation features themselves progress and interact.

### **God is In The Clouds in the Heavens**

God repeatedly associates himself with clouds. He expresses his presence in the cloud that escorted the liberated Jewish slaves from Egypt to the promised land during their forty years in the Sinai desert. We are told by Moses that even the surrounding hostile pagan nations recognized the presence of the Jewish God in the cloud that hovered over His holy tabernacle in the middle of the foursquare Jewish encampment. When both the holy tabernacle built by Moses and the Jerusalem temple erected by King Solomon were dedicated we are told God filled each structure with the cloud of His presence and glory. When Jesus was transfigured on the holy mount, God spoke to the six men on that mount from a cloud. When Jesus rose to heaven to be at the right hand of God, he very appropriately ascended into a cloud. This association between God and the clouds is also the reason why Caiaphas the High Priest screamed "**blasphemy**" when Jesus broke his silence at his Jewish trial by claiming that these judges would see him coming in the clouds with power and glory. Caiaphas, as High Priest, understood that it was always God that had come in the clouds.

It is rain that issues from the clouds. Therefore it would be logical if the Bible symbolically associated the rain with something that issues directly from God. It is the word of God that is consistently paralleled to the rain throughout the Bible. These are two primary applications: (1) the spoken word of God and the word of God in human form (Jesus Christ). The coming of the word of God in human form is also paralleled to the coming of the early and the latter rains. The early and latter rains, in an agricultural environment, should be understood as the spring and fall rains... the planting and the harvest rains... the initiation and the conclusion. This was briefly commented on in chapter three. Let's review those thoughts.

God parallels his spoken word to the rain. God, speaking through Moses, addresses the liberated Jewish masses at the base of Mount Sinai as he was in the process of transforming them from a band of former slaves into a nation of one family.

*My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass.* Deuteronomy 32:2 Through the prophet Isaiah God parallels his spoken word to the rain: *For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.* Isaiah 55:10-11

Jesus Christ is the Bible's Messiah, the Son of God, and is expressed as the word of God in human form by the Apostle John:

*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.* John 1:14 Interestingly, as the word of God made flesh, the Messiah is also paralleled to the rain in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. *Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.* James 5:7

James exhorts us to think of the coming of the Lord Jesus as the coming of the early and the latter rains. The embodied word of God came as the early rain, the planting rain, the rain of initiation. He will come again as the latter rain, the harvest rain, the rain of conclusion.

The Old Testament presents the same parallel. In a prophetic Psalm highlighting the awaited Messiah King Solomon writes:

*He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth. In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth.* Psalm 72:6-7

Solomon writes of the conclusion period when the Messiah will establish the promised peace on earth. He will come to us as the rain and the showers.... issuing from the clouds of God's presence and glory.

The prophet Hosea presents a similar parallel:

*Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.* Hosea 6:3

### **Lakes, Seas, Ponds, Oceans and Rivers**

When the rain falls to the earth it forms, as well as replenishes, bodies of water. These bodies of water also have a specific scriptural identification that progresses and blends perfectly with the cloud and rain symbols. These bodies of water consistently signify the word of God in judgement, giving life to the spiritually identified and death to those opposed to divine laws and principles. The flood is just such a picture. The flood waters certainly destroyed immoral and ungodly mankind. It is

interesting to note that the water is also identified as the vehicle of salvation. The Apostle Peter compares the waters of the flood to the waters of baptism in his first letter.

*...when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us... 1 Peter 3:20-21*

Peter declares that the water saved Noah and his family. Peter wants us to think of the saving aspect of the flood waters in the same sense as the baptism waters. Just as the water brought the divine judgement of destruction on the ungodly it lifted the ark above the destruction, preserving all the life within the ark. The water was the tool of judgement for both destruction and salvation. This body of water presents the image of the word of God in judgement.

The Red Sea also qualified as a tool of God's judgements against the ungodly and favor to those He approved. The Bible account reports that the Red Sea separated and formed two great walls of water that the children of Israel walked between to escape the Egyptian military. After they were safely on the far shore the water walls of the Red Sea collapsed on the elite Egyptian cavalry, executing them. The water qualified as both the tool of salvation and the tool of destruction.... symbolizing the word of God in judgement.

This principle of bodies of water being a symbolic tool denoting the word of God in judgement is consistently and repeatedly presented in the Bible. There were two water conversion miracles during the liberation of God's chosen people from their slavery in Egypt. The first of ten plagues turned the Nile river and all the other rivers, ponds and bodies of Egypt's water into blood. This presents a conversion from positive to negative, from life sustaining water to blood which would no longer sustain life (death). This is a miraculous conversion from life to death in the land of bondage. Yet when the family of Israel, at least two million strong, are liberated and separated to God in the wilderness after having crossed the dry seabed of the Red Sea there is an opposite water conversion, from death to life. The account is presented this way:

*And when they came to Marah<sup>c</sup>, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. <sup>24</sup>And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? <sup>25</sup>And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them. Exodus 15:23-24*

In this environment of freedom from the pagan influence of Egypt and freedom from hard bondage the conversion is reversed. The direction goes from waters of death to life sustaining waters. The tree (or part of the tree, as in a branch) that Moses was directed to pitch into the death waters to bring about the conversion represents the effect of Jesus Christ on death. Jesus is associated with tree parts throughout the Bible. He is the root out of a dry ground from Isaiah 53. Jesus describes himself as both the root and the offspring of David. The Messiah is God's servant "the branch" described in Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12. The Christ branch was tossed into the vile waters of Marah, thereby cleansing that water and making it suitable for consumption and capable of sustaining life. These two miracles sustain the same principle as the flood waters representing both life and death. The

water was the instrument of death to the immoral rejectors of God but the tool of salvation for the eight faithful in the ark

In the New Testament we have the same principle reflected in the Christian ritual of baptism. In this ritual a person is buried in water, undergoing a symbolic death and resurrection, like Jesus Christ. Here is a body of water that is the instrument of death to the old lifestyle dedicated to self-satisfaction and new life to a person symbolically reborn with the conviction of a lifestyle dedicated to serving God... death to the flesh and life to the spirit.

### **The Faithful are Fruitful**

Just as the clouds are consistently associated with the presence and glory of God, so the rain pouring out of these clouds consistently reflect the word of God and the word made flesh which issued from the Creator. Extending this further the bodies of water mentioned in scripture present a consistent association with the word of God in judgment: death to the rejectors of God and life to the chosen of God. Even further we can parallel the plantlife that is dependent upon the rain and the bodies of water to mankind. However, it is the true believers that are specifically and exclusively represented as **fruit bearing** plantlife. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible it is the vineyard, the fig tree, the olive tree and grain fields that are repeatedly used to represent the believers. Rejectors of God as well as believers that have turned away and abandoned the divine path of behavior and doctrine are associated with briars and thorns (non-fruitbearing plantlife). Just as fruit bearing plantlife cannot be fruitful or even survive without water so the faithful cannot have life without the word of God and the word made flesh (Jesus Christ).

Besides sustaining life another feature of water is its use as a cleansing agent. We wash away filth with water. This water feature also satisfies the metaphorical parallel of water representing the word of God. The Apostle Paul explains the parable of marriage to the believers at Ephesus and mentions the cleansing aspect of God's word.

*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.*  
Ephesians 5:25-26

The features of creation reflect divine principles. These brief observations are a mere flavor of the depth in scripture concerning this theme. Just as our facial reflection on the surface of still water on a clear day shields the complex beauty below, so the surface of the word of God can be twisted into self-glorifying and self-accommodating imaginations. It is the consistent effort to dive below the surface of the word of God, leaving our ego and personal convenience behind, where we will view the incredible beauty and perfect symmetry of the Bible.

### **The Creator's Atomic Signature**

As a hint of the infinite depth and perfect symmetry between God's creative work and His written word let's add one quick note. We saw some of the impressive evidence associating the number six with the curse of death and all the suffering we face as mortals. The very foundational element for all mortal life happens to be the element known as carbon. Every scientist on Earth knows that every form of life we have ever witnessed in the universe is exclusively carbon based life. Carbon is what scientifically identifies mortal life. Isn't it interesting that we find carbon on the Chart of the



Elements at number six. There are six protons in the nucleus of the carbon atom, identifying the foundational element of carbon with the number six to the entire world. God identifies life under the curse of sin and death by the number six all through the Bible. Science recognizes that the element that defines all life as we know it to be identified by the number six. Every great artist has personal signatures binding their creative works to them personally. The Creator of all things has placed subtle signatures that are hidden from the self-consumed but visible to the meek in heart who read their Bibles effectively.

The features of creation weave symbolically through the Bible in a very consistent fashion, evident to those who will read their Bibles effectively. Read the Bible every day. Understand that the Bible was written with a deliberate intention to repel the “wise in their own eyes” and pompous self-worshippers who love to hear themselves talk. The Creator refuses to be approached casually. We cannot discover the divine mind easily or quickly. Understand that the writers of the Bible presume you are already familiar with the history and characters and rituals and laws and promises of the Old Testament. That presumption of familiarity can be a stumbling block to understanding. Listen for the Bible echoes as we read and the richness of our reading will deepen. Abide by the divine rules of prophecy if you want to know what God has in store for us. There never has been a shortage of “false prophets” eager to find an audience for their self-serving agenda. Understanding prophecy begins with the divine guidelines. Learn to use a concordance, Lexicon and reference books so that you know how to find answers. Don’t accept the “mystery” excuse from anyone! Read from a translation and not a paraphrase and learn the Bible meaning of words because they may be significantly different from society’s definition of a word.

**Step Eight Capsule:** The way to understand Bible symbolic language is to look for the consistent application of the same relationship, whether the context is a historical record, a law, miracle, ritual, prophecy, parable or psalm. Consistency and symmetry are the confirmation for the correct understanding of symbolic language.

As your Bible reading effectiveness grows you will be able to see more and more of the beauty of God’s word that has been miraculously preserved down through the centuries. This beauty is hidden away, waiting for those who will abandon their ego and read diligently because that is where God can be found... in the Bible.

Written & Edited by  
James K Dillingham  
[Bible888@aol.com](mailto:Bible888@aol.com)