



# THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

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“Put on the whole armor of God”

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And Much More...



## Least of the Commandments

By MIKE JAMES

In **Matthew 5:19**, we read this interesting verse: “Whosoever therefore shall break one of these **least commandments**, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” The question I’d like to answer here is, what is meant by “these least commandments”?

By answering this question, I believe this will also be a further proof of the opinion of this church and many other Church of God groups that God’s law is still in force, and we should still be obeying it—with, of course, the understanding the New Testament provides in how to keep the Law.

Some biblical scholars argue that the “least commandments” here might be Jesus’ own instruction. For example, one writer argues Jesus is referring to His commands in **Matthew 5:3–12** when He mentions the “commandments” in **Matthew 5:19**. This is an outrageous interpretation, the obvious reason being that in **Matthew 5:3–12** Jesus is quoting scriptures from the “Law and the Prophets” of the Old Testament. Let me show the proof.

**Matthew 5:3** is alluding to **Proverbs 14:31; 16:19; and 19:17**. In **Matthew 5:4** Jesus is using **Isaiah 61:2–3**. **Matthew 5:5** is drawing from **Psalms 37:11**. If you are concerned that the Psalms are in the Writings category (rather than the Law and Prophets) of the Old Testament, don’t forget that David, who likely

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## Should the Feast Days Be Kept?

By SOLOMON BLEARY

The feast days and weekly Sabbath stand or fall together. In **Leviticus 23:1**, God uses the possessive pronoun “MY appointed festivals, the festivals of the LORD” to show ownership. **Leviticus 23** addresses God’s seven annual holy days and the Sabbath.

Many will say the feast days are just for the Jews, which is a fallacious argument. One must remember that *all* the laws were given to the Jews. “To Israel the adoption to sonship; the divine glory, the covenants, *the receiving of the law*, the temple worship, the promises. The patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah...” (**Romans 9:4**). All the Sabbaths were given to the Jews; therefore one should not single out one and say the rest are abolished. How will you understand God’s

plan of salvation without keeping the holy days?

One argument is that the weekly Sabbath is from creation, but the feast days are not. The *moeds*, or appointed times, in **Genesis 1:14** refer to the feast days. Notice: “And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times [annual feast days and the weekly Sabbath].’” The weekly Sabbath and feast days are God’s *moeds*, or appointed time. Therefore, since we are using the argument of “first mention,” the feast days come before the weekly Sabbath. Once we use “first mention,” we should keep the feast days.

Some argue that the feast days (**Leviticus 23**) are a part of the sacrificial system of the

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## A Jealous God?

By JEFF FLANICK

What does it mean that our God is jealous? **Exodus 34:14**, as translated by the Berean Study Bible (BSB) reads, “For you must not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” What is meant by the word *jealous* here? How could our all-powerful and mighty God be jealous? Who is our Elohim jealous of? In contemplating this idea, it seems quite straightforward the Ever-Living God of the universe, the only true and existing God, could not be jealous of non-existent false gods made of stone, iron, or wood.

Atheist and evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins once said: “God breaks into a monumental rage whenever his chosen people flirted with a rival god. The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: **jealous and proud of it**; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak.”

*Psychology Today* defines jealousy as “a complex emotion that encompasses feelings ranging from suspicion to rage to fear to humiliation.” Jealous individuals are quite insecure, allowing this emotion to affect their relationships in detrimental ways. People may become extremely angry when they see others have things they themselves want. Feelings of envy and jealousy take root in these individuals resulting in anger and bitterness.

Galatians chapter five lists negative works of the flesh, of which jealousy is included in this list. In fact, verse 21 states “that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” How can we reconcile the idea that our God is jealous with the fact we are told that those who exhibit characteristics of jealousy will not inherit the Kingdom of God? This seems like such an unresolvable paradox at first glance.

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## COMMANDMENTS

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wrote many of the Psalms, is also considered a prophet (**Acts 2:30**). **Matthew 5:6** is hearkening back to **Isaiah 55:1–2**. **Matthew 5:7** can be related to **Psalm 28:6** and **Psalm 136:10–24**. **Matthew 5:8** is similar to **Psalm 24:3–4**; **17:15**; and **42:2**. **Matthew 5:9** blesses the peacemakers, and the Old Testament story (**1 Samuel 25**) about David, Nabal, and Abigail confirms the importance of peacemakers. **Matthew 5:10** blesses those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, just like David, Elijah, and Jeremiah in the Old Testament. **Matthew 5:11** is addressed by **Isaiah 51:7**. Finally, the admonition to rejoice and be glad in **Matthew 5:12** is nothing new; it was also addressed by the Old Testament in **Psalm 9:2**. The idea that Jesus is bringing a new law that is not connected to the law He gave to Moses is ridiculous.

But most scholars would agree with us that the “least commandments” are some aspects of the Old Testament law.

Scholar Alexander Sand tells us that Matthew (**Matthew 5:17–19**) uses the Greek word *nomos* for law and *entole* for commandments. *Nomos* is the same as *torah*, the Hebrew word referring to the entire Mosaic law. *Entole* translates into the Hebrew *miswah* or *misva* which means individual laws like the Ten Commandments, as in **Matthew 15:3** and **Matthew 19:17**, or one of the other Mosaic laws like those mentioned in **Matthew 22:36–40**.

In **Matthew 22:36–40** we read the following: “Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” Please note that “loving thy neighbor as thyself” (**Leviticus 19:18**) is one of the many other laws, not one of the Ten Commandments, as is “loving the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (**Deuteronomy 6:5**). If these two laws are at the top of the list of God’s laws in the Old Testament, then obviously there must be some kind of ranking system God is using for the myriad other laws.

The fact these two laws are also part of the Old Testament law is another fact making it clear Christ was not creating some new law under the New Covenant. But if there are greater commands, what are the lesser commands. Note that the greater commands pertain to our relationship with God and man. Most of the commands also relate to those two categories. But there are other laws.

According to another scholar, T.W. Manson, the phrase “one of the least of these commandments” is an Aramaic idiom which could be translated as,

“one of the least commandments.” In other words, “light commandments” as contrasted with “weighty commandments.”

For example, look at **Matthew 23:23**. Note that it reads, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.”

Here we have one law—tithing—contrasted with justice, mercy, and faith, which underlie the entire *Torah* system. We don’t have a complete parallel usage here, but this can lead one to the idea there are “lesser laws” and “weightier laws” within the *Torah*. Logic would tell us, based on this, that the phrase “lesser commandments” could mean a specific number of laws.

The idea of light and weighty laws or precepts is a common idea in rabbinic literature. One of the “pupils of the wise” (not a rabbi) named Simeon B. Azzai said, “Run to the light as well as to the weighty commandment.” This learned man lived in the early half of the second century AD, not far removed from the time of Jesus.

Judah ha-Nassi, a second-century AD rabbi, stated, “Be as heedful of a light commandment as of a weighty one, for thou knowest not the recompense of reward of each commandment.”

Now what did these Jewish teachers then consider to be light commandments? Well one of the primary examples of a light commandment is found in **Deuteronomy 22:6–7**. Now why would this law about how to treat a bird’s nest be considered a lesser commandment? Because it deals with animal life. Of course, a law like honoring your mother and father would be weightier because it deals with human life. Remember God gave Adam dominion over the animal world from the beginning (**Genesis 1:26**). Obviously, we should treat animals humanely, but laws involving people would be of a higher rank due to the purpose of human life versus animal life in the grand scheme of God’s plan.

But there is something interesting about these two laws we just addressed (law of the bird nest and honoring father and mother). Let’s lay them out here so we can find an interesting insight.

**Deuteronomy 22:6–7**: “If a bird’s

nest chance to be before thee in the way in any tree, or on the ground, whether they be young ones, or eggs, and the dam sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young: But thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, and take the young to thee; **that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days.**”

**Deuteronomy 5:16**: “Honor thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; **that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee,** in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.”

Isn’t it interesting that in both laws the reward of obedience is things going well for you and your days prolonged?

Despite the fact there are lesser and more weighty laws, all the law revolves around the character of God which is love. The Jewish sages didn’t get everything right, but

their meditation on the law did open truth to them. This is why the sages taught, as did Jesus (**Matthew 5:19**), that we should be careful to keep the weighty and light commands of God. The sages even stated, “Be careful with a light *mitzvah* [commandment] as to a heavy one, as you do not

know the assigned reward.”

Some laws, like the ones regarding the bird’s nest and treatment of parents, did state the reward, but most laws did not. Some laws also stated the punishment, like the lesser and greater commands on eating and murder. Again, another example of a weightier law versus lesser law. If you murdered someone you could be put to death (**Leviticus 24:17**). But if you ate something that was unclean, you had a less stringent requirement (**Leviticus 17:15**).

Another similar example of distinctions in the law is found in **Numbers 15:22–36**. Here we find that there were less stringent requirements for unintentional sins versus intentional sins.

But one more point on why all the laws are important, the lesser and the greater. Going back to the nest law and the parent law. Why did these two laws have a similar reward? Think about the bird’s nest law for a moment. What happens when you take the eggs and shoo the mother bird away? She will go crazy trying to find the eggs. Her concern for her young is the same as (or similar to) human parents’ concern for their young, which is the same as God’s concern for His children (**Hosea 11:1**; **Matthew 23:37**). That’s why He died and rose to bring us back from death. But if He didn’t keep the law perfectly before He died He would not have been our Savior (**2 Corinthians 5:21**). His example of dying and never sinning is an expression of His love for us. Should we not try to do the same for Him? Follow His commands and let Him take over control of our lives.

One other point I will make to prove the New Testament did not bring a new law. Keeping in mind all that we have said about the bird’s nest, notice some interesting scriptures in the New

*“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”*

**MATTHEW 5:17–19**

### DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE:

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Submissions may be sent to [vancestinson@cgi.org](mailto:vancestinson@cgi.org)

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Testament on birds. Note **Matthew 10:29–31** and the parallel passage in **Luke 12:6–7**. Here we read that God cares for birds, so would He not care for us even more? Is this not alluding to the weighty vs. light discussion we have been addressing? Note **Matthew 6:26** with another example of God's care for birds and our greater weight to God who also cares for us. Where do you think Matthew and Luke were getting these concepts from? I would suggest the Old Testament law.

Notice what Paul says in **1 Corinthians 9:9–10** in giving the law (**Deuteronomy 25:4**) about feeding the ox (animal and lesser) and commenting that the law also has another (human and weightier) application. Paul also implies a similar idea with

the ass and ox plowing law in **Leviticus 19:19** in what he tells Christians in **2 Corinthians 6:14–15**.

The overarching point of the law is not to get everything right in every circumstance. God does not address everything that could have application to the law in the Old Testament. But He gives us enough to help us, with the help of His Spirit and the New Testament, to make the right decisions in our lives. Remember, Jesus came to lead us back to God by keeping the law completely. We can't do it like He did, but we can sure try to follow the path He led.

All of the law matters because it is all interrelated (**James 2:10–11; Galatians 5:3**).

The false concept that Jesus

brought a new law in the New Covenant to love God and to love man is silly. Those two laws were part of the Old Testament law given to Moses. Within that law there were distinctions that are not fully revealed

by Scripture, but evidence is in Scripture that there were laws of lesser rank and weightier rank. What is most important is to continue to try to observe God's law to the best of our ability just as Jesus Christ did.

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## JEALOUS

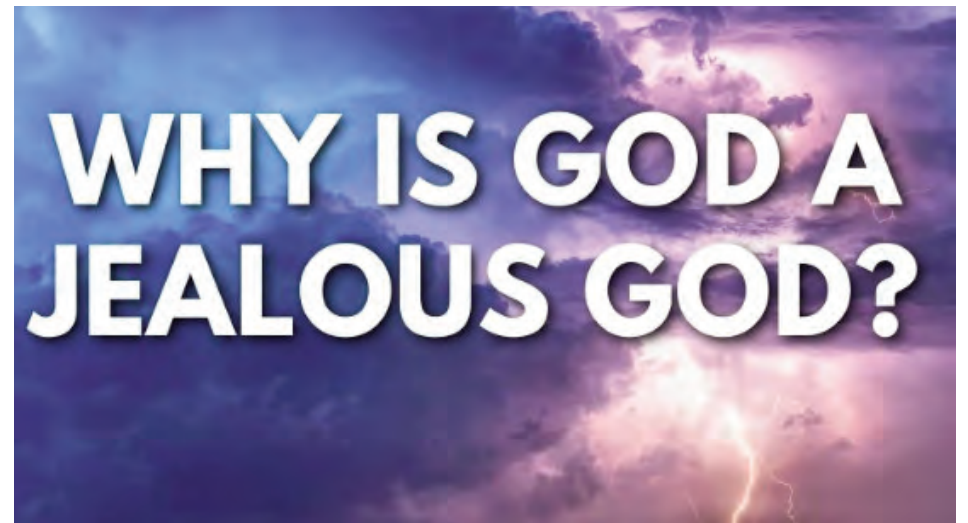
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As believers it is important to know the Scriptures well so we can work through Bible difficulties. The (apparent) conundrum regarding the negative characteristic of jealousy being applied to our Father in heaven seems quite problematic. Non-believers use situations such as this to superficially dismiss belief in God, along with belief in His Word. What seems to be a glaring contradiction in the biblical narrative provides those who are predisposed to treat the Bible as fiction an easy target to dismiss the Bible's validity. Serious searchers of the Truth need to remember **Proverbs 25:2**, “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter and the glory of kings to search it out.”

Solving the jealousy puzzle concerning the Creator's nature is one such opportunity to search out kingly matters. The word for jealous in Hebrew is Strong's H7067, *qanna*. The Bible

Hub website states the following: “The Hebrew word ‘Qanna’ is used to describe a profound and intense form of jealousy or zeal. In the context of the Bible, it is often used to describe God's passionate commitment to His covenant relationship with His people. This divine jealousy is not petty or envious but is a protective and righteous zeal for the holiness and exclusivity of the relationship between God and His people.” This interpretation of the word *jealousy*, as we have rendered the term in English, makes much more sense than the negative connotations we are familiar with in our interpretation of the terms jealous and jealousy. Our great God has a passion and enthusiasm for His people. Jealousy on the human level can be destructive, and many times is conceived because of sinful behavior.

The negative aspects of jealousy originate out of the human heart's self-interest and selfishness. It is centered on *me*; it is all about the ego.

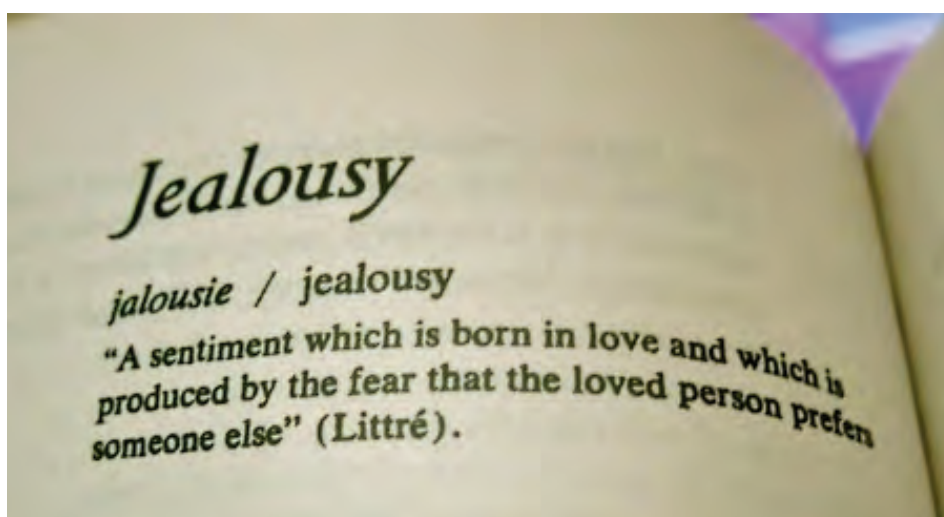


God's jealousy is based on altruistic love and devotion to his children. The jealousy of God is entirely related to His intense *agape* love for His people. The Almighty is a God of love, justice, and heart-felt concern for those He has called out of this world. The apostle Paul illustrates there is in fact a righteous type of jealousy. In **2 Corinthians 11:2** we read, “I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. For I promised you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.” The church is the bride of Christ. God is jealous for the bride He loves! Yahweh zealously defends and honors His Covenant, wishing all those He has called will remain faithful to Him. God knows remaining faithful to Him is the only way to everlasting life. Jealousy can be associated with possessiveness in relationships between men and women. God's *qanna*, His zeal, is more closely aligned with His fierce loyalty to us. Erik Thoennes, in an article entitled *The Jealous God*,

wrote the following: “What a staggering and wonderful truth—that the God who is perfectly self-sufficient (Psalm 50:12; Acts 17:24–25) has chosen to enter into an intimate relationship with his people to the point where he feels jealous anger if we are unfaithful to him!”

God is zealous towards His people, wanting to ensure they remain faithful to His Covenant; and they, and in so doing, receive all that He has promised His children. By investing sufficient time in the Scriptures, with an open mind, we can discover the unity of God's Word, from Genesis to Revelation. Some ideas and concepts will indeed take deeper prayer, study, and meditation to discern correctly. However as with digging for buried treasure, many times the further you dig, the greater the reward revealed.

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**What's going on in your local church area?** Combined services? Public Bible studies? Potlucks? Church activities? Celebrations? Memorials? Visiting ministers? Baptisms? Ordinations? Evangelistic campaigns? Birth or death announcements? Let us know, and perhaps we can publish it in *The International News*. We'd love to hear from you!

*The Editor*



## FEAST DAYS

*Continued from page 1*

Levites. One large group argues that the Sabbath is different from the holy days; yet, sacrifices were done not only on the holy days but also on the Sabbath (**Numbers 28**).

“On the Sabbath day, make an offering of two lambs a year old without defect, together with its drink offering and a grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of the finest flour mixed with olive oil. 10 This is the burnt offering for every SABBATH” (**Numbers 28:9–10**). “In addition to what you vow and your free-will offerings, offer these to the LORD at your appointed festivals: your burnt offerings, grain offerings, drink offerings, and fellowship offerings.... Moses told the Israelites all that the LORD commanded him” (**Numbers 29:39–40**). Sacrifices were made on the weekly Sabbath and annual feast days. The same knife that sticks sheep sticks goat. Thank God for Jesus Christ the Lamb of God who became our substitutionary sacrifice for all sacrifice for sin.

**Hebrews 7: 24–27** states: “But because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once and for all when he offered himself as the substitutionary sacrifice for us.” One will argue Jesus’ death does away with the feast days because it was a part of the sacrificial system. If that is the case, we should stop keeping the weekly Sabbath because it too is a part of the sacrificial system. **Numbers 28** and **Leviticus 23** mentions all the appointed times—the weekly Sabbath as well as the annual feast days—on which we should come before the Lord to be holy. Therefore, we should not be comfortable keeping only one of God’s appointed times; we must keep all of them. God commands that no regular work be done on the weekly Sabbath, and He commands the same for the annual Sabbaths. If we should not keep them, why did God give the same stipulation for the feast days that He gave for the weekly Sabbath?

The next argument is of the eschatological future as we see in the prophecy about the weekly Sabbath and feast days: “From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another” (**Isaiah 66:23**). “For if Joshua had given them rest, then there remains, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God” (**Hebrews 4:8–9**). These passages are consistent with **Ezekiel 45:21–25** and **Zechariah 14:16**. The former mentions keeping of the Passover and Feast of Tabernacles in the future mil-

lennial reign with Christ, and the latter states, “Then the survivors *from all the nations* that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to *celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles*.” One should not say that this has passed, because there has never been a time in history that ALL NATIONS have kept the Feast of Tabernacles. Therefore, this must be the age to come, when all people will keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

Why pick one of the eight Sabbaths to keep and leave the rest when all the Sabbaths are “holy convocations”? In **Leviticus 19:3**: “Each of you must respect your mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths. I am the LORD your God.” Verse 30 continues, “Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the LORD.” Here our obedience to God by keeping His holy Sabbaths is associated with our obedience to our parents. God wants us to be obedient to Him, our heavenly Father, as a child is obedient to his parents. How would we be holy to God if we are not obedient in keeping His holy days?

**Leviticus 19:2**: “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.’ Abraham was obedient to God. **Genesis 26:5**: “because Abraham obeyed me and did everything, I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees, and my instructions.” The Sabbaths are God’s Holy instructions that make us holy (set us apart) to Him. One must remember that each Sabbath has its whole meaning in Jesus Christ. The weekly Sabbath is a reminder of creation (**Genesis 2:2**). The Passover is a reminder of Jesus being our Passover Lamb (**John 1:29**). The Days of Unleavened Bread reminded us that Jesus is the Bread of Life (**John 6:35–40**; **1 Corinthians 5:8**). To receive life, we have to take part of the Bread of Life. Pentecost, which means *fiftieth*, reminds us of the law given on Mount Sinai (**Exodus 19:18**) and of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:1**). The Feast of Trumpets reminds us that we must be ready for Jesus’ return (**Matthew 25:1–13**). Trumpets reminds us that we must keep watch for the return of Jesus.

**First Corinthians 15:52**: “In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (cf., **1 Thessalonians 4:16**).

The Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, reminds us of the day when we will be at-one with God (**Romans 6:5–10**; **Revelation 21:3–4**). The Feast of Tabernacles reminded us of God’s Kingdom on the earth (**Acts 1:2**; **Zechariah 14:4, 16, 19**). These are the new meanings of the feast days with Christ as the center. Therefore, we do not keep the feast days with the same meaning as the Jews; we keep them with Jesus in mind.

The feast days for the Jews were

about the harvest. However, today the feast days are about the harvest of mankind with Jesus being the First that the Father raised from the dead (**1 Corinthians 15:23**). The meaning of the Sabbath and holy days have changed. The weekly Sabbath is about the rest we share, both now and in the future, in Christ (**Hebrews 4:8**). The holy days contain the plan of salvation. The Father is harvesting man from the “second death.” The second death is described in **Revelation 20:13–14**: “The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.”

The plan pictured in the Sabbath and holy days is all about saving man from death. For us, the Passover is not a remembrance of the slaying of the firstborn in Egypt or the exodus that followed; the new “Passover” we take is *Christocentric*—Christ is at the center. It is He who is now our sacrifice, our Passover Lamb.

**John 1:29**: “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” **Hebrews 10:12–14** states that Christ’s sacrifice was sufficient for all time and that He sat down at the right hand of God after making the sacrifice.

If Jesus did not want us to keep the feast days, He would not send the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Look at what Jesus commands, knowing very well the people would understand what He meant.

**Acts 1:3–5**: “He appeared to them over forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’” Why would Jesus tell them to wait if He did not want them to keep the Feast of Pentecost? In **Acts 2:1**, once the Day of Pentecost had arrived, the Holy Spirit was given and the Church was founded.

**Acts 2:1, 4**: “When the day of Pentecost fully came, they were all together in one place.... All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.” Why did God add a new meaning to a feast that they should not keep? It would seem that if He did not want them to keep it, He would have waited until Pentecost passed before sending His Spirit. The fact that He gave His Spirit at Pentecost indicates He wants us to keep it.

Remember **Matthew 5:17**: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

The question is, what did Christ abolish? The physical sacrifice system of animals. Nonetheless, Jesus Christ is now the perpetual sacrifice that

encompasses the entire sacrificial system the Jews made to God. Therefore, now the sacrifices continue in Christ because His sacrifice serves as a sacrifice today for those who come to believe in Him. So those laws are still there in Christ. See **Hebrews 9 and 10**. In **Matthew 5:18**, Christ, who is now the sacrificial lamb for all, says, “I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” One thing that is not yet accomplished is our **resurrection (1 Corinthians 15: 20–23)**; this is what the feast days look forward to.

**Acts 15:21**: “The law of Moses was preached in every city and read in synagogues on every Sabbath.” Here one might argue the weekly Sabbath was kept but not the feast days. But what was the “law of Moses” that was preached every Sabbath? This must be the Torah, the five books of the law. For believers in Jesus, the Torah carried powerful Christological meanings. In **John 5:46–47**, Jesus says, “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?” Simply put if you do not believe in Moses how are you going to believe what Jesus said?

**First Corinthians 5:6–8**: “Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival.” Here Paul gave a direct command—“let us keep the Festival”—not only to keep the Passover but also the Days of Unleavened Bread. This is consistent with **Matthew 26:17**: “On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?’” The “Passover” and the “Days of Unleavened Bread” and “Festival” are used interchangeably. Therefore, we cannot keep one and not keep the others. Paul said in **Acts 24:14, 16**, “I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets.... So, we can always strive to keep a clear conscience before God and man.” Holiness is what God requires from us. We must return to the Law and Prophets and uncover the Christological meaning and importance of the holy days.

By now the dust should be settled and the path made clear—we should keep the feast days.

But what about **Colossians 2:16** and **Galatians 4:10**? I will do a thorough exegesis of these scriptures. Let us look at Paul’s missionary journey 20 years after Jesus’ death. Keep in mind all the scriptures (**Acts 16:13**; **1 Corinthians 5:6–8**; **Acts 2:1**; **Acts 20:16**; **1 Thessalonians 4:16**; **Acts**

27:9; Zechariah 14:16) implying the feast days were kept after Christ and in the Millennium. Remember that 20 years would have passed from Jesus' death. Why would Paul mention the feast days if the New Testament Christian should not be keeping them? In **John 7:2-14**, Jesus is keeping the Feast of Tabernacles. The feasts are the appointed times in Scripture that we must come before the Lord to be made holy by Him.

**Amos 5:21-22**: "I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them." One would read this and go away thinking God hates His feast days. The problem was not with the feast days, but with the people. **Amos 5:25-26**: "Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, people of

Israel? You have lifted up the shrine of your king, the pedestal of your idols, the star of your god which you made for yourselves." The problem was not the feast days; it was mixed worship of idols and gods. **Isaiah 1:13-14**: "Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths, and convocations I cannot bear your worthless assemblies. I hate Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals with all my being." If we are saying God hates the feast days, here too God hates the Sabbaths. Therefore, it could not be about the Sabbaths or feast days; it would be the people worshiping idols and false gods that is the problem.

The New Testament Christians kept the Sabbath *and* FEAST DAYS long after Jesus' death. In **1 Corinthians 5:8**, why would Paul advise the Corinthians church, "therefore keep

the festival of the feast," if they weren't keeping it?

A last-ditch argument against feast-keeping is that the feast days are not codified in the Ten Commandments like the weekly Sabbath. For some who argue this way, we reply with this question: Tithing is not a part of the Ten Commandments, so why do you collect tithes? We have to be consistent.

**Genesis 1:14**, **Numbers 28**, and **Leviticus 23** are all codifications of the weekly Sabbath and feast days. Therefore, **Exodus 20** and **Leviticus 23** show mankind how we should keep His Sabbaths. God gives His feast days to call out people. In **John 6:44**, Jesus says, "No man comes to Me unless the Father who sends, He draws him." Christ is coming back for a Commandment-keeping people (**Revelation 12:17**). If we are not

commandment-keeping people, how will we be saved and be a part of the first resurrection?

**Revelation 20: 4-6**: "I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them."

This is what the feast days are all about—our deliverance, through the redemptive work of Christ, from the second death.

## Questions & Answers

by Vance A. Stinson

### The Rapture of the Saints

**Question:** I'm wondering how you would answer somebody who believes in the science fiction rapture when they bring up Luke 17:34-37?

*S.I., Canada (sent by email)*

**Answer:** In Luke 17:34-37, Jesus says, "I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.' And they said to him, 'Where, Lord?' He said to them, 'Where the corpse [body] is, there the vultures [eagles] will gather.'"

If "that night" refers to the time of the Second Coming—the time when Christ actual appears in the sky—then it is possible that the "taken" are the saints, who will be "taken" up to meet Christ as He descends to the earth. Of course, that *is* the rapture of the saints, and we have always believed in the rapture, as the term merely refers to the "catching up" of the saints to meet Christ. This is the classical **post-tribulation** view of the rapture. Many evangelicals embrace this view and reject the **pre-tribulation** rapture theory, which is popular among dispensationalists. I realize, of course, that we have traditionally avoided the use of the word *rapture* because most, upon hearing it, associate it with the pre-trib view.

A second possible meaning is that "that night" refers to the tribulation and suffering associated with the Second Coming. It will be a difficult time for the people of God. To describe how terrible that time will be, Jesus alluded to the Roman practice of dealing with problems arising from the criminal activities of Jewish insurrectionists and assassins. Apparently, when Jewish Zealots committed some act of terror against the Roman government or a Roman official, Roman soldiers would go into a community and randomly select individuals to be taken out and crucified (one taken, one left). This was supposedly for the purpose of getting the Jewish community to identify the culprits. The dead bodies of the crucified individuals would be taken out and dumped in a field. Family members, seeking to give their deceased loved ones a proper burial, would find their bodies by watching for circling vultures. It seems that Jesus may have been alluding to this horrifying scenario to describe the horrors associated with the time of His return.

Regardless which of these two views is correct, one thing is certain: The passage does nothing to prove (or even strengthen) the pre-tribulation theory of the rapture.

### A Spurious Text?

**Question:** A quick question: *Is Revelation 20:5 spurious?* "But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection." I'm getting mixed signals regarding this verse in my research. Can you help me?

*S.I., Canada (sent by email)*

**ANSWER:** The dispute is over the first part of the verse (**5a**), and the reason is because verse **5b** ("This is the first resurrection") would more naturally follow verse **4** ("They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years"), and verse **5a** ("The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended") would naturally follow **5b**. It is for this reason that some think **5a** was added by a later scribe.

The verse, as it appears in our Bibles, has been found in a third-century commentary, so it has a fairly early witness as to its authenticity. In my view, it is not spurious. The fact that **5a** and **5b** seem to be out of sequence doesn't really mean much of anything to me. It could be that the original was in the **4-5b-5a** sequence, and that a second- or third-century scribe mistakenly got the sequence wrong. A scribal mistake like that seems more likely than the idea that a scribe made up **5a** out of whole cloth and inserted it.

I would say, however, that it is most likely that John simply assumed his readers would understand that **5a** was parenthetical, and that **5b** refers back to **4**. This is likely because John does the same thing with larger sections of Revelation. For instance, what is described in the first part of Revelation 12 does not sequentially follow the events described in chapter 11. John takes the reader back to the time before the birth of Christ, and then, by chapter's end, is describing the crisis at the close of the age. (I have one commentary that attempts to interpret the visions of Revelation chronologically. To do this, the author had to conclude that the "male child" of 12:5 is not Christ but is a particular historical entity.)

But, for the sake of argument, let's suppose **20:5a** was added by a later copyist. How does this change anything? We still find, in the section that immediately follows, a description of a resurrection on the other side of the Millennium. Even if the entirety of **20:5** is spurious, we still have a resurrection unto immortality at the beginning of the thousand years and a resurrection to judgment at the end of the thousand years.

### Dealing with Unwelcome Thoughts

**QUESTION:** When Satan bombards us with his flaming darts, is that the sinful thoughts that sometimes go through a person's mind that we seemingly have no control over? How do we combat them?

*W.C., Tennessee (sent by email)*

**ANSWER:** I would say that the "flaming darts" metaphor refers to any of the various ways Satan uses in his war against the people of God. That would include those sinful thoughts that pop into our minds from time to time.

We deal with those thoughts by learning to fill our minds with something else as soon as the thought arises. If, for example, you've been studying a particular biblical topic, you might focus your attention on that topic the moment the unwelcome thought enters your mind. It's similar in some ways to dealing with tinnitus (ringing in the ears). I have had it for quite a few years, and it's always with me. At every waking moment I can hear that high-pitched tone. If I think about it, it gets louder and becomes more annoying. But if I focus my attention elsewhere, I'm able to ignore it, even though it is always there.

The thoughts you're referring to are just there. It's almost as if they pop into our heads from out of nowhere—as if they were put into us from an outside source. We can't stop that, just as I cannot stop the ringing in my ears, but we can learn how to quickly focus our attention on something else and ignore those unwelcome thoughts.



# Narcissism

By JAMES FIRE



The subject of narcissism has become a popular subject. The widespread interest in this topic, Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), especially in the context of mental health and relationship dynamics, has led to the proliferation of online resources. Some websites are entirely focused on providing support and information for those dealing with narcissists, while others include narcissism as part of broader discussions on mental health or personality disorders.

There has also been a significant surge in the number of books written about narcissism. These books range from self-help guides and memoirs to scholarly works aimed at both the general public and professionals.

What exactly is narcissism? Are narcissist behaviors found in the Bible? Did Jesus encounter narcissistic individuals? Are there biblical strategies that address narcissist behaviors?

We will explore these questions and how one can overcome narcissistic behaviors through biblical principles.

## What is Narcissism?

“People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:2–4, NIV throughout).

What exactly is narcissism? It has become a popular, loosely used term to describe an undesirable person or their behaviors.

According to the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5-TR), “Narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) is a complex psychological condition that presents with a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy. NPD can cause significant social and occupational impairment and often has complications of comorbid (simultaneous medical conditions) psychiatric and substance use disorders.”

Narcissistic behaviors can manifest in various ways, these often creating challenges in relationships and interactions. Key behaviors associated with narcissism are:

- Exaggerated sense of their own importance and talents. They may believe they are superior to others and expect special treatment or recognition, even when it is not warranted.
- The inability or unwillingness to

recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others. Narcissistic individuals may appear indifferent to the suffering or concerns of those around them.

- The need for validation as narcissists require excessive admiration and affirmation from others. They often seek out praise and attention, sometimes engaging in behaviors specifically designed to draw focus to themselves.
- Entitlement and special privileges. They may become angry or frustrated when they do not receive the deference or respect they believe they deserve.

Narcissists often use others to achieve their own goals, with little regard for the impact on those they manipulate. This can include lying, deceiving, or exploiting others to maintain their self-image or achieve their desires.

- Narcissistic individuals often display arrogance and contempt towards others. They may look down on people they perceive as inferior and can be dismissive or condescending in their interactions.
- Despite their outward confidence, narcissists are often highly sensitive to criticism or perceived slights. They may react with anger, defensiveness, or even rage when their self-image is threatened.
- Narcissists often struggle to maintain healthy relationships due to their self-centeredness, lack of empathy, and manipulative behaviors. Relationships may be marked by conflict, instability, and a lack of genuine emotional connection.
- Narcissists often use manipulative strategies to exercise control over others, which can be spiritually and emotionally damaging.

“They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:6).

Here are some controlling strategies narcissists may use:

- Gaslighting is the manipulation of someone’s perception of reality, causing them to doubt their memory, perceptions, or sanity.
- Love bombing can occur when someone is overwhelmed with excessive attention, flattery, and affection to gain control.
- Triangulation is used to create conflicts or rivalries between others to maintain control by being the central figure.
- Blame shifting is used when a narcissist refuses to take responsibility and blaming others for problems or mistakes.

- The silent treatment is marked by withdrawing communication or affection to punish or manipulate.
- Devaluation is when a narcissist will criticize, belittle, or devalue someone to assert dominance.
- Projection is the accusation of others of the very behaviors or feelings a narcissist exhibits.
- The control of money is using financial manipulation to control or dominate others.
- Isolation is to keep someone from their friends, family, or support system to increase dependence.
- Mirroring is used to imitate someone’s interests, values, or behaviors to create a false sense of connection.
- Hoovering is the attempt to draw someone back into a relationship after a separation.
- Exploitation of others’ emotions, vulnerabilities, or resources for personal gain.

Use caution when applying these narcissistic behaviors to others. Jesus instructed Christians in Matthew 7:1, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

Ephesians 5:15–17 continues, as it states, “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.”

James 3:17–18 encourages us to use wisdom to discern and understand, “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.”

There is one vital piece that is not mentioned in the DSM-5-TR definition of NPD. There was a comedian by the name of Flip Wilson, who during the 1960s and 1970s TV show turned his routine into a meme. He would say something outlandish, pause, turn to the camera, and say, “The Devil made me do it.” The audience would roar with laughter.

If we recognize these narcissistic behaviors in others, we also need to question our own attitudes. Are we allowing Satan to influence us? Satan, as it is written in Revelation 12:10, “accuses the brethren day and night.”

Ephesians 6:12 tells us there are spiritual powers that influence society. It states, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” The Greek word for “powers” is *exousia*, which means “delegated influence.” We are constantly bombarded

by influences from various sources, including our own thoughts.

Ephesians 2:2 continues, “in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.”

How can we resist Satan’s influence? Paul told the Corinthians that it is possible to control our thoughts. In 2 Corinthians 10:5, Paul states, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

Why is this important? Again, he states in 2 Corinthians 2:10, “...in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.”

Later we will see that Satan’s narcissism existed even before he influenced Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. We will also see that it is possible to resist and overcome his narcissistic influences.

## Narcissism Popularity

“Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind” (Romans 1:28).

Why has the subject of narcissism become so popular? Research has cited six factors that have heightened narcissism awareness.

The first is a cultural shift. In recent decades, the cultural shift has been toward greater individualism. It emphasizes personal success, self-promotion, and the pursuit of individual goals, often at the expense of communal values and relationships. As a result, behaviors associated with narcissism, such as self-centeredness and the need for admiration, have become more visible and, in some cases, socially encouraged.

Second is the expansion of social media and digital platforms. The Covid pandemic caused people to isolate to limit social interactions. People turned on their screens and viewership exponentially increased. This resulted in online self-promotion and validation, which can amplify narcissistic tendencies. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Discord, YouTube, X (Twitter), and others encourage users to curate idealized versions of themselves and seek constant validation through likes, shares, and comments. Some, through the sheer number of followers, are given the title “Influencer.” This environment has led to increased attention on narcissistic behaviors, sometimes outrageous, as they are more easily observed and measured in the digital space.

Third is a growing awareness of personality disorders, such as NPD that fueled more attention. As people expe-

rienced challenges to mental health due to Covid isolation, they sought information about mental health and its impact on individuals and relationships. This awareness has led to an increased focus on understanding, diagnosing, and treating narcissistic behaviors.

Fourth is the pervasive influence of celebrity culture. The media often glorifies and magnifies the lives of celebrities, many of whom display narcissistic traits. The public's fascination with fame and the behaviors associated with it has made narcissism a topic of interest in discussions about modern culture and values. TV tabloid news shows such as TMZ, *Inside Edition*, *Daily Mail*, and others have popularized following celebrities.

Viewers, especially the younger impressionable viewers, can be influenced to mimic celebrities' behaviors.

Fifth is how narcissism has become a focal point in discussions about leadership, particularly in the political and corporate arenas. High-profile leaders who exhibit narcissistic traits have sparked debates about the role of narcissism in leadership and its potential consequences for society. This has led to increased scrutiny of narcissistic behavior in public figures and a broader interest in understanding its impact. Again, followers are influenced and tend to believe such behaviors are necessary for career success.

Finally, the field of psychology has increasingly focused on NPD. The growth in research is to explore its causes, manifestations, and effects. This academic interest has translated into a wider public understanding and curiosity about narcissism, especially as it relates to everyday life and relationships. Online sites, books, videos, and mainstream discussions bring focused attention to viewers.

These six factors touch nearly every aspect of our lives and give us a means to recognize and define behaviors—not only others but our own.

### Biblical Narcissists

“And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people, for not everyone has faith. But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one” (2 Thessalonians 3:2–3).

Narcissistic behavior is not a new concept. Here are several biblical examples of narcissistic behaviors.

Satan is the ultimate example of narcissism in the Bible. Although not a human, Lucifer's story is often cited. Once a high-ranking angel, Lucifer's pride led him to rebel against God, desiring to exalt himself above all others. This pride resulted in his fall from grace and declared the enemy (“Satan”) of God. In Isaiah 14:12–14 it states, “How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit

enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’”

King Saul, the first king of Israel, exhibited narcissistic traits, particularly in his relationship with David. Saul's jealousy and insecurity grew when David became more popular after defeating Goliath. Saul's obsession with his own power and status led him to repeatedly attempt to kill David, despite David's loyalty. First Samuel 18:7–9 describes Saul's jealousy, “As they danced, they sang: ‘Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.’ Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. ‘They have credited David with tens of thousands,’ he thought, ‘but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom? ‘And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David.’”

Absalom, King David's son, was known for his striking appearance and charm. His vanity and desire for power led him to conspire against his father, leading a rebellion to seize the throne. His self-importance ultimately led to his tragic death. Second Samuel 14–18 describes Absalom's rebellion, particularly 2 Samuel 15:5–6, which states, “Also, whenever anyone approached him to bow down before him, Absalom would reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him. Absalom behaved in this way toward all the Israelites who came to the king asking for justice, and so he stole the hearts of the people of Israel.” His benevolent behavior served the goal to undermine his father's authority.

Herod the Great, the king of Judea during the time of Jesus' birth, is infamous for his narcissistic paranoia. Fearing the loss of his throne, Herod ordered the massacre of all male infants in Bethlehem to eliminate the newborn “King of the Jews.” Matthew 2:1–3, 16 describes the events, “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews’.... When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.... When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.”

Not all narcissists in the Bible were only men. Here are some examples of narcissistic women.

Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab of Israel, is one of the most notorious women in the Bible. She was a pagan queen who promoted the worship of Baal and persecuted the prophets of God. Jezebel's manipulation and desire for power are evident in her plot to have Naboth falsely accused and executed so that her husband could seize Naboth's vineyard. First Kings

21:7, 15: “Jezebel his wife said, ‘Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I'll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.’ ... As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, ‘Get up and take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite that he refused to sell you. He is no longer alive, but dead.’” Her manipulative and ruthless nature is further evident in her interactions with the prophet Elijah. First Kings 19:1–3: “Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, ‘May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.’ Elijah was afraid and ran for his life.”

Athaliah, the daughter of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, was the queen of Judah and is another example of a woman displaying narcissistic tendencies. After the death of her son, King Ahaziah, Athaliah seized power by ordering the massacre of all royal heirs, including her own grandchildren, to secure her position as queen. Her lust for power and lack of empathy highlight her narcissistic traits. Second Kings 11:1–3: “When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she proceeded to destroy the whole royal family. But Jehosheba... took Joash son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the royal princes, who were about to be murdered. She put him and his nurse in a bedroom to hide him from Athaliah; so he was not killed. He remained hidden with his nurse at the temple of the LORD for six years while Athaliah ruled the land. Another account is also found in 2 Chronicles 22:10–12.

Herodias, the wife of Herod Antipas, is known for her role in the death of John the Baptist. When John criticized her unlawful marriage to Herod (since she had been his brother's wife), Herodias harbored a grudge against him. Mark 6:17–19, 28: “For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. For John had been saying to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.’ So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him.... Finally, the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet.... When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests.... The king said ‘Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you.’... she went out and said to her mother, ‘What shall I ask for?’ ‘The head of John the Baptist,’ she answered.... The man went, beheaded John in the prison, and brought back his head on a platter.” Another account of this is also found in Matthew 14:3–11.

Jesus addressed narcissistic behaviors in Matthew 6:1–4: “Be careful not

to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So, when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

He continues in verse 5–6: “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

This demonstrates how narcissistic behaviors—pride, arrogance, self-centeredness, and lack of empathy—can lead to destructive outcomes, both for themselves and others.

### The Two Trees

“The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:9).

Adam and Eve were given free will to choose. Notice that God made both trees that were “pleasing to the eye and good for food.” According to Scripture, they were equal in appearance.

### The Tree of Life

The Tree of Life represents God's righteousness, full of wisdom, humility, and eternal life, the opposite properties of narcissism. It produces eternal life-sustaining fruit. Genesis 3:22 reveals its properties: “And the LORD God said, ‘The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.’”

Proverbs 11:30 equates the tree of life with righteousness: “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and the one who is wise saves lives.”

In the Kingdom, this same tree will be central to the healing waters that will flow out of God's throne. Revelation 22:1–3 describes it: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse.”

*Continued next page*



The tree of life is wisdom and humility. Proverbs 3:18 tells us that, “She (wisdom) is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed.” Again heavenly wisdom is reflected in James 3:17: “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”

The tree of life is not narcissistic but reflects the characteristics of God’s nature. Galatians 5:22–23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

The tree of life represents a life focused on God and others. It points to humility and righteous service, to embrace heavenly wisdom.

### ***The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil***

Genesis 2:16 describes the command Adam was given. “And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.’” Narcissism introduced to mankind.

In Genesis 3:1–2 it recounts how Satan interacted with Eve. “Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’ The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

God’s command was very clear to Eve as she repeated what was said to Adam. By eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was to blatantly go against God’s command, to reject him through outright rebellion.

This rejection is a narcissistic attribute of Satan’s character. Jesus described the character of Satan to the Jews who rejected Jesus. He said in John 8:44, “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” His lying nature is demonstrated in Genesis 3:4 when he told Eve, “You will not certainly die.”

Ezekiel 28:17 further describes the origin and character of Satan. “Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings.” Isaiah 14:12 describes this fall from God’s throne: “How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth,”

We read in Luke 10:18 that Jesus saw Satan cast out of heaven, “He

replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.’” Revelation 12:9–10 states, “The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.”

The sin of Satan will lead ultimately to his destruction. Revelation 20:9–10: “But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown.” We read the same account recorded in Ezekiel 28:18–19: “So I made a fire come out from you, and it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching. All the nations who knew you are appalled at you; you have come to a horrible end and will be no more.”

When God confronted Adam and Eve about eating from the tree they were explicitly told not to, notice the narcissistic behavior they both took. Genesis 3:12–13 states, “The man said, ‘The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.’ Then the LORD God said to the woman, ‘What is this you have done?’ The woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’”

Adam blamed God because of the woman He put there. Eve blamed the serpent. Neither were willing to admit wrongdoing or even repent of this sin. They both rebelled, being self-serving towards their own vanity to “be like God, knowing good and evil,” disregarding revealed knowledge of the consequence of sin.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil represents turning away from God. A selfish choice to lean on man’s self-determined understanding and reject God’s revealed knowledge. This follows Satan’s narcissistic behaviors.

### **Jesus’ Example**

“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

We need to first understand the character of Jesus. Jesus’ love and compassion are central to His character.

Jesus’ love for his Father and mankind are described in John 17:22–23: “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

An example of this is found in Matthew 9:36 “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

We see His compassion again, in Luke 7:12–15, when he raised up the widow’s son: “As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went

out to her and he said, ‘Don’t cry.’ Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, ‘Young man, I say to you, get up!’ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.”

Throughout His life He demonstrated love for God the Father and for all people regardless of their social status. He understood what it meant to be human in every sense.

Obedience to God the Father is another defining trait of Jesus’ character. He submitted himself to His Father’s will despite suffering. It states in John 6:38, “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.” This is repeated in Matthew 26:39 as Jesus faced certain torture, abuse, crucifixion, and ultimately, death: “Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.’”

### **The Battle**

The best example for Christians is how Jesus willingly dealt directly with Satan, the ultimate narcissist in existence. How did he do this?

Immediately after Jesus was baptized, he went into the wilderness to fast for 40 days. Matthew 4:1–2 recounts this: “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.”

Jesus was extremely weak physically from fasting. Satan used Jesus’ weakness to challenge him through devaluation and exploitation. Satan exerted his self-dominance by commanding Jesus to perform a miracle, a sign.

The Pharisees also did the same, asking Jesus to give them a sign to assert their dominance while belittling Jesus. This is recorded in Matthew 16:1–4: “The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven. He replied..., ‘A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.’”

Luke 4:2–4 describes this: “He [Jesus] ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.’”

Closer examination reveals Satan’s narcissistic attitude. Satan knew who Jesus was, otherwise, he would simply dismiss Him as unworthy of attention. Satan, through his own rebellion demonstrated that he considers himself superior to God. The real objective was to cause Jesus to sin. What was the sin? It was the very sin that Satan is guilty of. To place himself above God.

Paul wrote how he was willing to follow the law in his mind, but his physical body was weak, wanting to sin, he wanted to pursue pleasure above following the law of God. This

is conveyed in Romans 7:23–25: “but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Jesus admonished Peter in Matthew 26:41, “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

In this case, Satan attempted to influence Jesus to satisfy the flesh as Jesus was suffering through extreme hunger. Think of how it feels to miss a meal or two. Attitudes change as thoughts become selfish. Hunger often kicks in within a few hours, let alone 40 days.

Jesus set the example for us by using Scripture to counter Satan’s narcissistic challenge. In Matthew 4:4, “Jesus answered, ‘It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’” We too can also use Scripture to answer challenges we face. Jesus said in John 14:26, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

The second temptation is shown in Matthew 4:5–6: “Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ‘If you are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

At this point, Satan used triangulation to create conflict between Scripture and God with Satan being the central figure. Satan quoted Psalms 91:11–12, which states, “For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” This appears to be a no-win challenge. If Jesus didn’t cast Himself down, it was implied He was not the Son of God. If He did, he would in essence, force God to obey Satan.

Jesus immediately recognized Satan’s strategy. Through humility and extreme weakness, Jesus was clear in mind and spirit. Matthew 4:7 states, “Jesus answered him, ‘It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Jesus used Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:16) to counter by applying wisdom above a reckless misapplication.

Matthew 4:8–9 describes Satan’s third temptation. “Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ‘All this I will give you,’ he said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me.’”

In this temptation, Satan exposed his true goal, to be above God the Father, whom Jesus loved and worshipped.

Satan’s narcissistic belief is that he can still defeat God, to be above Him.

Satan has a superiority complex, a belief that everyone is inferior to him.



Jesus, who, has authority over Satan, set an example for us. Jesus strongly rejected him. In Matthew 4:10–11, it states, “Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.” James 4:7 further demonstrates this strategy against Satan: “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

### Satan is not God

It can be speculated with some accuracy that Satan lied to his demons in describing the events that unfolded during the temptations of Jesus. A narcissist will blame others for their weakness, deny the truth, never accept responsibility or accountability, or admit defeat.

Satan is a God-created being. Ezekiel 28:15 confirms that Lucifer was created: “You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you.” We see in Colossians 1:15–16 that all things were created: “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.”

Satan rejected God’s authority. In Jude 1:9 we see that Satan refused to submit to God’s authority: “But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’”

Satan is less than God; he is not all-knowing, although in his narcissistic thoughts, he sees himself as superior. Isaiah 14:13–14: “You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’”

Satan is powerless to alter God’s plan. Even before the creation of the earth, there was a plan set in place for Jesus’ sacrifice so that mankind would have a means to salvation. Revelation 13:8: “the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.”

Satan’s power and time to influence is limited. First Corinthians 15:24 tells us that Satan’s kingdom will end. “Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.”

Satan will be destroyed. Satan told Eve that she would not die, despite being told she would if she touched or ate the fruit. Consider that Satan sinned and was cast from heaven to earth. He was still alive. He may have told Eve the same story, that God is merely trying to exercise control beyond his ability to enforce. However, Scripture states that Satan

will ultimately become ashes (Ezekiel 28:18–19). Scripture also indicates that Satan understands this. Revelation 12:12 states, “Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”

### God’s Way

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8–9).

These are biblical examples of the Godly approach to dealing with narcissists.

### Jesus and the Pharisees

The Pharisees, a religious group in Jesus’ time, often displayed narcissistic traits, such as self-righteousness, pride in their religious status, and a desire for public recognition.

Matthew 23:5–7 recorded Jesus’ description of their behavior: “They do all their deeds to be seen by others....they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the market-places and being called rabbi by others.” Jesus confronted the Pharisees’ hypocrisy and pride with truth and rebuke, calling them to genuine repentance.

Jesus addressed the narcissism of the Pharisees by challenging their behavior with direct and honest criticism, while also teaching the importance of humility. Jesus pronounced woes on the Pharisees, exposing their pride and the harm it caused. Matthew 23:13–15: “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces.”

Jesus taught that humility is essential for righteousness. Luke 18:14 states, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

### David and King Saul

King Saul exhibited narcissistic tendencies, particularly jealousy and a desire for control, leading him to become obsessed with maintaining his power and eliminating perceived threats, including David.

After David’s victory over Goliath, the people praised David more than Saul, leading to Saul’s intense jealousy. First Samuel 18:6–9: “And Saul was very angry.... And Saul eyed David from that day on.” Despite Saul’s attempts on his life, David refused to retaliate against Saul. Instead, he chose to honor Saul as the Lord’s anointed king.

When David had an opportunity to kill Saul in a cave, he said in 1 Samuel 24:6–7: “The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD’s anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the LORD.” David left Saul’s judgment to

God. First Samuel 24:12: “May the LORD judge between you and me.”

David dealt with Saul’s narcissism with patience, respect for God’s authority, and trust in God’s justice, rather than taking matters into his own hands.

### Daniel and King Nebuchadnezzar

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, exhibited narcissism in his prideful self-exaltation and desire for absolute power, even demanding worship from his subjects.

Nebuchadnezzar boasted, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30). Daniel remained faithful to God and interpreted the king’s dreams, warning Nebuchadnezzar about the dangers of pride. Daniel advised the king to repent: “Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity” (Daniel 4:27). Despite this, the king refused and was humbled as God made him live as a wild animal.

Afterwards, the king finally acknowledged God’s sovereignty, and Daniel’s wisdom was vindicated. Daniel 4:37: “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”

Daniel dealt with Nebuchadnezzar’s narcissism with courage, wisdom, and truth, ultimately pointing the king towards humility before God.

Romans 12:2: “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

God’s way to overcoming narcissistic tendencies require a supernatural power, God’s Holy Spirit.

### Overcoming Narcissism

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).

Perhaps you recognize some narcissistic traits in your own behavior. Or, you’re dealing with an individual who has narcissistic tendencies. Is it possible to effectively deal with narcissism, especially with biblical guidance?

### The Plan

Peter gave a heart-felt, energetic message on the holy day Pentecost. In Acts 2:37, it records their reaction to Peter’s message: “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’”

Peter provided the answer in verse 38: “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of

the Holy Spirit.’”

Once we’re baptized and have received the Holy Spirit, Christ begins to live in us through the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:9–10: “if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you.... Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.”

Through Christ all things are possible. Philippians 4:13 states, “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” Romans 8:31 further encourages us, “What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” It is through the righteousness of Christ that one is able to overcome, as Hebrews 12:1 encourages us, “let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.” By following biblical teachings of Jesus’ examples, all sins can be overcome.

### The Guide

The Bible has been described as God’s instruction book to mankind. Biblical wisdom plays a crucial role in shaping Christian’s character, enabling us to deal with narcissism—both in ourselves and in others—through a godly perspective. Contained within the Scriptures are nuggets of righteous wisdom. Second Timothy 3:16 states, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” Through Scripture, Christian’s can develop traits such as humility, self-control, and discernment—essential elements to counter the destructive effects of narcissism.

Study the Word of God. Second Timothy 2:15: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

Use the Word of God as a guide to understand yourself. Along with God’s Holy Spirit, Scripture will come alive, revealing the truth of our nature. As we spiritually mature, we will recognize behaviors more clearly. First Corinthians 13:11–12 explains, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

God’s Word reveals the very intents of the heart. Hebrews 4:12 tells us, “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

A good example of how the Word of God reveals the intents of the heart is found in Proverbs 6:16: “There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent



blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.”

Apply the Word of God in your life. Proverbs 3:5–6 instructs us to “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.”

Philippians 2:3–8 instructs us on how to approach narcissism: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!”

### The Veil

When Jesus died, the veil in the temple was torn. We read in Matthew 27:51, “And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” The meaning of this is significant to Christians.

Here are some characteristics of the temple veil.

- It was made of fine linen and richly adorned with blue, purple, and scarlet yarn. Embroidered on it were cherubim angels. Exodus 26:31 describes it: “Make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen, with cherubim woven into it by a skilled worker.”
- The veil was extremely thick and

heavy. According to an early Jewish text, the Mishnah, it was several inches thick and so strong that horses tied to each end could not tear it.

- The veil was very large. Estimates of its height are up to 60 feet (18 meters). Behind the veil was the Most Holy Place, which underscored the separation between the Most Holy Place and man.
- The Most Holy Place was God’s earthly dwelling place. Within it was the Ark of the Covenant, a gold-covered wooden chest. On top was the lid, also of gold, referred to as the Mercy Seat that was adorned with two Cherubim at the ends. Inside the Ark were the two tablets of the Ten Commandments, Aaron’s rod that blossomed, and a jar of manna.
- Once a year on the Day of Atonement, only the high priest would enter the Most Holy Place behind the veil. He would present offerings for the sins of Israel.

### A New High Priest

The meaning of the veil being torn top to bottom represents that all of mankind now has access to go boldly to the Most Holy Place. No longer is the human high priest of the physical temple needed, who offered sacrifices for sin, because Jesus became that sacrifice. Jesus has become our High Priest. Hebrews 2:17–18: “For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”

Hebrews 4:15–16 further explains, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—

yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

### Life Through Death

Jesus willingly gave up his place next to God the Father in Heaven to become human. He lived a sinless life, survived being directly tempted by Satan, and suffered an agonizing death at the cruel hands of sinful man.

But the true victory was his resurrection to life. First Corinthians 15:20–22 states, “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”

First Corinthians 15:56 continues, “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The same Spirit that resurrected Jesus to a spirit being is now available for mankind. It is the gift of God after repentance and baptism. First Corinthians 3:16: “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst.” Galatians 2:20 continues, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”

James 4:7–8 tells us how to handle the narcissistic influences of Satan: “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.”

Our carnal, selfish, and vain human spirit requires that we have God’s righteous Holy Spirit to overcome all sin. This includes narcissism that we may exhibit or experience from others.

### Conclusion

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the

future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38–39).

Narcissism is real. It comes from influences that bombard us daily and has its roots before the beginning of mankind’s existence. Those behaviors are recorded throughout the Bible as Satan and man rejected God’s truth. Narcissism will become more prevalent as Satan’s influence nears his end.

However, there is a way to overcome it. Through the power of God’s Holy Spirit, Jesus living within us, and biblical teachings, it is possible to conquer narcissism.

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# Born, Begotten—or Both?

By ARNIE FONTAINE



History can help us to understand where beliefs originated. The concepts of being born again and begotten will be the subject of this article.

In Alexander Hislop’s work, *The Two Babylons* (1953), he lays out some of the ancient beliefs among which was being “born again.”

Hislop wrote: “The Brahmins make it their distinguishing boast that they are ‘twice-born’ men, and that, as such, they are sure of eternal happiness. Now, the same was the case in [ancient] Babylon, and there the new birth was conferred by baptism. In the Chaldean [Babylonian] mysteries,

before any instruction could be received, it was required first of all that the person to be initiated [into the mysteries of the religion] submit to baptism [as a] token of blind and implicit obedience” (p. 132).

Being born again in a physical body has its roots in these pagan origins.

Hislop didn’t stop there, but further quoted another historical work. He quotes Prescott’s *Conquest of Mexico* (Vol iii, pp. 339–340, London, 1843) that Roman Catholic missionaries were shocked by the similarities of the pagan baptismal ceremonies to their own. In this pagan ceremony, it was stated that the infant “is born anew.”

Catholics use baptism as a physical born again gateway to heaven. Their scholars admit this did not come from Scripture but from obscure secret sources. Similarly, the Trinity doctrine

crept into Catholicism from extra-scriptural sources (paganism).

Jesus warned His apostles—and by extension, us—that there would come false teachers. There is a common thread of warnings to beware false teachings. Note just a few examples among many:

**Matthew 24:11:** “And many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many.”

He mentions it several times in **Matthew 24**, and Mark and Luke also make it clear. The Apostle Paul also warned of this departure of the faith. In **2 Thessalonians 2:7–12**, he warns of a creeping infiltration of misleading the brethren. “For the mystery of lawlessness is already working; only there is one Who is restraining at the present time until it arises out of the midst. And then the lawless one will be

revealed (whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth, and will destroy with the brightness of His coming); Even the one whose coming is according to the inner working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in those who are perishing because they did not receive the love of the truth, so that they might be saved. And for this cause, God will send upon them a powerful deception that will cause them to believe the lie, So that all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but who took pleasure in unrighteousness.”

Babylon the Great and its mystery religion is the underpinning of Catholicism and Protestant beliefs.

For most of us this is not new, but it is important to recognize the reasons



why the concept of being born again has been twisted and thus misunderstood to this day. It was linked to baptism in the ancient mysteries and received and accepted by the Catholic Church over time.

Early Catholic doctrine adopted infant baptism due in part to the false teaching of the immortality of the soul, and so via infant baptism the child was born again of water.

In *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, there is the following entry on infant baptism: "Although from the first, baptism was the universal means of entry into the Christian community, the NT contains no specific authority for its administration to infants. But by a tradition at least as old as the 3rd century, and virtually universal until the Reformation, children born to Christian parents have been baptized in infancy. In the 16th century this practice (pseudo-baptism) was rejected by the Anabaptists and since the early 17th century also by the Baptists and later by the Disciples of Christ" ("Infant Baptism").

The Catholic sacrament of infant baptism evolved into a religious "work" and was rejected by Protestants during the Reformation. Subsequently, Protestantism developed a slightly different doctrine regarding being "born again"—based on a "no works" perversion of grace—that essentially teaches that all one must do is "profess Christ" and they are then "born again."

Now to the early Church fathers.

Theophilus of Antioch, second century, wrote: "But the moon wanes monthly, and in a manner dies, being a type of man; then it is born again, and is crescent, for a pattern of the future resurrection" (Theophilus of Antioch. To Autolycus, Book 2, Chapter XV. Translated by Marcus Dods, A.M. Excerpted from *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 2. Edited by Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson. American Edition, 1885. Online Edition Copyright © 2004 by K. Knight).

A curious aside is the dual application of **John 3:5**: Jesus answered, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless anyone has been born of water and of Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

In the process of natural childbirth, the water is broken just prior to birth. Next, after a life of faithful Christian life, the individual dies and awaits spiritual birth. It also applies to water baptism first, and then the second part of the previous explanation, entering the Kingdom of God as Spirit.

In the fourth century, Athanasius wrote this: "For God not only created them to be men, but called them to be sons, as having begotten them. For the term 'begat' is here as elsewhere expressive of a Son, as He says by the Prophet, 'I begat sons and exalted them;' and generally, when Scripture wishes to signify a son, it does so, not by the term 'created,' but undoubtedly by that of 'begat.'... He is called 'First-born among many brethren' because of the relationship of the flesh, and 'First-born from the dead,' because the resurrection of the dead is from Him and after Him.... And as He is First-born among brethren and rose from the dead 'the first fruits of them

that slept;' so, since it became Him 'in all things to have the preeminence'" (Athanasius. Discourse II Against the Arians, Chapters 59, 60, 61, 63, 64. Excerpted from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Volume 4. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. American Edition, 1892. Online Edition Copyright © 2005 by K. Knight)

Thus, the idea of being begotten when converted and being born again at the resurrection is not a relatively new one among professing Christians. But unlike the idea of being born again now, it is not a concept with pre-Christian (pagan) origins.

**Psalm 89:27-28**: "Also I will make him my first born, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also I will make to endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven."

Let us go to the oft quoted and yet misunderstood exchange by Jesus and Nicodemus, **John 3:1-21**. The confusion is the difference between begotten and born. If we don't know the difference, we would be as confused as Nicodemus. Jesus also will commonly redirect the conversation from the physical to the spiritual. This He does in the conversation. So, first, let us look at verse 3: "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly I say to you, unless anyone is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.'"

Paul said flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (**1 Corinthians 15:50**). So, in this state of physical being, we cannot see the Kingdom which now is spiritual. Context determines the point Jesus is making as we continue in **John 3:6**: "That which has been born of the flesh is flesh; and that which has been born of the Spirit is spirit."

In both cases, *gennao* is the Greek word translated "born," as it is in **John 3:8**: "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear its sound, but you do not know the place from which it comes and the place to which it goes; so also is everyone who has been born of the Spirit."

Are we still flesh? Can we fly about as the wind moves? Hence baptism, a form of being born again as nominal Christianity would have you believe, is not a pass to "once saved always saved."

So, what is the meaning of "born" in these examples? The Greek is *gennao*. It is used to explain physical begets of Jesus' lineage in the Gospels. **Matthew 1:2**: "Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judah and his brethren."

Begat is past tense for begotten, *gennao*, a physical birth. The *gennao* is, in this case, the complete process of childbirth from conception to birth. It is analogous to our Christian development. The question before us is, are we only *begotten* now as we wait for a yet future *birth* into God's Kingdom, or are we born again at baptism? Is the burial and being raised out of the waters of baptism with Christ a begettal or birth?

It is important to understand that Jesus gave us a pattern to follow. Let us begin at the beginning of Jesus' journey, **Matthew 1:19-20**: "And

Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to expose her publicly, was planning to divorce her secretly. But as he pondered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife, because that which has been begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit.'"

"Begotten" here is the same *gennao* of His genealogy. Next, He was born of the flesh, and we continue to mirror it by our physical birth.

Is there a scripture or scriptures that speak of Jesus being born into another form? Yes. **Colossians 1:17-18**: "And He is before all, and by Him all things subsist. And He is the Head of the body, the church; Who is the beginning, the FIRSTBORN from among the dead, so that in all things He Himself might hold the preeminence."

So we clearly have two types of births don't we?

Was Jesus, at his baptism by John the Baptist, born again? No. He was given a megadose of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, was He the first person to receive said Holy Spirit? No. If being born again is the receiving of the Holy Spirit, were the luminaries of old born again? There is no scriptural evidence other than being righteous.

Paul, in **Romans 8:17-23**, discusses our awaiting that new birth. "Now if we are children, we are also heirs, truly, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer together with Him, so that we may also be glorified together with Him. For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation itself is awaiting the manifestation of the sons of God; Because the creation was subjected to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who subjected it in hope, In order that the creation itself might be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that all the creation is groaning together and travailing together until now. And not only that, but even we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, also groan within ourselves, awaiting the sonship, the redemption of our bodies."

So, we haven't been revealed; we are in the midst of labor pains yearning to be born. Peter continues this theme of anticipation in **1 Peter 1:3-5**: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who, according to His abundant mercy, has begotten us again unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; Unto an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and unfading, reserved in heaven for us, Who are being safeguarded by the power of God through faith, for salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time."

This parallels Paul's previous Romans teachings. Peter continues with this analogy **1 Peter 1:22-24**: "Having purified your lives by obedience to the Truth unto unfeigned brotherly love through the Spirit, love one another fervently with a pure heart. For you have been begotten again, not from corruptible seed, but from incorruptible seed, by the living Word of God, which remains forever. For all

flesh is like grass, and all the glory of man is like the flower of the field; the grass has withered, and its flower has fallen away."

Begotten in these two verses is *anagenao*, still waiting as our flower fades for that reborn time yet future. We have been begotten and are waiting for that change.

In Paul's letter to Titus there is a Greek word that only occurs twice in the Bible, in **Titus 3** and **Matthew 19**. Let us look at these scriptures and this word, regeneration (*paliggenesia*).

**Titus 3:5**: "Not by works of righteousness which we practiced, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit."

At first glance, some might make the case this refers to being born again in our current state, but Jesus defines the word. Let us look at that Scripture.

**Matthew 19:28**: "And Jesus said to them, 'Truly I say to you who have followed Me: in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit upon the throne of His glory, you also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.' A singular future event for faithful Christians to be born into God's Family. Jesus makes it abundantly clear Paul's reference is yet future. Paul teaches us that baptism is the washing away of the past to begin anew with the Holy Spirit.

Paul in **Titus 3:7** gives us a qualifier: "So that, having been justified by His grace, we would become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." An heir has not yet received the inheritance when added to the "will." Notice he writes *hope*, which implies something yet future. With this background, it is time to for **John 3** once again.

For emphasis, we shall go over some verses previously discussed. In **John 3:3** Jesus discusses the requirement to see the Kingdom: "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly I say to you, unless anyone is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.'" The analogy of human gestation and birth comes into play. Can we see the world in our mother's womb? We can experience a limited number of sounds, but to fully see and hear we must be born.

Jesus carries this through in **John 3:5**, making it clear that it is a two-step process. First conception, and then going full term and being born into this world. We at baptism (the water) begin the "in the womb" phase. The Spirit nourishes us as we grow spiritually. Without that Spirit, we cannot enter the Kingdom of God.

There is an interesting comment by John in **1 John 3:9**. It can be rather confusing and there are plausible explanations for what John is writing. From Young's Literal Translation: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; or his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." Born here is again *gennao*, which must be taken in context. It can mean human birth as we saw in Jesus' lineage. In this usage, there is definitely a spiritual meaning. One meaning can be that once we are born into the Kingdom we won't sin as spirit-beings. There is another possible layer of meaning. *Gennao* in the Greek



can mean the entire process of development, spiritually or physically.

Another translates (Faithful Version) this verse thusly: “Everyone who has been begotten by God does not practice sin because His seed of begetting is dwelling within him, and he is not able to practice sin because he has been begotten by God.” Here it is posited that when we were begotten by God at baptism, our lives changed. Our walk with God put us on a path to avoid sin and follow God’s/Christ’s ways.

This translation and others link this understanding with **1 John 3:10**: “By this standard are manifest the children of God and the children of the devil. Everyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, and neither is the one who does not love his brother.” So, both understandings are plausible. John is laying a standard to live by in

verse 9 as we grow in righteousness; verse 10 is the process.

Paul repeats the idea that this earthly body we have is only the first step. One example among many is in **2 Corinthians 5:1–2**: “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with human hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we truly are groaning, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven.”

Recall Paul, in Romans, writing of the whole creation groaning for that moment.

In **2 Corinthians 5:5** we have another oft mentioned concept—an earnest payment, or down-payment. “Now He Who is working out this very thing for us is God, Who has also given us the earnest of the Spirit.” Yes, the Holy

Spirit given is part of the initial begetting.

In **2 Peter 1:3–4** we read the following: “According as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him Who called us by His own glory and virtue; Through which He has given to us the greatest and most precious promises, that through these you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

He lays out behaviors in **2 Peter 1:5–7** not that dissimilar to the fruits of the Spirit outlined by Paul in **Galatians 5:22–23**. Doing these things helps us endure, as we see in **2 Peter 1:10**: “For this reason, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure; because if

you are doing these things, you will never fall at any time.”

In **Romans 8:1** Paul hammers home this future birth of being truly born again as Jesus spoke of in **John 3**. “Now if the Spirit of Him Who raised Jesus from the dead is dwelling within you, He Who raised Christ from the dead will also quicken your mortal bodies because of His Spirit that dwells within you.”

We have seen the origins of the “born again” theology of the pagan religious systems and the biblical teachings through Christ’s clarifications and the apostles’ supporting narrative of what Jesus was teaching Nicodemus of the true meaning of being “born again.” Hopefully this submission helps us all understand our current state and future hope.

# The Law of God: Just What Is It?

## Part 1

By KEITH RISDEN



In this presentation we will look at what the law of God is and address questions such as these: Why does the law of God seem to be constantly under attack, even within the Christian church? Why is there so much confusion surrounding the law? Why are the churches across the world not teaching the truth of God’s law?

Only a small percentage of us have had these and similar questions on our minds. Ever since the foundation of the Church of God, new believers have sought the understanding of God’s law. So let’s turn to the Scriptures and see what God reveals about His law and its relevance to the followers of Christ.

Let’s begin our study in the book of Acts.

**Acts 28:23**: “They set a day to meet with him [Paul], and they came to him where he was staying in even greater numbers. From morning until evening, he explained things to them, testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the prophets” (New English Translation).

Paul was preaching the books of Moses and the words of the prophets of old to a great number of people. Could it be that Paul was telling them that the laws were done away with and that they should forget the past and think about Christ only and the resurrection? No!

Moses was the mediator between God and Israel, and Moses wrote the laws of God in books.

**Deuteronomy 28:58**: “If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD.”

**Deuteronomy 30:10**: “If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the LORD thy God with all thine heart,

and with all thy soul.”

The text in Acts states Paul was teaching them about Jesus from what both Moses and the prophets had written.

For even Christ taught the laws of Moses and the words of the prophets.

**John 7:19**: “Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me?”

**Mark 10:3**: “And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you?”

Humanity does not want a God to rule over them. Men have naturally rejected God’s law and want to set up their own law.

It is funny how Christ came and uplifts the law and still he was accused of breaking the very laws He established in the earth. Christ was righteous and was without sin, yet He was seen as a mad man and dealt with as if He were a criminal.

**John 10:20**: “And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?”

**Mark 3:19–21**: “And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him: and they went into an house. And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself.”

They thought Christ was losing his mind. They thought he had gone mad. Some of the Jews thought He was a false prophet, and they sought to kill him.

**John 5:18**: “Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.”

Humans today have the same attitude towards those that preach the plain truth of God’s law.

While talking with his disciples Christ said in **John 16:2–3**: “They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have

not known the Father, nor me.”

All the hate from humanity is because of the teachings of the law of God. This world, ever since Eden, has been deceived to think that God is wrong. The carnal man is totally against the ways of God.

**Matthew 24:9**: “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake.”

We are and will be hated, because of the law of God; it is all over the written Word of God.

**John 15:18–19**: “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”

You might run to say this is not speaking of the law of God, but I beg to differ. Christ represents the Father, and the laws of God represent the Father as well. The ways of God are determined by His words. Christ is the Word of God made flesh.

**John 1:14**: “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.”

The message of Christ is the Kingdom of God; the Kingdom of God is the Government of God, and the Government of God functions by the law of God.

### The Law of God is the Government of God

Humanity, along with AI (*artificial intelligence*), does not want the government of God here on earth for various reasons.

God’s law leads to perfection and justification, so let us think about this for a moment. What if everybody began to keep God’s laws. We would use the many prisons across the world to store food because no man would be committing crimes. Hospitals would become vacant, and those buildings utilized into classrooms. Doctors, soldiers, and police officers might or

would be priests/ministers of God. We would have a world of peace and love, and the funniest thing about this is that almost every human being would tell you that is what they want.

Can you imagine a world of no war, a world where no man acts unjustly?

God’s law is God’s way of life; it is the way to eternal peace and love and to eternal life. But law-breaking leads to death! The law says, *You can violate me as much as you can, but there is a price for doing that. I will come one day when you know not to reward you for your action.* The penalty of breaking the law is death. You will die if you break God’s law, but if you live by the law, having accepted the grace of Christ, you will gain everlasting life through Christ.

The law of God is life; the law reveals the life of God and many of us do not come to understand this yet. Breaking God’s law is as if you are sacrificing the life-giver Himself and, as a result, getting the death penalty.

**John 1:4**: “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

**John 10:10**: “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

When we come to the knowledge of Christ and his sacrifice for humanity, understanding that Christ set us *free* and *allows us to keep His law*, repentance is necessary to the keeping of this law of God that humanity hates. You can now have peace and happiness, faith instead of fear. God’s law is the way to love and prosperity and everything good that you want. The law of God is the way of God, and there are many blessings God has to offer us if we obey.

When Christ was on earth, He taught the way of God and brought the message of love, which is the way of life established by the law.

**Psalms 119:97**: “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.”

**Psalms 119:113**: “I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.”

**Psalms 119:127**: “Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold.”



The law of God is not an evil thing and does not conflict with your interest of having a peaceful life and prosperity.

Men have defiled the law of God, being under the influence of Satan with their corrupt government, so Christ will have to come and uphold this very law according to His righteousness.

#### Christ Came to Fulfill the Law

**Matthew 5:17–19:** “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but *whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*”

Today, when we teach the keeping of God’s law, they say we are wrong and are the least among men. They beat us over the head and say Christ did away with all these commandments.

When Christ came, He put a magnifying glass on the law of God because men miss the mark that the law is spiritual.

**Romans 7:14:** “For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.”

**Romans 7:12:** “Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.”

It takes the holy love of God in our hearts given to us by the Holy Spirit to keep the law of God.

**Deuteronomy 11:26–28:** “Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known.”

Then, **Deuteronomy 30:11–12:** “This commandment I am giving you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it too remote. It is not in heaven, as though one must say, ‘Who will go up to heaven to get it for us and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?’”

The Word of God states in **Leviticus 18:5:** “Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD.”

Paul wrote, in **Romans 10:5:** “For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that the man which doeth those things shall live by them.”

God wants us to live by his laws so that we can become his children and share a special relationship with him; this is the only way to his eternal blessings.

*Many that come to this knowledge and the acceptance of God’s law now seem to be confused as to which of the laws to keep.*

I believe that if we just stop, get closer to the Father, and grow and become more like Him, He will lead us to a deeper understanding. I am sure that we all have come to the understanding that the sacrificial system and the rituals associated with it have ended by Christ.

What other laws have the Scriptures suggested have also ended and those that will eventually end.

#### We need to examine these things.

Christ’s teaching is of a righteous life and government of love towards each man. Mercy and forgiveness were two important aspects of Christ’s teachings, as he placed emphasis on the law of God. Christ revealed that love towards God and man is the foundation of His law.

Answering a question from a puffed-up lawyer of the Pharisees in **Matthew 22:37–40**, “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

The government of God also stands on these two fundamental principles, yet men rejects such.

The government of God has been the target of the biggest highjack and hostile takeover event in the history of earth since Genesis, and if we get to understand it clearly, everything happening here on earth will make sense.

I have mentioned in other presentations that the devil is now the god of this world according to the Scriptures.

**2 Corinthians 4:4:** “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

Ever since the Garden of Eden, Satan has deceived mankind into accepting his law above the law of God. God’s Word is life, and Satan’s word brings death.

**John 6:63:** “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”

Satan has control over humanity.

**2 Timothy 2:25–26:** “In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.”

According to this epistle, those of us that God calls to His Son should repent and begin to live by God’s law. Those who do so will break free from the trap of the devil, who has taken the world into captivity. The devil’s trap, or snare, as some translators have it, causes man to find fault with God and His law, thereby deceiving man into breaking at least one of the commandments. **Read it for yourself and understand it.**

**James 4:7:** “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Satan is God’s adversary, and he fights against everything of God. Satan literally fights against life.

There is always warfare against God and his laws, even before man came to be, by Satan and his entourage. Herod tried to take the life of Christ when Christ was yet a child.

**Matthew 2:13:** “...for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.”

We see an encounter between Satan and Christ when Christ was in the wilderness (**Matthew 4:4**). Satan has

always tried to overthrow Christ and His disciples, the little flock, the saints of God.

**Matthew 16:18:** “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

**Matthew 11:12:** “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.”

Most English translations follow the pattern of the ESV: “the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence and the violent take it by force.” Other translations, such as the NLT, render this as “the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people are attacking it.” The NASB adds some subtlety by noting, in footnotes, that these phrases can also be translated “is forcibly entered,” and “seize it for themselves,” respectively.

Jesus’ reference to the days of John the Baptist likely means the time of John’s ministry before he was imprisoned (**Matthew 4:12**). “Now,” in this context, would then mean that moment in Jesus’ ministry of introducing the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is obvious that the religious authorities plotted against humanity’s greatest hope, rejected Christ and the Kingdom message He preached, and desired to hold onto their positions of authority.

**John 18:36:** “Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.”

**John 18:37:** “Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.”

When Christ said everyone that is of the truth, Christ is actually saying everyone that is of the Law (the Torah) will hear His voice.

**Psalms 119:142:** “Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth.”

Christ is coming to take over the government of God and no power can stop it.

**Daniel 2:44:** “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.”

**Zechariah 14:3–4:** “Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.”

The return of Christ to this earth is to set up His government so that His laws—yes, His laws—will be established on earth as it is in heaven.

The devil influences man to resist the way of God and to break God’s law.

**Revelation 17:13–14:** “These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.”

Satan wants men to be destroyed by their very Creator that loves them, and this is why he is influencing man with every method he knows to rise against God and His righteousness.

**Isaiah 9:7:** “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”

Satan cannot prevent this so he is out on a full-scale war against God’s law and people.

Today the children of God have the laws of God in their hearts and are committed to live by it.

**Romans 3:31:** “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we **establish the law.**”

The devil is at war with law-keepers. “And the dragon was wroth with the woman and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which **keep the commandments of God**, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (**Revelation 12:17**).

When Christ comes, Satan shall be thrown into a prison for a thousand years so that he will not deceive the nations no more.

**Revelation 20:2–3:** “And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.”

In this time, humanity will be free from Satan’s strong hold and deceptions and will learn the law of God and will live by it.

**Isaiah 2:3:** “And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”

When Satan and his angels are gone, men will seek to learn God’s law.

**Micah 4:2:** “And many nations shall come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, and to the house of the God of Jacob. And He will teach us from His ways, and we will walk in His paths. For the Law shall go forth out of Zion and the Word of Jehovah from Jerusalem.”

*To be continued.*

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# In Loving Memory

## Charles W. Woods, Sr.

September 19, 1933 – December 27, 2024



Charles W. Woods, Sr., a longtime member of the Nashville, Tennessee Church of God International congregation, died on December 27, 2024. Funeral services for Mr. Woods were held on January 5, 2025, at the Merry Street Church of God Seventh Day in Nashville. Interment was on January 6 in the Greenwood North Cemetery, Goodlettsville, Tennessee.

Mr. Woods became a part of the Merry Street Church of God in 1969. Within a few years he was appointed to the church's Board of Deacons. He was also appointed to the Board of Trustees and served as Chairman of the Board for a time. He would later become a part of the Nashville CGI congregation.

Mr. Woods is survived by his loving family, his devoted daughter Annette Hamler (James); his sons, Charles William Woods, Jr. (Bonita), Bud Woods (Barbara), and Thomas Ray Woods (Julie); his grandchildren, Loretta Dalton, Roderick Sneed, Jr. (Earline), Maurice Brown, Nicholas Thompson (Valencia), Donte Batey, Ulysses Brown, Felicia Fuqua (Charles), Kiesha Miles, Thomas Woods, Stacey Woods, Tracey Kibet (Leroy), and Adam Woods (Sarah); seventeen great-grandchildren; nieces, Georgia Fuqua and Ora Day; extended family, Brenda Dudley and Jennifer Ross; and his devoted close friend, Carolyn Lawson.

In the "Acknowledgements and Resolution" portion of his funeral service, presenter Joanne Hockett said that "Deacon Woods had a smile that would warm your heart.... He loved everyone, and everyone loved him, and they respected him at all times." He "fought a good fight; he kept the faith; and he finished his course," Ms. Hockett said. "He had many mountains to climb in his lifetime, but he never gave up. He was truly a great inspiration to all of us."

## Jeffrey Hunter Patton

1952 – 2025



Jeff was born into the Patton family whose motto is *Virtute adeptus*, meaning "acquired by virtue," and he lived this motto all of his life. Though his battle was not by the sword of his ancestors, he wielded the Word of God with honour and strength for over fifty one years. He began his life-long commitment to walk with God when he was baptized in Jerusalem in 1973. After completing a French-language year abroad program and having a harrowing experience behind the iron curtain, he began studies at Ambassador College where he obtained a journalism degree and worked as a writer for the *Portfolio* and the *World Tomorrow* telecast.

He relentlessly pursued his wife, Carolanne, and they married in 1976, and were eventually blessed with four sons and their families: Joshua and Heather, Jeremiah and Leah, Josiah and Jeffrey, and five grandchildren, Christina, Daniel, Elian, Elizabeth, and Phinehas. They took as their personal motto a passage from the book of Isaiah, "God has given us the tongue of a teacher to comfort the weary with the Word." Jeff was known for his hospitality, his generous spirit, his *joie de vivre*, his infectious laughter, and his care for his family, his church brethren, and his many homestay "sons."

Jeff was active in local church congregations and hosted youth outdoor living summer programs. His love for his family and friends motivated him in all of his activities. Whether keeping bees to share the gift of honey, making fruit wines, or studying Hebrew and Arabic, he was devoted to learning new things that could be a benefit to others.

For a decade Jeff was mail processing and circulation manager for the French department of the Worldwide Church of God, and he enjoyed his travels to Europe and Quebec to meet those he was serving.

After pursuing some months of study at Hebrew University, he became managing editor for the *Global Church of God*, where he developed the *World Ahead* magazine and other literature to support the mission of preaching the gospel—God's good news of His Kingdom—to a worldwide audience. Later he wrote *Walk a Straight Path in a Crooked World* to encourage people to take up the challenge of following God in a post-Christian world of materialism and meaninglessness.

Pursuing his love of the Scriptures, Jeff researched many recently discovered historical and archaeological facts about the migrations of the ancient ten tribes of Israel and their descendants as they related to the biblical evidence. He shared this research with the United Church of God helping to write *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*, and then compiled the information in *Your Roots, Your Destiny*.

While in England, Jeff (a certified teacher) worked teaching history and religious studies in the British school system. On Sabbath he was given the opportunity to preach in the local church congregations in London and Tonbridge. In England and Cyprus he pursued his love of history with the family and visited many sites of historical and biblical significance. Returning to Canada, Jeff served as an elder in the local congregation and eventually developed with his sons an independent web-based ministry, COGWebcast.com. You can read Jeff's blog at [worldtomorrow.ca](http://worldtomorrow.ca).

Jeff was a passionate storyteller at heart. His adventures across Europe, North America, and Israel still echo in his books, articles, and sermons. In 2005, he started his video journey as producer as he partnered with his son Jeremiah and created

Cinnabar Vista Productions, a film company with an eye to making meaningful documentaries and capturing authentic stories. Their first major production, *E.J. Hughes, Triumph Over Hard Times*, won a Leo Nomination. While their video, *My Dad's Dentist Story*, represented Canada in a Cannes Film Festival. Since that time they have produced many award-winning pieces for their clients to communicate positive messages through creative story-telling.

Jeff loved being outdoors hiking and camping with his boys and exploring the local islands. He appreciated working in the garden on his "wee green spot" where he planted his own vine and fig trees. His hope for the future was to be among those envisioned by Isaiah who would be "repairers of the breach and the restorer of paths to dwell in."

## Migdalia (Miggy) Hohertz

January 14, 1956 – December 22, 2024



Miggy Hohertz was born in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico to a large family on January 14, 1956. She was adopted by a childless Puerto Rican couple living in a suburb of New York City and was raised as an only child. She often talked about the size and/or sounds of the rats she saw.

Her first husband was an expert in repair of automobile transmissions. They travelled the country wherever his services were needed. He died unexpectedly while en route between two jobs.

At some point in time, Miggy moved to Victoria, Texas. She met our dad, Weldon Hohertz, at the Feast of Tabernacles in 2010, and they were married a few months later on December 30 the same year.

She assisted Dad in his gardening endeavors and was very good at planting onions! She also assisted with taking care of the chickens and their eggs. She loved animals and always remembered to ask about our pets.

Whenever we visited her and Dad, she would always send us home with canned goods or something from the garden. She also made sure we did not drive off the culvert into the ditch when we left their home.

Despite her health and physical limitations as she grew older, she did not complain. She continued to drive and shop.

She died unexpectedly in her sleep Sunday night, December 22, 2024. She was so kind and delightful to everyone she met. She will be missed by all who knew and loved her.

Amy Hohertz



## Jean Claude Rubumba

October 10, 1976 – December 28, 2024



We were shocked and deeply saddened to learn of Jean Claude Rubumba's untimely death in late December of last year. Jean Claude, 48, served the church in the East African Republic of Rwanda. Please remember his family and friends and the brethren of Rwanda in your prayers.

*“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”*

1 CORINTHIANS  
15:52



THE SHREVEPORT-BOSSIER CITY CGI conducted its annual Chili Cookoff on January 18, 2025. The six entrants provided quite a contest! While it was a tough decision, we had a lot of fun deciding on a winner. LaShaun Aldrige (left) was our first place winner, followed closely by Gloria Miller (middle) in second, and Jane Willhite (right) in third. Congratulations to our winners and everyone who participated! — John Woodard

## Open Church Policy

**The Church of God International is an open church.**

**W**e have many people attending who are new in the faith. Some will not always keep each of God's laws as they should, and some will not believe everything we teach. We pray that they may be strengthened through the services we render and the examples we set as they come to a closer walk with their God. We request that you be neither judgmental nor base your standard for obedience on what you see your brethren do. Christ is our standard, not weak and sinful men. Always remember that you will be judged for what you do, not what others do. Your job is to pray for them, set the right example, and please the Father in all that you do.

## CGI-Jamaica Commits to Innovative Evangelistic Efforts

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:19–20).

The Church of God International in Jamaica has embarked on a renewed drive to fulfill our primary mission, which is to preach the gospel and make disciples, that is, to be witnesses for our Lord Jesus Christ. We have recently appointed a sub-committee of the local board to focus on evangelism and media.

Our Vision: “To be a church that consistently engages in evangelism and growth by sharing the gospel in diverse and creative ways.”

Our Mission: “To spread the gospel of the Kingdom of God to everyone within our reach.”

We have set ourselves four objectives:

- Reach a wide audience with the gospel
- Reinforce the gospel through multiple channels
- Increase the frequency/intensity of evangelism activities
- Create a culture of evangelism

The committee consists of representatives from all four local congregations: Ocho Rios, May Pen, Maroon Town, and Kingston.

Some notable activities and achievements so far since coming back from the Feast of Tabernacles include:

- Community walks, in May Pen, where we distributed flyers announcing our presence in the community, along with pamphlets teaching about the gospel of the kingdom of God. This was followed up with a street meeting to proclaim the gospel. This will continue to be executed on the last Sabbath of every month. Already, we have experienced a boost in attendance from the community, particularly the children.
- Monthly visitors Sabbath in Kingston, on the first Sabbath of each month. To date we've had 40 visitors in person across both instances in January and February. The only form of promotion is encouraging members to invite someone to service. Once they are there, we use the opportunity to hand out literature to ensure that visitors are exposed to the gospel. We also offer warm hospitality and follow up contact to reinvite them to join us again.
- On social media, in keeping with our objective of reinforcing the gospel through multiple channels, we have embarked on consistent engagement via Instagram, achieving steady growth in engagement (114), views (8,660), and new followers (31) in the November to January period. On YouTube we mustered 7,695 views and 34 new subscribers over the same period.

In the upcoming months, we will continue with these initiatives, and more, including health fairs, where we will partner with local health officials to provide free medical check-ups in the communities. We will host campaigns later in the year to proclaim the gospel in May Pen, Maroon Town, Ocho Rios, and Kingston. We are also making plans to establish a presence in the parish of St. Elizabeth, where we have several people who are interested but simply cannot make the arduous journey to Maroon Town in St. James on a weekly basis. The foundation of a new building has already been laid, and we are looking to complete a physical structure that can accommodate regular fellowship.

Another major initiative for this year is a conference on the topic of the holy days. We are collaborating with two seventh-day Church of God groups to host a conference to discuss whether Sabbath-keepers should also observe the annual holy days. Invitations are going out to the leaders of various Sabbath-keeping groups in Jamaica for this interactive discussion.

Please pray for the success of all these initiatives and our evangelism efforts. If you would like to find out how you can assist these efforts, feel free to contact Elder Stephen Scale at [stephen.scale@gmail.com](mailto:stephen.scale@gmail.com).

Stephen Scale

(See photos on back cover.)





Members of the Church of God International of Jamaica engage in diverse and creative evangelistic activities.



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