

Doctrines of the Bible

by David K. Bernard

The Existence of God

The first verse of the Bible introduces God as the Creator of the universe. The Bible does not try to prove that God exists; it assumes His existence as fundamental. Creation itself bears witness that there is an intelligent, omnipotent, loving Creator (Romans 1:20).

There can be only one of three explanations for the existence of the universe: (1) it has always existed (eternal universe); (2) it came into existence by its own power (self-creating universe), or (3) God created it. Accepting any of these requires a faith that transcends scientific proof. It is more plausible to believe in an intelligent, eternal, omnipotent Creator than in the eternity or self-creative ability of nonrational matter.

The orderliness and design of the universe require the existence of a Designer. The incredible complexity of even the simplest forms of life shows that life did not begin by accident or blind chance. Man's moral nature reveals that he is more than an intelligent animal; he was created in the image of a rational, spiritual, moral Being. Every human child develops a conscience, and every human society has a sense of morality (Romans 2:15).

How could the finite human mind even conceive of an in-

finite, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, and perfect God unless God imparted that concept? Every society in history has expressed belief in a Supreme Being, and modern anthropological studies show that the earliest and most fundamental religious belief is not polytheism but monotheism.

The testimony of the Scriptures and the confirmation of personal experience assure us that God indeed lives and communicates with humanity. Ultimately, we accept the truth of His existence by faith (Hebrews 11:6).

The Bible

Since God exists, the Word of God must also, for would not the Creator communicate with His creation? Since God created us as rational beings and since He loves us enough to provide for us, surely He wishes to communicate with us and thereby fulfill His purpose for creation. All intelligent beings seek to communicate, and the Supreme Intelligence is no exception.

We would expect God to record His message in writing, the historic medium best suited for precision, preservation, and propagation. And the following evidence convincingly demonstrates that the Bible is the unique written Word of God to man: (1) its unique claims, (2) self-vindicating authority, (3) testimony of the apostles and prophets, (4) integrity of Jesus Christ, who endorsed the Old Testament and commissioned the writers of the New, (5) nature and quality of its content, (6) moral superiority, (7) unity, despite more than forty writers over 1,600 years, (8) lack of a credible alternative, (9) agreement with history, archeology, and science, (10) indestructibility, (11) universality, (12) influence on society, (13) witness of the Spirit, (14) life-changing power, (15) fulfilled promises and miracles, (16) fulfilled prophecies, and (17) lack of an alternative explanation for its origin.

We would certainly expect God's Word to identify itself as such, and each book of the Bible claims, either directly or indirectly, to be the Word of God. Of all the books of the world's great religions, only one other book boasts of equal authority—the Koran—and its fanciful, contradictory content does

not support its claim. The world's most moral book, the Bible, would not proclaim the world's biggest lie. The world's noblest and wisest man, Jesus, would not perpetrate the world's greatest hoax. No one but God could have authored the Bible, for good beings would not falsely claim divine inspiration, and evil beings would not teach such high morality.

The Bible is inspired of God, literally "God-breathed." "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (II Timothy 3:16). Holy men wrote as the Holy Spirit moved them (II Peter 1:21). Inspiration extends to all parts of the Bible and to every word. While the human writers chose words that reflected their language, culture, personality, circumstances, and style, God guided the process so that each word would accurately convey His message. As a result, the Bible is infallible, inerrant, and the sole authority for doctrine and Christian living. The Bible is truth.

The thirty-nine Old Testament books were recognized as Scripture by the ancient Hebrews, and Jesus and the apostles quoted from or alluded to almost all of them. The twenty-seven New Testament books were accepted by Christians from the earliest times, including contemporaries of the writers in most cases (II Peter 3:15-16), and are recognized as Scripture by all Christendom.

Errors can sometimes arise in copying, translating, or printing the Scriptures, but God has kept His hand upon the transmission process to preserve His Word for all time (Psalm 100:5). The accuracy of the Old Testament Hebrew text was safeguarded by the extremely high quality of the scribal transmission process and has received dramatic verification by the recent discovery of the ancient Dead Sea scrolls. The accuracy of the New Testament Greek text is assured by the extremely large number of manuscripts—over 5,000—which cancel out copyists' errors.

The King James Version is the most popular English Bible. It was translated over a seven-year period by forty-seven theologians and linguists. Each was a noted scholar who was firmly committed to the inspiration and authority of the Scrip-

tures. The New King James Version is a modern language revision that seeks to preserve accuracy and increase understandability.

Bible students should use the literal method of interpretation, which means following the natural or usual implication of an expression—the ordinary and apparent meaning of the words—rather than seeking a hidden, allegorical or “spiritual” meaning. It is important to use sound logic and to study words, grammar, background, context, literary genre (style), history, geography, culture, figures of speech, symbols, parables, and types. When studying the Bible, we should keep in mind several points: (1) illumination of the Spirit is necessary, (2) the Bible is basically plain and meant to be understood, (3) Scripture interprets Scripture, (4) truth is revealed progressively from Old to New Testament, (5) the Bible presents a unified theology, (6) no doctrine stands on one passage alone or is hidden in obscure passages, (7) the Bible is accommodated to the human mind (but not to error), and (8) each passage has one primary meaning but can have many applications.

We can have confidence that God has revealed, preserved, and transmitted His Word to us today and that we can understand it. His Word is the Bible.

The Doctrine of God

“God is a Spirit” (John 4:24). He is not made of flesh, blood, bones, or physical matter. He is invisible to the human eye unless He chooses to reveal Himself in some way (John 1:18). God has individuality, rationality, and personality. He is self-existent, eternal, and unchanging. He is omnipresent (everywhere present), omniscient (all knowing and all wise), and omnipotent (all powerful).

God’s moral nature includes holiness, justice and righteousness, mercy and grace, love, faithfulness, truth, and goodness. He is absolutely perfect in every way. I John 4:8 says, “God is love”; no other religion identifies God so totally with love.

Since God is holy He cannot have fellowship with sin.

God's justice demands punishment for sin, but in His love and mercy He gave His Son to meet the requirements of His justice and yet provide salvation for repentant sinners. Those who reject His gracious provision of salvation will face His judgment. God loves the sinner, but His holy nature will not allow Him to love, condone, or ignore sin.

God is absolutely and indivisibly one. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deuteronomy 6:4). His eternal nature contains no essential distinctions or divisions. All names and titles of the Deity such as God, Jehovah, Lord, Father, Word, and Holy Spirit refer to one and the same being. Any plurality associated with God is only a plurality of attributes, titles, roles, manifestations, modes of activity, or relationships to man. Many passages emphasize God's oneness (Isaiah 42:8; 43:10-11; 44:6-8, 24; 45:21-23; 46:6-9; Mark 12:28-30; Galatians 3:20; I Timothy 2:5; James 2:19).

The title of Father describes God's roles as father of all creation, father of the only begotten Son, and father of the born-again believer (Deuteronomy 32:6; Malachi 2:10). The title of Son refers to God coming in the flesh, for the baby Jesus was literally conceived by the Holy Spirit, who was literally His Father (Matthew 1:18-20; Luke 1:35). The title of Holy Spirit identifies the fundamental character of God's nature. Holiness forms the basis of His moral attributes, while spirituality is the basis of His nonmoral attributes. The Holy Spirit is specifically God in activity, particularly anointing, regenerating, and indwelling man—works that God can do because He is a Spirit (Genesis 1:2; Acts 1:5-8).

These terms can also be understood in God's revelation to man: Father refers to God in family relationship to man; Son refers to God incarnate; and Spirit refers to God in activity. For example, one man can have three significant relationships or functions—such as administrator, teacher, and counsellor—and yet be one person in every sense. God is not defined by or limited to an essential threeness. The Bible nowhere speaks of God as a "trinity" or as "three persons" but often calls Him the Holy One.

The title of Word relates to God's self-expression or self-

revelation. The Word is God Himself (John 1:1), particularly His thought, mind, reasoning, or plan. In the person of Jesus Christ, “the Word was made flesh” (John 1:14). “God was manifest in the flesh” (I Timothy 3:16).

The Identity of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is both God and man. He is the one God incarnate. “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (II Corinthians 5:19). Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, God manifest in flesh, our God and Savior, and the express image of God’s own person (substance) (II Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; I Timothy 3:16; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:3; II Peter 1:1). He is not the incarnation of one person of a trinity, but the incarnation of all the character, quality, and personality of the one God.

Acknowledging the deity of Jesus Christ is essential to salvation. Jesus said, “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins,” making reference to God’s name of I Am (John 8:24, 58). Only if Jesus is truly God does He have power to save from sin, for only God is the Savior and only He can forgive sin (Isaiah 43:25; 45:21-22; Mark 2:7).

All names and titles of the Deity properly apply to Jesus. He is God (John 20:28), Lord (Acts 9:5), Jehovah (Isaiah 45:23 with Philippians 2:10-11), I Am (John 8:58), Father (Isaiah 9:6; Revelation 21:6-7), Word (John 1:14), and Holy Spirit (John 14:17-18).

God the Father dwelt in the man Christ. Jesus said, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). “The Father is in me, and I in him” (John 10:38). “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father . . . the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works” (John 14:9-10). The divine nature of Jesus Christ is the Holy Spirit (Galatians 4:6; Philippians 1:19), which is the Spirit of the Father (Matthew 1:18-20; 10:20). “The Lord is that Spirit” (II Corinthians 3:17). Jesus is the One on the heavenly throne, as we see by comparing the description of Jesus in Revelation 1 with that of the One on the throne in Revelation 4 and by noting that “God and the Lamb” is one being in Revelation 22:3-4.

Jesus is also the Son of God. The term *Son* can mean the human nature of Christ alone (as in “the Son died”) or the union of deity and humanity (as in “the Son shall return to earth in glory”), but it is never used apart from God’s incarnation. It never refers to deity alone. The terms “God the Son” and “eternal Son” are nonbiblical. The role of the Son began when Jesus was conceived miraculously in the womb of a virgin by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35; Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 1:5).

The Scriptures emphatically proclaim Christ’s genuine and complete humanity (Romans 1:3; Hebrews 2:14-17; 5:7-8). He had a human body, soul, spirit, mind, and will (Luke 22:42; 23:46; Acts 2:31; Philippians 2:5; Hebrews 10:5, 10). Jesus was a perfect human, with everything genuine humanity includes. Christ’s true humanity does not mean He had a sinful nature. He was without sin, He did no sin, and sin was not in Him (Hebrews 4:15; I Peter 2:22; I John 3:5). He came with the kind of innocent human nature that Adam and Eve had in the beginning.

Belief in Christ’s true humanity is essential to salvation (I John 4:3). If God did not truly come in the flesh, then there is no blood for remission of sin, no sacrifice of atonement. The very purpose of the Incarnation was to provide a holy man to mediate between holy God and sinful mankind.

It is necessary to distinguish clearly between the deity and the humanity of Christ. While Jesus was both God and man at the same time, sometimes He acted from the human viewpoint and sometimes from the divine viewpoint. As Father, He sometimes spoke from His divine self-consciousness; as Son He sometimes spoke from His human self-consciousness. Only as a man could Jesus be born, grow, be tempted by the devil, hunger, thirst, become weary, sleep, pray, be beaten, die, not know all things, not have all power, be inferior to God, and be a servant. Only as God could He exist from eternity, be unchanging, cast out devils by His own authority, be the bread of life, give living water, give spiritual rest, calm the storm, answer prayer, heal the sick, raise His body from death, forgive sin, know all things, have all power, be identi-

fied as God, and be King of kings. In an ordinary person, these two contrasting lists would be mutually exclusive, yet the Scriptures attribute all of them to Jesus, revealing His dual nature.

Although we must *distinguish* between Christ's deity and humanity, it is impossible to *separate* the two in Christ (John 1:1, 14; 10:30, 38; 14:10-11; 16:32). The Father united with humanity to form one being—Jesus Christ, the Godhead incarnate. While on earth Jesus was fully God, not merely an anointed man. At the same time, He was fully man, not just an appearance of man. He possessed the unlimited power, authority, and character of God. He was God by nature, by right, by identity; He was not merely deified by an anointing or indwelling. Unlike a Spirit-filled believer, the humanity of Jesus was inextricably joined with all the fulness of God's Spirit.

We can identify four major themes in the biblical description of the Incarnation: (1) the absolute and complete deity of Jesus Christ; (2) the perfect, sinless humanity of Jesus Christ; (3) the clear distinction between the humanity and the deity of Jesus Christ; and yet (4) the inseparable union of deity and humanity in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the fulness of God dwelling in perfect humanity and manifesting Himself as a perfect human being. He is not the transmutation of God into flesh, the manifestation of a portion of God, the animation of a human body by God, or God temporarily dwelling in a separate human person. Jesus Christ is the incarnation—embodiment, human personification—of the one God.

Angels and Demons

The one God created everything, including heaven and earth and every living being (Genesis 1:1; Revelation 4:11).

Before the creation of this world God created the angels, who are spirit beings with individual personalities. It appears that there are different types or ranks of angels, including seraphim, cherubim, and at least one archangel (Michael). Angels have a heavenly ministry; they surround God's throne

and worship Him. They also have an earthly ministry as messengers from God. They strengthen, encourage, protect, and deliver the saints. They are instrumental in performing God's work, particularly His judgment.

Angels were created good but some became evil by choice. One third fell by transgression, and the Bible does not speak of any plan of redemption for them. Some of these fallen angels are bound (II Peter 2:4).

The Scriptures indicate that Satan, or the devil, was originally created as Lucifer, a good angel second to God in power. He sinned through pride and rebellion against God. Now Satan is the chief adversary of God and man. The Bible calls him the tempter, accuser, wicked one, murderer, father of lies, serpent, dragon, roaring lion, god of this world, prince of the power of the air, and prince of devils (demons). Although mighty, he is not omniscient, omnipresent, or omnipotent. The Spirit of God gives believers power over Satan (James 4:7; I John 4:4).

Satan's agents are the demons. They seem to be fallen angels who are not bound (Matthew 25:41). They seek to possess human bodies, and they cause many types of physical and mental disease, temptation, and oppression. They are involved in divination, heresy, idolatry, and world government. In the last day, Satan and his agents will be cast into the lake of fire for eternity. Christians have power to cast out demons in Jesus' name (Mark 6:13; 16:17).

Humankind

God created man and woman in His spiritual, moral, and intellectual image (Genesis 1:27). Humans are made of body, soul, and spirit (I Thessalonians 5:23). The soul and spirit compose the eternal part of man, including intellect, personality, emotions, will, self-consciousness, intuition, conscience, and God-consciousness.

Originally, human nature was innocent and sinless, with a totally free will. Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and thereby brought sin into the human race. Everyone is now born with a sinful nature—the compulsion to sin, the dominion of sin (Romans 3:9; 5:12, 19; 7:14). The sinful nature

inevitably leads to sinful acts, resulting in condemnation.

The Bible emphatically declares that all humans are sinners (I Kings 8:46; Proverbs 20:9; Isaiah 64:6). Everyone is under sin and is guilty before God (Romans 3:9, 19). “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

As a result, humanity is under the sentence of death, physically and spiritually. “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). “Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:15). Death means separation, and the ultimate spiritual death is eternal separation from God.

Everyone needs salvation from sin and its penalty, death. And God has provided salvation through Jesus Christ.

The Saving Work of Jesus Christ

God came in the flesh as Jesus Christ in order to provide salvation for His fallen creation. The Incarnation was for the purpose of the Atonement. The gospel, literally the “good news,” is that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again for our salvation. Unlike any other religion, Christianity depends upon the death and resurrection of its founder.

The holiness of God demands that He separate Himself from sinful humanity. Separation from God, the source of all life, means death—physically, spiritually, and eternally—so God’s holy law requires death as the penalty for sinners. God chose to bind Himself by the principle of death for sin. Without the shedding of blood (the giving of a life) there can be no remission or release from this penalty and no restoration to fellowship with the holy God (Hebrews 9:22). The death of animals is not sufficient to remit our sins (Hebrews 10:4), because we are much greater than they in that we were created in the spiritual image of God. Neither can an ordinary person suffer the penalty in our place, for each one deserves eternal death for his own sins.

In order to provide a suitable substitute, God came to earth as a sinless man—Jesus Christ. Jesus was the only sinless man who has ever lived, so He was the only One who did not deserve to die and who could be a perfect substitute. His

death became the permanent atonement for our sins. God does not excuse our sins but has inflicted the penalty for those sins on the innocent man Christ. Thus the death of Christ was made necessary by (1) the sinfulness of all humanity, (2) the holiness of God, (3) God's law requiring death as the penalty for sin, and (4) God's desire to provide salvation for sinners.

There is no salvation outside the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus asserted, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). (See John 8:24; Romans 10:9-17.)

The Old Testament foreshadowed Christ's death by animal sacrifices. God's people offered blood sacrifices to atone for—cover, pardon, forgive, remit, or expiate—their sins. These sacrifices did not actually take away sin, but they demonstrated faith and obedience in God's plan of salvation. On the cross, Jesus paid the penalty for the sins of all time, and His sacrifice avails to all in every age who believe and obey God (Romans 3:25).

The Bible describes Christ's death in several ways:

1. *Redemption* or ransom (Matthew 20:28; Galatians 3:13; I Timothy 2:6). To redeem means to deliver by paying a price; ransom is the price paid. Christ's blood (life) was the ransom required by God's holy law to redeem us from sin's bondage and penalty (I Peter 1:18-20; Revelation 5:8-10).

2. *Propitiation* (Romans 3:25; I John 2:2). This means atonement, satisfaction, or appeasement—something that allows God to pardon sin without compromising His holiness and justice. Christ's death fulfilled God's just requirements, thus purchasing remission of sins (Matthew 26:28; John 1:29).

3. *Reconciliation* (Romans 5:6-11; II Corinthians 5:14-21). Christ the man mediates between God and men (I Timothy 2:5). As a sinless man He removed the barrier between holy God and sinful men, restoring us to fellowship with God.

4. *Substitution* (Isaiah 53:5-6; II Corinthians 5:21; I Peter 2:24). Jesus Christ took our place and suffered the penalty we

deserved for our sins. In this sense He became the sinbearer, the sacrifice for our sins (I Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 9:28; 10:10-17).

After Christ died, His body was buried in the grave and His soul descended to hell (Hades, the place of departed souls, not the lake of fire) (Acts 2:25-32). After three days He arose with a glorified physical body, victorious over death and hell. His resurrection is essential to our salvation because it made His death effective; it secured His victory over death (Romans 4:25; I Corinthians 15:14). Because of His resurrection we have overcoming power and new life in Christ as well as assurance of future immortality (Romans 5:10; 6:4; I Corinthians 15:20-23).

Forty days after the resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven, where He is exalted forever (Ephesians 1:20-21; Philipians 2:9). During His earthly life, He relinquished divine prerogatives of glory, honor, and recognition and submitted to human limitations, but no longer. In heaven, Jesus Christ is openly invested with all power, authority, and glory as God. The Cross was the one, final sacrifice for all time (Hebrews 10:12), and that supreme sacrifice provides present intercession for our sins and free access to the throne of God (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 4:14-16; I John 2:1).

The Cross reverses all the consequences of sin. Everything the human race lost because of sin, the church will more than regain in Christ. Believers enjoy many resultant blessings in this life and will receive the fulness in eternity. The benefits of Christ's work include forgiveness of sin, new spiritual life, power over the devil, healing for the body, and ultimately liberation of the creation from sin's curse and eternal life for believers (Isaiah 53:5; Romans 8:19-23; Colossians 1:14, 20; Hebrews 2:14).

The present work of salvation has several aspects, which a person receives by faith as he repents, is baptized in Jesus' name, and receives the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:11):

1. *Justification* (Romans 3:24, 26). To justify means to declare, count, or reckon as righteous. This involves forgiveness of sin, including removal of all guilt and punishment, and

imputation of Christ's righteousness.

2. *Regeneration*, or new birth (John 3:5; Titus 3:5). This is more than a reformation; it is the impartation of a new nature—God's nature—with a change of desires and power to live a new life.

3. *Adoption* (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:1-7). The believer is placed into God's spiritual family and chosen as His heir.

4. *Sanctification*, or separation (Hebrews 10:10). At conversion, a person is set apart from sin. The Holy Spirit then continues to transform him, perfect him, and make him holy (II Corinthians 3:18; I Thessalonians 3:13; 5:23).

Christ's atoning work is the basis of salvation in every age. Salvation always originates in God's grace and is appropriated by obedient faith. Christ died for the whole human race (John 1:29; I Timothy 2:6; I John 2:2). The benefits of His atonement come to all who believe in Him and apply His work to their lives (John 3:16; Hebrews 5:9).

New Testament Salvation

In the context of Scripture, salvation means deliverance from all the power and effects of sin, and it has past, present, and future aspects.

Salvation by grace through faith. A person can do nothing to save himself. No amount of good works or adherence to law can save him. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Salvation is a free gift from God, which man cannot merit, earn, or deserve. The atoning work of Jesus Christ has made this free gift of salvation available, and the only way to receive it is to believe in Jesus and in the sufficiency of His sacrifice (Romans 3:24-28; 4:22-25).

Saving faith. To believe on Jesus includes believing His Word, and truly believing His Word includes obedience. Faith is more than mental assent, intellectual acceptance, or verbal profession; it includes trust, reliance, commitment, appropriation, and application. We cannot separate saving faith from

obedience (Acts 6:7; Romans 1:5; 2:6-10; 10:16; 16:26; Hebrews 11:6-8). Obedience to God's Word is absolutely necessary to salvation (Matthew 7:21-27; John 14:15, 23; Romans 6:17; 15:18; II Thessalonians 1:7-10; Hebrews 5:9; I Peter 1:21-23; 4:17; I John 2:3-5; 5:1-3). Faith is alive only through response and action (James 2:14-26). It is possible to have an initial degree of faith in Christ and still not be saved if there is not complete acceptance, commitment, and obedience (Matthew 7:21-23; John 2:23-25; 12:42-43; Acts 8:12-23; James 2:19).

Faith is the means of appropriating God's grace. It is the means by which people yield to God, obey His Word, and allow Him to perform His saving work in them. Saving faith, then, is (1) acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ as the sole means of salvation and (2) obedience to that gospel (application or appropriation of that gospel).

The gospel and the new birth. The gospel of Jesus Christ is His death, burial, and resurrection for our salvation (I Corinthians 15:1-4). A person responds to the gospel, or applies the gospel to his life, by repentance from sin (death to sin), water baptism by immersion in the name of Jesus Christ (burial with Christ), and receiving the Holy Spirit (new life in Christ) (Acts 2:1-4, 38; Romans 6:1-7; 7:6; 8:2).

Jesus said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). When someone believes on Jesus Christ and obeys Acts 2:38, he experiences the birth of water and the Spirit. He is "born again," actually becoming a new creation (John 3:3, 7; II Corinthians 5:17). At repentance and water baptism, he buries the old sinful lifestyle, the record of past sins, and the death penalty for sin. When he receives the Holy Spirit he begins to live a new, godly life.

On the Day of Pentecost, the birthday of the New Testament church, the apostle Peter preached the first gospel sermon to the crowds who had gathered to observe the newly Spirit-filled believers as they spoke in tongues and worshiped God. Convicted of their sins by his simple yet powerful message, the audience cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall

we do?" (Acts 2:37). Peter gave a precise, complete, and unequivocal answer: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

Those saved in the Gospels were saved under the Old Covenant while they awaited the New. The New Covenant did not come into effect until after Christ's ascension (Luke 7:28; 24:47-49; John 7:39; 16:7; Acts 1:4-8; Hebrews 9:14-17). Thus Acts 2:38 is the comprehensive answer to an inquiry about New Testament conversion, expressing in a nutshell the proper response to the gospel.

Not only did the Jews on Pentecost receive the Acts 2:38 experience, but so did the Samaritans, the apostle Paul, the Gentiles, and the disciples of John at Ephesus (Acts 8:12-17; 9:17-18 with 22:16; 10:44-48; 19:1-6). In short, the New Testament message of salvation is repentance from sin, water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and receiving the Holy Spirit with the initial sign of speaking in tongues.

Repentance. Repentance is a turn from sin to God (Acts 26:18-20). It has three necessary aspects: an intellectual change (change of views), an emotional change (change of feelings), and a volitional change (voluntary change of purpose). It includes recognition of sin (Mark 2:17), confession of sin to God (Proverbs 28:13; I John 1:9), contrition or godly sorrow for sin (Psalm 51:17; II Corinthians 7:10), and a decision to forsake sin (Proverbs 28:13; Luke 3:7-8). With repentance comes the willingness to make restitution for past sins as much as possible (Matthew 5:23-24; Luke 19:8).

Repentance is the first response of faith to the call of God (Mark 1:15). It is absolutely necessary to salvation (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30; II Peter 3:9). Without repentance baptism is not effective, and without repentance a person cannot receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 3:19).

At repentance, a person begins to let God work in his life. He decides to turn away from sin and allows God to turn him. As part of the turn from sin, God enables him to break away from sinful habits and desires. As part of the turn to God,

repentance prepares the way for him to have a personal relationship with God, qualifying him for baptism of water and Spirit.

The work of forgiveness and remission comes through repentance and water baptism (Acts 2:38). Repentance deals with a person's sinful lifestyle, and baptism deals with the record and consequences of sin.

Water baptism. Water baptism is part of salvation (I Peter 3:21). It expresses faith in God by obedience to His Word (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:41). The scriptural mode of baptism is immersion in water, and only this method retains the biblical symbolism of baptism as a burial (Matthew 3:16; Acts 8:36-39; Romans 6:4). Faith in Christ and repentance from sin are necessary to its validity; thus infant baptism is not proper (Matthew 3:6-11; Acts 2:38; 8:37).

The biblical significance of water baptism is as follows: (1) God remits sins at water baptism (Acts 2:38; 22:16). God erases the record of sin and cancels its penalty. He washes away sins, burying them forever. (2) Baptism is part of the new birth (John 3:5; Titus 3:5). (3) Baptism identifies a person with Jesus' burial (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12). It indicates he died to sin by repentance and is burying his past sins, the dominion of sin, and the sinful lifestyle. (4) Water baptism is part of the one baptism of water and Spirit that places believers into Christ (Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:5). It identifies them personally with Jesus and is part of the entrance into His family. (5) Baptism is part of spiritual circumcision (Colossians 2:11-13).

The Bible teaches that baptism should be administered in the name of Jesus Christ. This means invoking the name of Jesus orally (Acts 22:16; James 2:7) and rebaptizing those who have been baptized some other way (Acts 19:1-5). The name of Jesus in the baptismal formula expresses faith in His true identity, atoning work, and saving power and authority. The name of Jesus is the only saving name, the name by which to receive remission of sins, the highest name, and the name in which Christians are to say and do all things (Acts 4:12; 10:43; Philippians 2:9-11; Colossians 3:17). Thus using

Jesus' name is the proper way to fulfill all the purposes for baptism.

The Bible records five historical accounts of baptism in the New Testament church that describe a name or formula. In each case the name is Jesus (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16). The epistles also allude to the Jesus Name formula (Romans 6:3-4; I Corinthians 1:13; 6:11; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12). Even Matthew 28:19 refers to this formula, for it describes a singular name that represents all the redemptive manifestations of the Godhead, and that name is Jesus (Zechariah 14:9; Matthew 1:21; John 5:43; 14:26; Revelation 22:3-4). Moreover, Jesus is the name described in the other Great Commission accounts (Mark 16:17; Luke 24:47).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit. The baptism with, by, in or of the Holy Ghost (Holy Spirit) is part of New Testament salvation (John 3:5; Romans 8:1-16; I Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:13-14; Titus 3:5). The phrase describes how the believer is immersed in and filled with God's Spirit. In Acts the terms "baptized, filled, received, fell on, came upon, and poured out the gift on" all describe this experience (Acts 1:4-5; 2:4; 10:44-47; 11:15-17; 19:1-6). It is promised to all who believe on Jesus and obey His Word (John 7:38-39; Acts 5:32; 11:15-17; 19:2; Galatians 3:14; Ephesians 1:13).

The Bible records five historical accounts of receiving the Holy Spirit in the New Testament church: the Jews, the Samaritans, the Gentiles, the apostle Paul, and the disciples of John at Ephesus. This record establishes that the baptism of the Spirit is indeed for everyone (Luke 11:13; Acts 2:39) and is accompanied by the initial sign of tongues (Mark 16:17). Speaking in tongues means speaking supernaturally, as the Spirit gives utterance, in a language the speaker has never learned (Acts 2:1-11).

Three of the accounts explicitly describe speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of receiving the Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost, a sound of wind signified the coming of the Spirit and tongue-like flames signaled the availability to each person, but speaking in tongues "as the Spirit gave them utterance" was the initial sign of each individual filling (Acts 2:1-4). Tongues con-

vinced skeptical, astonished Jews that the Gentiles had just received the Holy Ghost; tongues alone sufficiently identified this as the Pentecostal experience (Acts 10:44-47; 11:15-17). The Ephesian disciples also spoke in tongues as the first sign of receiving the Spirit (Acts 19:6).

Tongues are implicit in the other two accounts. An unnamed miraculous sign indicated the exact moment the Samaritans received the Spirit; its prior absence denoted they did not already have the Spirit despite joy, belief, and baptism, and it was so spectacular that Simon the Magician coveted the power to bestow the Spirit with this sign (Acts 8:5-19). Acts 9:17 mentions Paul's experience without description, but I Corinthians 14:18 says he spoke in tongues often.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the normal, basic New Testament experience with God, the birth of the Spirit. The Spirit is the rest, guide to all truth, adopter, intercessor, seal, earnest of the inheritance, and sanctifier (Isaiah 28:11-12; John 16:13; Romans 8:15, 26; Ephesians 1:13-14; I Peter 1:2). Someone can receive the Spirit by repenting, having faith in God, and asking God for His gift. When a person receives the Holy Spirit, he receives power to overcome sin and live a holy life (Acts 1:8; Romans 8:4, 13). If he lets the Spirit continually fill (control and guide) him, he will bear the fruit of the Spirit and become Christ-like (Galatians 5:22-23).

Conclusion. There should be no rejection of those who have not received the New Testament experience, but they should be encouraged to receive everything God has for them. There are many sincere, and even repentant, people like Apollos and the disciples of John at Ephesus who need to be led to further truth so that they can have an apostolic new birth. A person's experience and doctrine should conform to the complete biblical, apostolic pattern; those who seek God without fulfilling this pattern will answer to God. A person's responsibility is clear: he must act on the truth.

In summary, (1) the Bible is the sole authority for salvation; (2) the basis of salvation is Christ's death, burial, and resurrection; (3) salvation comes only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ; and (4) the application of grace and the

expression of faith come as a person obeys Acts 2:38, thereby receiving the new birth of John 3:3-5.

Holiness and Christian Living

The Christian life is a daily walk of faith (Romans 1:17). No one is saved by individual predestination; all are saved as they respond in faith to God's universal grace (John 3:16; Titus 2:11-12). The Bible does not teach unconditional security; each person lives by obedient faith in Christ (Romans 11:17-23; Hebrews 2:1-4; 10:35-39). If Christians remain in Him, they have assurance of eternal life, for no external force can take away their salvation (Romans 8:35-39; Hebrews 6:11; 10:22).

Several basic disciplines are integral parts of Christian living.

1. *Prayer* (Matthew 6:5-15; Ephesians 6:18; I Thessalonians 5:17; Jude 20-21). Prayer enables a Christian to receive God's promises as well as spiritual direction and power. God promises to answer his prayers, supply his needs, deliver him from temptation, and work all things for his good (Matthew 6:33; 7:7; 17:20; 21:22; John 14:14; Romans 8:28; I Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 4:6, 19). To receive these promises, he must ask in faith, from a repentant heart, in God's will and not from carnal desires (Psalm 66:18; James 1:5-8; 4:2-3; 5:16; I John 3:20-22; 5:14-15).

2. *Bible study* (Psalm 119:11, 16, 105; II Timothy 2:15; 3:14-17). To know truth, perform God's will, and overcome temptation, a Christian must read, study, meditate on, and learn God's Word.

3. *Faithful church attendance and submission to godly leadership* (Psalm 122:1; Hebrews 10:25; 13:17). Christians all need the instruction, fellowship, group worship, and evangelistic outreach that a local church and pastor provide.

4. *Giving of tithes and offerings* (Malachi 3:8-12; Matthew 6:1-4; Luke 6:38; 16:10-12; I Corinthians 9:7-14; II Corinthians 9:6-7). Tithing began before the law of Moses and continues after it. Abraham and Jacob paid tithes. Tithes are ten percent of "increase" (income) and are used to sup-

port the church. Offerings are any additional freewill gifts.

5. *Worship* (Psalm 100:1-5; 111:1; John 4:24; I Corinthians 14:26-33, 40; II Corinthians 3:17). Christians must worship in spirit and in truth. Scriptural expressions of worship include private devotions, group worship, praising with loud noise, singing, playing musical instruments, praying aloud, raising hands, clapping hands, weeping, and dancing before the Lord (Psalm 33:2-3; 47:1; 141:2; 149:3-5; 150:1-6; Acts 4:24-31; I Timothy 2:8; Ephesians 5:19).

6. *Fasting* (Matthew 6:16-18; 9:14-15; 17:21). Fasting does not earn favors from God, nor is it meant to punish the body. Rather, it helps a person to discipline self, focus on priorities, and draw closer to the spiritual realm.

7. *Holiness of life*. Pursuing holiness is as important as the new birth. "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

God commands His people to be holy in all conduct because He is holy (I Peter 1:15-16). They are to obey this command in order to (1) please God, for they belong to Him, (2) communicate Christ to others, and (3) benefit themselves, both now and for eternity.

For God's people, holiness means conformity to God's character—thinking as He thinks, loving what He loves, hating what He hates, and acting as Christ would act. Specifically, holiness is (1) *separation* from sin and the world system and (2) *dedication* to God (Romans 12:1-2; II Corinthians 6:17-7:1).

Christians must not love this ungodly world system, identify with it, become attached to the things in it, or participate in its sinful pleasures and activities (James 1:27; 4:4; I John 2:15). They must avoid three major areas of sin: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (I John 2:16). They must discipline themselves, and they must abstain from all appearance of evil (I Corinthians 9:24-27; I Thessalonians 5:22).

Holiness is both inward and outward (I Corinthians 6:19-20; II Corinthians 7:1; I Thessalonians 5:23). It includes attitudes, thoughts, and spiritual stewardship, but also

actions, appearance, and physical stewardship. Both aspects are essential.

The life of holiness is a continual striving for perfection (Matthew 5:48; II Corinthians 7:1; Philippians 3:12-16). No one is absolutely perfect, but everyone can be relatively perfect and mature. God expects continual growth in grace and knowledge and increasing production of spiritual fruit (John 15:1-8; II Peter 3:18). The Christian's daily goal is to overcome sin (John 5:14; 8:11). He is not to sin; if he does, he can receive forgiveness by repentance and confession (I John 1:9; 2:1).

Holiness is not a means of earning salvation but a result of salvation. It comes by (1) faith, (2) love, and (3) walking after the Spirit. All aspects of salvation, including the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work, come by faith (Ephesians 2:8). If someone truly believes God, he will obey God's Word. Moreover, if someone truly loves God, he will obey God's commandments (John 14:15, 23; I John 2:3-6). Love is far stricter and more demanding than law or duty. The Holy Spirit imparts a holy nature. Through the Spirit's guidance and power, the believer can overcome sin and live righteously (Romans 8:2-4; Galatians 5:16; I Thessalonians 4:7-8).

The Holy Spirit teaches holiness by (1) the inspired Word of God, (2) anointed preachers and teachers who proclaim and apply the Word, and (3) internal promptings and convictions (which do not deviate from the Word).

Following holiness requires personal effort; it is not automatic. The Christian must yield to the working of God's Spirit and actively implement spiritual principles (Romans 6:11-14; Philippians 2:12; II Peter 3:14).

The Christian life is one of liberty, not legalism. Legalism means basing salvation on works or law or imposing nonbiblical rules. All true holiness standards are either specific biblical statements or valid applications of biblical principles to contemporary situations.

Christians have freedom from sin, freedom from the law, and freedom to act as they will in nonmoral matters. Christian liberty does not negate the responsibility to follow moral law

and scriptural teaching (Romans 6:15; Galatians 5:13). Moreover, the Bible presents several guidelines for the proper exercise of Christian liberty even in nonmoral matters: (1) Do all to God's glory (I Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17). (2) Avoid anything unbeneficial, detrimental or a "weight" (I Corinthians 6:12; 10:23; Hebrews 12:1). (3) Avoid anything that will gain dominance (I Corinthians 6:12). (4) Avoid harm to others (Romans 14:13-21; I Corinthians 8:9-13; 10:32-33).

Here are important areas in which biblical, and therefore universal and unchanging, principles of holiness apply:

1. *Attitudes* (Galatians 5:19-23; Ephesians 4:23-32). Christians must put away evil attitudes, including hatred, malice, wrath, envy, jealousy, covetousness, bitterness, pride, prejudice, vengeance, strife, and discord. The essence of holiness is to bear the fruit of the Spirit, which includes love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. Christians must forgive, be obedient to authority, be thankful, not let anything offend them, and not be busybodies in others' lives.

2. *Thoughts* (Matthew 15:18-20; II Corinthians 10:5; Philippians 4:8). A person is what he thinks, and he becomes what he allows his mind to dwell upon. Christians are to think on true, honest, just, pure, lovely, reputable, virtuous, and praiseworthy things. They must cast out evil thoughts, taking captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

3. *The tongue* (James 1:26; 3:1-2; 4:11; 5:12). Christians must avoid talebearing, backbiting, slander, sowing discord, swearing by oath, using the Lord's name in vain, pronouncing curses, reviling, lying, idle words, and suggestive, indecent, or obscene speech.

4. *The eye* (Psalm 101:2-3; 119:37; Matthew 6:22-23). The eye is the gate of the soul and the primary source of input for the mind. Christians should not read sensual or vulgar materials. They should not watch television and movies, because violence, illicit sex, sinfulness, and vanity dominate those media.

5. *Appearance (adornment, dress, and hair)* (Deuteronomy 22:5; I Corinthians 11:1-16; I Timothy 2:8-10;

I Peter 3:1-5). The appearance reflects the inner self, both to God and to others. Ungodly appearance promotes lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life, molding wearer and society in ungodly ways. Biblical principles here are (a) modesty, (b) rejection of ornamentation, (c) moderation in cost, (d) distinction between male and female, and (e) separation from worldly connotations. Thus Christians should abstain from immodest clothing, ornamental jewelry, colored cosmetics and hair dye, very expensive, extravagant or gaudy attire, dresses on men, pants on women, long hair on men, cut hair on women, and fashions with carnal associations.

6. *Stewardship of the body* (I Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:12, 19-20). The body is the temple of the Spirit, so Christians should not use things that harm or defile the body, cause intoxication, or cause addiction. Alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and illegal drugs violate this principle.

7. *Sanctity of marriage* (I Corinthians 6:9-10; Colossians 3:5; Hebrews 13:4). The Bible condemns all sexual relations outside of lifelong marriage of a man and a woman. It opposes lustful thoughts and actions.

8. *Sanctity of human life* (Exodus 20:13; Matthew 5:39, 44). Christians should not participate in violence or taking of human life, including warfare, abortion, and suicide.

9. *Honesty* (Mark 10:19). The Bible rejects all dishonesty, including lying, theft, fraud, refusal to pay debts, extortion, bribery, and cheating.

10. *Fellowship* (Matthew 18:15-18; I Corinthians 5:9-6:8; 15:33; II Corinthians 6:14). Christians must not be identified with sinful attitudes or lifestyles. They should not fellowship so-called believers who continually indulge in sinful activities. They are not to become unequally yoked with unbelievers, such as by marriage. They must resolve internal disputes according to the procedure given by Christ, not by suits in civil court.

11. *Worldly activities* (I Thessalonians 5:22; Titus 3:3; I John 2:15). Christians must maturely regulate amusements, music, sports, and games, avoiding worldly atmospheres and appearances. Some amusements are inherently worldly, such

as gambling, dancing, hard rock music, and the occult.

In sum, holiness means to imitate Christ, to be Christ-like. The holy person will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature, but will put on the personality and mind of Christ (Romans 13:14; Galatians 4:19). He will judge every decision and action by asking, What would Jesus do?

Holiness is an integral part of the salvation of the whole man from sin's power and effects. It is a joyful privilege; a part of abundant life; a blessing from God's grace; a glorious life of freedom and power. The life of holiness fulfills God's original intention and design for humanity. For the Spirit-filled believer who truly loves God, holiness is the normal—indeed the only—way to live. Holiness is the essence of the Christian life.

The Church

The church of Jesus Christ is the body of called-out believers, those who have been baptized into Christ by water and Spirit. The Bible describes the church as the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, and a spiritual temple in which the Spirit of Christ dwells. The church is both local and universal. Its mission on earth is to (1) worship and glorify God, (2) evangelize the world, and (3) develop the saints to maturity.

Each believer is his own priest to God (through Jesus) and can communicate with God directly (Hebrews 4:14-16; Revelation 1:6). Each member of the church has a position of service, which includes bearing one another's burdens and praying for one another (Galatians 6:1-2; Colossians 4:3, 12).

To train and equip believers for the task of the church, God has given it special ministers (Ephesians 4:11-16). (1) *Apostle*—one sent with a commission. Although no one can take the place of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, who were eyewitnesses of Christ, others exercise an apostolic ministry by serving as pioneer missionaries and leaders (Acts 13:2-4; 14:14). (2) *Prophet*—one who imparts special messages or direction from God (Acts 11:27; 15:32; 21:10). (3) *Evangelist*—preacher to the unsaved (Acts 21:8; II Timothy 4:5). (4) *Pastor* (shepherd)—one who leads and takes care of

God's people, also called bishop (overseer) and elder (Acts 14:23; 20:28; I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; I Peter 5:1-4). (5) *Teacher*—one who instructs in God's Word (Acts 13:1).

There is also the office of *deacon* (servant). Deacons assist spiritual leadership in church activities and business matters (Acts 6:3; I Timothy 3:8-13).

God has ordained church government, and He gives various ministries, roles, tasks, or offices in addition to those just mentioned (Romans 12:4-8; I Corinthians 12:28). Everyone should be submissive to spiritual leaders and obey them as long as they are consistent with Scripture (I Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:17). At the same time, leaders are to be servants and examples, not dictators (Matthew 20:25-28; I Peter 5:3).

The church also has gifts of the Spirit, which will remain until Christ's return (I Corinthians 1:2, 7; 12:8-10). These gifts should never be exercised contrary to the Bible or godly leadership, but always with love, in order, and for edification of the body. The spiritual gifts are miraculous and supernatural. They can be classified as follows.

Gifts of revelation. (1) *Word of wisdom*—divine guidance, direction, or insight for a specific situation (Acts 27:9-11). (2) *Word of knowledge*—divine revelation of a fact otherwise unknown to the recipient (Acts 5:1-11). (3) *Discerning of spirits*—perceiving whether something is motivated by God, an evil spirit, or the human spirit (Acts 16:16-18).

Gifts of power. (4) *Faith*—a special endowment of trust in God for a particular crisis or a seemingly hopeless situation (Acts 27:21-25). (5) *Gifts of healing*—divine healings, either instantaneous or progressive, for various types of physical and mental diseases (Acts 5:12-16). Christ purchased healing for the body (Isaiah 53:5; Matthew 8:16-17) and gave believers authority to lay hands on the sick for their recovery (Mark 16:17-18). The elders are to anoint the sick with oil and pray for healing in Jesus' name (James 5:13-16). (6) *Working of miracles*—direct intervention by God in a situation, transcending natural laws (Acts 20:7-12; 28:1-6).

Gifts of utterance. (7) *Prophecy*—a message from God in the known language (I Corinthians 14:3-4, 29-33). In a more general sense, every anointed testimony, preaching, or praise can be called prophecy (Revelation 19:10). (8) *Kinds of tongues*—a message from God in a language not known to the audience, to be interpreted for the benefit of the church (I Corinthians 14:5, 27-28). Each believer may also speak in tongues without interpretation for personal devotion and benefit (I Corinthians 14:4, 14-15, 18, 28). (9) *Interpretation of tongues*—giving the meaning of a public message in tongues (I Corinthians 14:5, 27-28).

Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper and footwashing in His church, commanding observance of both (Luke 22:14-20; John 13:2-17; I Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:23-34). The Lord's Supper consists of eating unleavened bread and drinking the fruit of the vine, which symbolize Christ's broken body and shed blood. The church is to partake with reverence, self-examination, and repentance, solemnly remembering the Lord's atoning death and joyously anticipating His return. The saints thereby enjoy communion with Him and fellowship with one another. Footwashing teaches humility, service, and fellowship.

The local church should meet regularly and often. It is not required to observe Sabbath laws, for the church is not bound by the ceremonial law (Acts 15:19-29; Romans 14:5-6; Galatians 4:9-11; Colossians 2:16-17). Christians enjoy spiritual sanctification and rest every day in the Holy Spirit. Setting aside a weekly day of rest and designating times for group worship, fellowship, and instruction are still valid principles, however. The early church met on Sunday in commemoration of the Lord's resurrection (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:2). Every Christian should be faithful to the meetings of his local church (Acts 2:42; Hebrews 10:25).

The Last Things

When a person dies his body goes to the grave, in a state the Bible likens to sleep, to await the resurrection, or reuniting of body and soul. The unrighteous soul waits in a place

of unrest, while the righteous soul is at rest (Luke 16:22-28). The temporary abode for souls of the dead is Sheol (Hebrew) or Hades (Greek) (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:27). When Christ rose from the dead, He conquered Hades and death, and as part of His victory He apparently led the righteous souls out of Hades (Ephesians 4:8-10). When a Christian dies today, his soul rests in the Lord's presence (II Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21-24).

The next great event for the church is the catching away of the saints and the return of Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13). At the catching away (sometimes called the rapture) the dead in Christ will be resurrected and the living saints will be transformed, both receiving immortal, glorified bodies (I Corinthians 15:51-54; Philippians 3:20-21; I Thessalonians 4:13-18). Together they will meet the Lord in the air to live with Him eternally.

An unparalleled time of great tribulation will come upon the world (Matthew 24:21; Revelation 6-19). Satan will seek to dominate the earth through a man and system described as "the beast" (sometimes called the Antichrist) (Revelation 13). The beast and his false prophet will establish a religious, political, and economic system to control the world. These satanic maneuvers will bring war, famine, and death. Eventually the beast will claim to be God and desecrate the rebuilt Jewish temple. Those who oppose this evil system and turn to God will be persecuted and martyred; some will have divine protection.

In the middle of the tribulation, God will pour out His judgment upon unrepentant, degenerate mankind by various great plagues (Revelation 6-18). Many believe that the church will be caught away before the tribulation, while some believe the church will go through part or all of it. In any event, the church will be protected from God's wrath (Luke 21:36).

At the close of the tribulation, the satanic armies will gather in the Valley of Armageddon to crush all opposition. Seemingly victorious, they will march to Jerusalem to claim their prize. Then Jesus Christ will physically return to earth with His saints, descending to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah

12-14; Acts 1:9-12; Revelation 19). The Jewish nation will recognize Him as their Messiah, and He will destroy the beast and his armies.

Jesus will establish His kingdom on earth for 1,000 years (often called the Millennium), and the saints will rule with Him (Revelation 20). Satan will be bound, but at the end of the age he will be loosed for a short time. He will foment a final rebellion, which God will destroy with fire from heaven.

Then will come the Last, or White Throne, Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15). All those not in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire (also called *Gehenna* in Greek), there to be separated eternally from God. God will destroy the present world and create a new heaven and a new earth. The saints will live with Him forever in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21-22).

The Bible describes many signs that will precede Christ's second coming, and they are being fulfilled today (Matthew 24:1-39; Luke 21:7-31; II Thessalonians 2:1-8; II Timothy 3:1-13). The present age will soon end. Despite different ideas about prophetic details, several key truths are evident from any literal interpretation of Scripture:

1. Jesus Christ will soon return to earth physically.
2. No one knows or can set the time of His coming; the church must be ready at all times (Matthew 24:42-44; Mark 13:33-37; Romans 13:11-14).
3. Every person will face Him in the judgment to receive either the reward of eternal life or the punishment of eternal death.

What is the proper response in light of these awesome truths? "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. . . . He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:17, 20).