

Way More Good News

by Dr. D. Michael Hentrich



Contents

Introduction.....	1
1. Special Mother Mary	4
2. The real John the Baptist	9
3. The awesome birth of Jesus	15
4. Game over – Decide your destiny	18
5. God put <i>YOU</i> in control of your future.....	44
6. Got apples? They are NOT the cause of sin	48
7. Much more than forgiveness.....	52
8. Jesus’ baptism was not wet and cold.....	70
9. The blood became necessary	73
10. Jesus’ resurrection was better than physical.....	78
11. Raising the dead really did happen	88
12. Happiness and joy beyond belief	90
13. God had big plans for Jesus	96
14. Jesus defeated Satan, but more.....	101
15. God’s Kingdom is not of this earth world	106
16. God is God and man is man	110
17. Jesus will return in a recognizable way	122
18. Way More Good News.....	133

Introduction

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a fountain gushing with spiritual life for all Christians. That's why we peruse it over and over again, always gleaned one more tidbit of Good News each time we comb the narratives. We never tire of our quest for truth.

However, a careful inspection of the Biblical text reveals several MAJOR pieces of Good News which have been masked from our mind's eye by some of the cornerstone doctrines we have adopted over the millennia. I'm not talking about some insignificant minor little doctrines that are peripheral to our faith. I'm talking about MAJOR doctrines of our faith. Thank God this overlooked Good News has not been lost but just hidden in the shadows. This book will bring many of these golden nuggets out again for your edification and inspiration.

A word to the wise about "doctrine." Christian scholars and theologians labor with good intention. God bless them. Part of their work is to reconcile God's Word with contemporary society and its values. As you might guess, this is a relative task as these doctrinal perspectives fluctuate with the social and cultural winds of time.

What experts and theologians are considering and accommodating today could not be dreamed of a hundred years ago. What was on the front burner for theologians a hundred years ago was similarly off the table a century before that. Liberation Theology, women in the pulpit, homosexuality, and gender-neutrality are but a few contemporary examples. In the process, then, some golden nuggets of the Good News have become buried or obscured from our view.

We will put on new bifocals and find out that Mother Mary was far greater than we may have previously thought; that Jesus' future return may not be as mystical as we have believed; that Jesus' birth in the manger was not only humble, it was miraculous; and Jesus' baptism is WAY better than the baptism that you and I are most familiar with, etc.

Now you may ask, "*Who are YOU to peer behind the curtains of age-old doctrines of the Christian faith?*" I assure you, I am no one special. If you were to believe my words alone, then you would be repeating the same problematic pattern that I am shining a light on throughout this book. You definitely should NOT trust me or my word. You should go back and open your Bible and trust God's Word as you find it there. Therefore, I am enclosing in these chapters an "exhaustive" list of Scripture passages to reveal to the reader the Biblical basis for what is being asserted.

We will now take an exciting journey together through a sampling of 17 of these hidden nuggets of Way More Good News.

Because of the well-worn comfortable slippers of our long-cherished doctrines, some of these revelations of scripture will feel like welcome news and cause for celebration, while others may make you upset because they challenge your age-old notions of what the Bible is really saying. In either case, put your seatbelt on and let's enjoy the ride.

1. Special Mother Mary

Every Christian knows that Mary was an incredible woman. She must have been incredible to be selected by God to be the mother of Jesus. There is no question that young Mary was a virgin in the contemporary definition of the word and that she ***“conceived and gave birth to a son and called his name Jesus.”*** (Lk 1:31) That’s Good News!

The angel Gabriel explained to Mary that, ***“The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.”*** (Lk 1:35) Joseph had a dream in which an angel told him, ***“what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”*** (Mt 1:20) Matthew said, ***“she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.”*** (Mt 1:18) This is all Good News!

However some early Christian thinkers such as Origen and Tertullian and a growing number of others after the 3rd century AD put great emphasis on what they perceived was the “unholiness” of sex and the notion that being an untouched virgin woman was morally superior to being a loving wife and mother. Thus, armed with Paul’s admonition that to remain celibate is better than to

marry (1Cor 7:38) the doctrine was developed over time that Mary absolutely must not only be a virgin but a perpetual virgin at that, i.e., ever-virgin. Numerous Scriptural passages were reinterpreted and/or massaged to support this view. Let's take a look at the Bible and see if we missed anything in the shadows of this age-old and closely-held doctrine.

When we look again at God's Word in the Bible regarding this perspective and Mother Mary, the waters seem to get muddied right away. As we begin our focus on the "ever-virgin" question, a revealing statement about the subsequent marital relationship between Mary and Joseph is found in Mt 1:25: "***...he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son.***" The claim of "ever-virgin" would preclude the possibility that Joseph ever "consummate" their marriage. Of course, those who insist in doctrine-over-text categorically deny that Joseph ever consummated their marriage. "It's impossible. Mary must be 'ever-virgin.'" Case closed.

However similarly, in Luke 2:7 we find this statement: "***...she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.***" Why would this Scripture passage say "***firstborn***" if there were no "*other-born?*" It would make no sense without some "*other-born.*" No, it's not a mistake in translation. That's what it says.

We also find numerous references in the Bible to Jesus' brothers and sisters, and even by name. Mark recounted that *Mary*

and her sons went to a house where Jesus was causing controversy and sought to bring him home. (Mk 3:31-32) It is also recorded that Jesus' disbelieving brothers once sought to set Jesus up to be killed. (Jn 7:3-5, 10) The Book of Acts tells that Mary and *Jesus' brothers* joined the disciples after Jesus' crucifixion to pray together for him. (Acts 1:14) The book of Matthew names each of *Jesus' four brothers* (**James, Joseph, Simon and Judas**), and refers also to his "sisters." (Mt. 13:55-56) Finally, it is believed by many, if not most Biblical scholars, that the Book of James was written by the actual brother of Jesus. Wow! It looks like Mary had at least seven children, including Jesus.

Those who insist on doctrine-over-text argue that these alleged "*brothers*" and "*sisters*" can't possibly be actual blood relatives of Jesus because Mary is "*ever-virgin*," by definition. They claim that these therefore must either be children of Joseph by a previous marriage (stepbrothers and stepsisters of Jesus) or maybe they were actually just cousins and were called "*brothers*" and "*sisters*" because there is not a singular word in Aramaic or Hebrew for "cousins" as we have in English.

First of all, if Joseph had been previously married and these were Jesus' "stepbrothers and stepsisters" then the Gospel writers would have been compelled to say something about this previous marriage. Yet there is not even a hint of such a previous marriage in the Bible.

If Joseph's alleged previous wife had died, that would be one thing, but if he simply divorced her, except for adultery, there would be a huge problem. Note Matthew 19:9 where Jesus is quoted as saying: ***"I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."*** The Gospel writers would not have left such a huge question unaddressed. They would have said something to clear the air about such a sensitive situation.

Secondly, any Semitic person will tell you that no one using the Aramaic or Hebrew languages, even 2000 years ago, would refer to a cousin as a *"brother"* or *"sister."*

If we reflect on the fact that God designed us to have sex, and that through having sex we create more sons and daughters of God in this world, people endowed with eternal life on the basis of Jesus' saving grace, then the notion that sex is intrinsically dirty and unholy becomes somewhat questionable. Mary is God's daughter. Is she only good and holy if she is an untouched virgin, untainted by the experience of sex, even with her husband? What does that say about all other women, wives and mothers?

So, obscured in the shadows of this doctrine of the perpetual virgin Mary we find the REAL Good News about Mary in that she was not just Joseph's friend and helpmate and he her protector. She was not just a "vessel" or "instrument" or "vehicle" through which God could give birth to Jesus, but Mary was a real, loving wife and

mother of at least seven children whom she raised with the heart of God. She had a very full experience as a woman and daughter of God in her own right, not only as a virgin mother of one super-special son. Wow! Now that's Way More Good News!

2. The real John the Baptist

John the Baptist is a great icon of the Christian faith. Thousands of churches bear his namesake. His fame and acclaim are based on his baptism of the Lord and the impressive testimonial words he spoke about Jesus. While God revealed to the apostle Peter that Jesus was the Messiah (Mt 16:15-17), we don't really know how this revelation was conveyed. But, John the Baptist is the one and only person in the Gospels to receive an audible "*shout*" from God telling him who Jesus really was and is, following his baptism at the River Jordan. (Jn 1:32-34) Put this together with Jesus statement that, "*...among those born of women there is no one greater than John...*" (Lk 7:28) and we can see why John has been held in such high esteem for the past 2000 years. Wow! That's good news for all of us.

However, this widely-acclaimed traditional showcasing of John has served to make him into a "larger-than-life" saint who appears to be one step beyond what normal humans can ever hope to achieve. Was St. John the Baptist an exalted superman beyond

the grasp of common humans, or was he a real person, more like you and me, and therefore someone we can identify with and relate to? Let's take a closer look at the Gospels and see.

The story of John the Baptist starts with the Book of Malachi where he writes that God will send Elijah the prophet ***“before the great and terrible day of the lord.”*** (Mal 4:5) Elijah had lived hundreds of years earlier and his return was to mark the imminent arrival of the messiah for the Jews. Even today, Jews are still awaiting the return of Elijah to herald the coming of their messiah. No Elijah; no messiah. It is a very significant part of Jewish faith and was at the time of Jesus.

Flash forward 400 years and we find the angel Gabriel appearing to the priest Zechariah and telling him that he and his wife would be bearing a son at their advanced age and that this son (John) would be coming ***“in the spirit and power of Elijah.”*** He said this son would also ***“make a people prepared for the lord.”*** (Lk 1:17) This was very, very significant. No Elijah; no messiah.

Unfortunately, Zechariah didn't initially believe the angel, and when John was born and circumcised, he somehow neglected to proclaim to his newborn son the critical revelation that he had come ***“in the spirit and power of Elijah.”*** (Lk 1:64-79)

Fast forward another 30 years and Jesus meets John at the River Jordan and asks John to baptise him. They are kin. John's mother and Jesus' mother are cousins. Jesus certainly doesn't need

to be baptized by John but there is some important meaning to this ceremony. John offers a honorific greeting as he sees Jesus approach and complies with Jesus' insistence that he baptize him.

Following the baptism, the vision of a dove appears over Jesus' head and a voice from heaven proclaims: ***"This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased."*** (Mt 3:17) WOW! John is told directly by God that Jesus is the long-awaited messiah and savior. There was no mistake about it.

John's response is curious. He proclaims the message which he had just received from God but then walks away from Jesus, never to return to his side. The following day, John sees Jesus walking by and again says words of praise about Jesus. Then he watches as two of his own disciples go and follow Jesus out of curiosity. But, John himself never joins with or even follows the savior.

The next thing we read about John is that he is arrested and jailed for accusing King Herod's sister-in-law of having an affair with the King and he awaits his beheading in his prison cell. Revealingly, he sends a couple of his disciples to Jesus to ask him an important question: ***"Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"*** (Mt 11:4-14) Hello! Jesus responds to this question very bluntly and explains that even the least person in heaven is more qualified to enter than John. In other words, either you believe in purgatory or the ***"greatest man ever born of***

woman” is going to hell.

What happened here? John was a great man and testified about Jesus. However, he also bore human weakness and somehow doubted God’s direct revelation to him about Jesus. He never took Jesus’ side in his ministry and he even denied being the critical missing *“Elijah”* when grilled about his identity and role. (Jn 1:21) Of course, he was not literally Elijah the prophet who appeared with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration, but the angel Gabriel had told John’s father that his son was coming *“in the spirit and power of Elijah,”* a critically necessary role for the Jewish people and leadership to accept Jesus as the messiah.

Isaiah had given several different prophesies about the coming Messiah. Chapters 9, 11 and 60 tell of a messiah who would be embraced and acclaimed by Israel and lifted up as its king, literally, ushering in everlasting peace and God’s kingdom on earth. Isaiah’s Chapter 53 prophesied of a rejected and suffering messiah who would bear our sins and be tortured to death. Because the Bible records that God has always and universally refused to interfere in man’s free will and choices, either of these two scenarios could come to pass. It would depend upon man’s acceptance or rejection of the messiah when he comes.

Enter John, a highly respected son of a priest and kin of Jesus. John was uniquely positioned to stand with Jesus in the position of Peter, to make *“a people prepared for the Lord,”* (Lk 1:17) and to

testify of Jesus first to his own father, the priest, and subsequently with him to all the leadership of Israel. John even had the ear and respect of King Herod. (Mk 6:20) With the unwavering conviction and active support of John by Jesus' side, the glorious prophecies of Is 9, 11 and 60 could have literally become a reality.

But it seems that John was every bit like you and I, capable of human error and shortcomings. He talked the talk, but couldn't quite walk it. He even contradicted Jesus and undermined his credibility by denying that he was Elijah. (Jn 1:21) Jesus said three times in the Gospels that John was the critical return of "***Elijah.***" (Mt 11:14; 17:10-13; Mk 9:11-13) The Jews today are still awaiting the return of Elijah who heralds the coming of the Messiah. They missed them both, 2000 years ago.

John's potential to attend and serve and help Jesus was far beyond the short testimonies he uttered. This highly respected and followed "Elijah" figure was groomed by God to stand resolutely with Jesus in the position of Peter.

But, there is no record that John caused *anyone* to go to Jesus and become his disciple including the two, Andrew and his friend, who went to Jesus out of their own curiosity. (Jn 1:35-40) Would it not be John's blessing and responsibility to bring people to Jesus after God himself directly revealed to him who Jesus was? Why would God reveal to John who Jesus was if not to actively support and defend Jesus and bring people to him?

John himself needed the salvation of Jesus as much as anyone else. John's followers still exist today and are now called "Mandaeans." They live in Iraq, Iran and Australia and they do not believe in Jesus.

There is no question that John the Baptist was a great man, and prepared by God to attend and serve Jesus. He briefly testified to the Lord. He therefore deserves great respect and acclaim. However, perhaps embellishing him with the status of sainthood may be stretching things a bit far.

He was a real human being. He had great faith and was a proactive young Jewish man. He lived his faith with conviction and promoted water baptism for the forgiveness of sins, thus pushing the envelop and getting outside the box. That's all good news to me. But, he also demonstrated the weaknesses and human tendencies that we all have. From Jesus' response to John's question from his prison cell, John clearly fell short of Jesus' needs and expectations of him. Haven't we all? Thus, he is truly relatable. He is truly a person we can identify with and learn from, both from his shining testimonies of Jesus and also from his shortcomings. Thank you, John. This to me is Way More Good News.

3. The awesome birth of Jesus

Christians and non-believers alike, all over the world, have been humbled at the circumstances of the savior's birth in a manger. It affects children and senior citizens alike. How many other people do you know who were born in a manger? Not only that, but we are talking about the long-awaited Messiah, the king of kings and lord of lords; the Christ. We are told that he was born in these circumstances to demonstrate and show both his humility and his humanity in the face of his Divinity. That is Good News.

The scene opens when Mary and Joseph are on their way to Bethlehem. Bethlehem was Joseph's home town. (Lk 2:3-4) That means he grew up there. His parents lived there, his grandparents, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, and all those he grew up with. Historians say it was at that time a town of about 600 homes; cozy enough such that everyone knew everyone else or was at least aware of everyone. Joseph must have known many of the families in Bethlehem, or they knew him.

Mary is pregnant and needing a place to deliver her baby Jesus. Already this is very curious. Why? Where were Joseph's family and friends? What Mary really needed was a midwife and a few square feet inside, out of the weather, where she could safely give birth to her baby. Did Joseph have prenatal classes so he could support Mary at the critical moment of birth? The small and intimate home town of Joseph was full of potential midwives who could help her. The Bible narrative simply says: “*...there was no guest room available for them.*” (Lk 2:7) Hello! Something is missing in this picture.

Mary was pregnant before she and Joseph were married. The baby was not Joseph's. Such a pregnant, unmarried woman should be stoned to death under the Mosaic law. There are many unanswered questions here. Did someone explain this whole thing to Joseph's parents and family? How might they receive the angel's message in Joseph's dream that what was conceived in Mary's womb is “*of the Holy Spirit?*” Who you think may have told Joseph's parents that he was not really the father? Joseph took Mary for his wife, but is there any record of a festive wedding ceremony to celebrate that event, like the wedding at Cana which Mary helped her friend with, later on?

When we dare to peer into the shadows of our long-held doctrines, we see that no one would open their door to Mary and Joseph. Not only that, but why would this young couple sneak off

to a remote pasture to give birth to baby Jesus? A manger is a place where animals are fed and watered with a hollowed-out log and some hay. It is a most unsanitary, filthy place soaked with animal poop and pee. Perhaps Mary and Joseph did not feel safe to have the baby in town, perhaps behind someone's shop or home since no one would help them or let them in. In fact, they felt they had to go where no one would find them to protect Mary and her baby.

And without special protection from Heaven, it is unlikely that you or I as infants would have survived the ordeal. The totally unsanitary conditions, the weather, the lack of experienced support from even a midwife... Considering all of these factors, if Jesus were not the Son of God, we can reasonably say that this precious baby may not have survived. These were the painful but real circumstances of the birth of the savior of the world.

Without question, the birth of baby Jesus was the epitome of humility and it evokes awe in everyone to think about it. But when we see it in the context of the real-life situation of Jesus' parents, it becomes even miraculous and we are left speechless. Thus, it was truly a miracle and not just an example of extreme humility. Wow. Is that Way More Good News or what?

4. Game over – Decide your destiny

Many, many Christian people are comforted by the Good News that God knows everything, past, present and future, in detail. There can be no surprises for God. *“After all, he is God! He made the entire universe. He must be so powerful and omniscient that he can even know the future.”* All believers do not embrace this belief, but it is certainly broadly held. In this human world of uncertainty, it would clearly seem like Good News.

Again, we can find verses of Scripture which lend themselves to this kind of interpretation. For example, in the NIV version of the Bible, Jesus says in the Book of Matthew: *“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”* (Mt 10:29-30) This is often cited as evidence that God knows everything, including the future. However, a careful reading of this verse shows that there is actually no element of futuristic knowledge inferred here. God is simply described as being fully aware in the present moment.

In the book of Mark, Jesus says ***“The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”*** (Mk 14:21) This is also seen as evidence that God knows everything, including the future. However, if we consider what Jesus is referring to as ***“written about him”*** we will discover another important aspect of this story. The prophet Isaiah wrote in his 53rd chapter that the coming Lord would walk the way of rejection and suffering. He will be ***“pierced, crushed, bruised, and by his wounds we are healed, etc.”*** It seems clear enough.

However, Isaiah also wrote about the coming Lord in chapters 9, 11 and 60. Here he speaks of a glorious reception by the chosen people and the literal kingship of the Messiah. He talks of everlasting peace in Israel and a kingdom that will have no end - God’s long-awaited kingdom on earth. These passages were also ***“written about him.”*** However, these glorious, victorious achievements were not realized during Jesus’ lifetime 2000 years ago, if we are honest about history and honest with ourselves.

Those who embrace this view of the Good News tell us that the prophecies of Isaiah’s chapters 9, 11 and 60 must be referring to the Lord’s return in the distant future and not to his life 2000 years ago. But, it would be far more consistent with the historical record of the Bible to see these dual prophecies as a simple recognition and reminder that God has given man free will to

choose and, based on man's dismal past record, God knew that the coming Lord will either be received or rejected. Isaiah is simply painting the picture for us of what the outcome will be of either choice we make; to have faith in and accept God's Son, or to reject him. In fact, this is exactly what Jesus described in his parable of the tenants. (Mt 21:33-43)

Another verse that is usually cited as evidence that God knows the future is Rev 13:8. This verse has been rendered to say that Jesus was "*slain from the creation of the world.*" This would mean that God planned from the beginning that Jesus would be rejected and killed by faithless people. It was "*the plan.*"

However, in reality there has long been serious controversy among scholars as to the rendering of this passage. When compared to Rev 17:8, the controversy becomes apparent. Rev 17:8 has the same wording about "*the creation of the world*" but here this phrase is attached to the "*book of life*" rather than to the "*lamb who was slain.*" Thus, many scholars believe that Rev 13:8 should read like Rev 17:8: "*All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life from the creation of the world, the Lamb who was slain.*" This alternate rendering is footnoted in the NIV Bible and expressed directly in the WEB, and others. It is not a new and obscure controversy by a couple of radical theologians. There is a serious, ongoing debate on this.

The point is, if God knows every detail of even the future, then the future is already scripted and available to be known, making God's life boring and man's life hopeless since his free will and freedom of choice must ultimately be little more than a human illusion.

Some try to have it both ways and say that it is not human illusion and we really do have free will and freedom of choice, but God knows every choice that every human being will make in the future, forever. It then makes one wonder what is the point of our existence and why does God play out a plan in which 90+% of all of his children end up in eternal suffering in hell, all with his foreknowledge? The merciful and loving God that Jesus showed us and described for us and this doctrinal picture become totally inconsistent.

On the contrary, we also find Jesus expressing with passion and remorse in Lk 13:34: ***“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.”*** This reveals a disappointed and frustrated Jesus. He obviously did not know nor expect that the people would not respond to him. Either that, or his expression is not sincere.

God's word came to the prophet Samuel. He said, ***“I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from***

me and has not carried out my instructions.” Here God expresses deep disappointment in Saul, saying that he did not live up to his expectations.

And what about the Fall of man in general? Few people think about the Fall of the first human ancestors these days. The focal point of Christian faith is on Jesus and his answer to sin. But the way we look at the Fall sets the stage for how we look at Jesus and our salvation and everything else. If we start with a false premise, it is unlikely that we will arrive at a correct conclusion.

Sin came into the world through the first humans. The question is, did God know it was going to happen that way from the beginning? Did God plan it that way? If God did not know ahead of time and even plan it that way, then that would mean that Jesus came as a remedial necessity rather than a predestined part of God’s original plan. Fortunately, all the evidence required to answer this question can be found in the first few pages of the Book of Genesis.

God created the world and the Bible says that originally, ***“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”*** (Gen 1:31) That means there was no evil, devil, Satan, or sin in all of God’s creation. These only existed conceptually in the mind of God. (Gen 3:5)

Fast forward to Genesis Chapter 3. God’s first children commit sin and He confronts them about it. He interrogates them

as to what they have done, concluding that they have disobeyed his commandment not to *“eat of the fruit.”* What was God’s reaction? God was **furious!** He was disappointed and so upset that he kicked them out of the garden he prepared for them. Not only that, but he cursed both of them and all their descendants to suffer as a consequence of their sin, plus the Serpent. And that was not the end of it. Far from it. We read in Genesis 6:6 that God *“regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.”* The King James Version is even more expressive: *“it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.”*

Did God just dramatize this scene to show us that sin is a bad thing? Was he just injecting a lot of emotion to dramatize it, having known and even planned it all along? After all, what if they didn’t fall? Jesus would not have to come and save us! Was God’s human paradise on earth his original plan, or a miserable, painful history of human sin and salvation? To take the doctrinal route and insist on the latter makes the Genesis story insincere, inconsistent and even contradictory.

A God who has decided to give his children literal free will and choice, even to disappoint him, is the only kind of God that makes sense as described by the Biblical narratives from beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation. The Bible could veritably be retitled *The Book of God’s Unending Frustrations*

with Man. It is filled with hundreds of instances where God expressed disappointment, sorrow and frustration over man's repeated lack of faith, obedience and commitment to his words and directions. Truly man is a wild card.

God tells us what will happen "IF" we obey him or not. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are but a couple of great examples. The big two-letter word "IF" is found throughout the Bible, but some people still think that God already knows everything we will do, choose or decide in detail.

Everything breaks down with this perspective. God becomes heartless and cruel and the Bible becomes a insincere and useless book. Our lives would become a boring game for a God who already knows every move and outcome.

But there is Way More Good News in this, and here it is: It is simply not Scriptural. It's simply not what the Bible is saying to us. Therefore, rejoice. God has chosen to literally give you and me free will, free choice and he DOES NOT know that you will sneeze 27 years from now on March 8th at 2:47 pm. He doesn't want to know. He wants to be surprised by your actions, choices and decisions. He wants a REAL, genuine relationship with you, as any human parent does. Wow! If that isn't Good News, I don't know what is.

But hold on! Some believers even go one step further and

believe that everything in our earthly life and also our eternal destiny were already predestined before we were born. It is called “Determinism” or “predestination.” For those who hold this perspective there is even Way More Good News!

What predestination means is this: no matter how carefully and virtuously you may live your life, if God has already predestined that you are going to hell when you die, that is where you will go. And on the flip side, no matter how selfishly, hurtfully and criminally you might live your life, if God has already predestined that you are going to heaven when you die, that is where you will go. Why do people consider this to be Good News? It’s because it would relieve us of our human responsibility. It’s all up to God. We need not fret about our lives, our behavior, our family, our society or the world. The future outcome is all decided already.

Certainly there are passages of Scripture which have been interpreted to suggest this to be true. For example:

Prov 16:4 ***“The LORD works out everything to its proper end—even the wicked for a day of disaster.”***

Is 46:11 ***“... What I have said, that I will bring about; what I have planned, that I will do.”***

Jer 1:5 ***“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”***

Rom 8:29-30 *“...for those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”*

Rom 9:11-12 *“Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’”*

Rom 9:15-16 *“For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy.”*

Rom 9:21 *“Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?”*

Eph 1:4 *“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”*

Now let us peruse an “exhaustive” list of over 75 additional passages of Scripture, from Genesis to James, which indicate that God *DOES NOT* predestine our earthly life or our destiny. In fact, he clearly *REFUSES* to micro-manage our lives or decide our future. The following passages make it clear that the consequences

of our decisions and actions are solely based on our own choices and not on any predestined will of the Father.

Gen 2:17 ***“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.”***

God forbade them but did not control their decision nor actions.

Gen 3:17 ***“To Adam he said, ‘Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ ‘Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.’”*** God cursed Adam because he chose to listen to his wife instead of God.

Gen 6:6 ***“The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.”*** God regretted his decision! He was deeply disappointed in how things turned out.

Gen 22:16-18 ***“...because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”***

Ex 32:14 ***“Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.”*** God changed his mind

because of Moses plea to him.

Ex 33:17 *“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.’”* God’s actions were contingent upon Moses’.

Ex 34:12 *“Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you.”*

God is warning them, not predestining them.

Lev 26:3 *“If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands...”* God promises blessing to those who follow and obey. The choice is theirs. Verse 15 states that lack of obedience will bring curses galore.

Num 11:19-20 *“You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, but for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it—because you have rejected the LORD, who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, ‘Why did we ever leave Egypt?’”* Consequences for complaining and rejecting God.

Num 14:43 *“Because you have turned away from the LORD, he will not be with you and you will fall by the sword.”*

Num 20:12 *“But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.”*

Num 20:24 *“Aaron will be gathered to his people. He will not*

enter the land I give the Israelites, because both of you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah.”

Deut 7:12 *“If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the LORD your God will keep his covenant of love with you, as he swore to your ancestors.”* The huge two-letter word “IF”.

Deut 8:20 *“Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God.”*

Deut 11:13 *“So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul—...”* The huge two-letter word “IF” again.

Deut 28:1-2, 15 *“If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth...However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you:...”*

The choice is ours.

Deut 30:19 *“This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.”* God says “choose.” He is not predestining. To predestine would effectively make God the author of all the suffering in the

world (it is his script) and also make him responsible for all those who end up in eternal hell. This would be totally inconsistent with the loving heavenly Father whom Jesus revealed to us. The parables of the lost sheep and the prodigal son would be meaningless and irrelevant.

Deut 32:50-51 *“There on the mountain that you have climbed you will die and be gathered to your people, just as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people. This is because both of you broke faith with me in the presence of the Israelites at the waters of Meribah Kadesh in the Desert of Zin and because you did not uphold my holiness among the Israelites.”*

Josh 14:9 *“So on that day Moses swore to me, ‘The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly.’”*

Jud 2:20-21 *“Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and said, ‘Because this nation has violated the covenant I ordained for their ancestors and has not listened to me, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died.’”*

1Sam 13:14 *“But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the LORD’s command.”*

1Sam 15:11, 23 “**I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions’...Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king.**” God REGRETS again. That means he did not know or expect that Saul would be such a bad king. God was disappointed again.

1 Sam 28:18 “**Because you did not obey the LORD or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the LORD has done this to you today.**”

1Ki 3:11-12 “**So God said to him, “Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked...”**” God is in an object role to man’s actions and choices.

1Ki 13:21-22 “**This is what the LORD says: ‘You have defied the word of the LORD and have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you. You came back and ate bread and drank water in the place where he told you not to eat or drink. Therefore your body will not be buried in the tomb of your ancestors.’**” Our choices have consequences.

1Ki 20:36, 42 “**So the prophet said, “Because you have not obeyed the LORD, as soon as you leave me a lion will kill you.”** **And after the man went away, a lion found him and killed him...He said to the king, ‘This is what the LORD says: ‘You have**

set free a man I had determined should die. Therefore it is your life for his life, your people for his people.”

2Ki 1:16 *“He told the king, ‘This is what the LORD says: Is it because there is no God in Israel for you to consult that you have sent messengers to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Because you have done this, you will never leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!’”*

2Ki 10:30 *“The LORD said to Jehu, ‘Because you have done well in accomplishing what is right in my eyes and have done to the house of Ahab all I had in mind to do, your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.’”*

2Ki 19:28 *“Because you rage against me and because your insolence has reached my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will make you return by the way you came.”*

1Chr 15:13 *“It was because you, the Levites, did not bring it up the first time that the LORD our God broke out in anger against us.”*

1Chr 22:8 *“But this word of the LORD came to me: ‘You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight.’”*

2Chr 16:7-8 *“At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him: ‘Because you relied on the king of Aram*

and not on the LORD your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand. Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen? Yet when you relied on the LORD, he delivered them into your hand.”

2Chr 20:37 *“Because you have made an alliance with Ahaziah, the LORD will destroy what you have made.”*

2Chr 21:12-15 *“You have not followed the ways of your father Jehoshaphat or of Asa king of Judah. But you have followed the ways of the kings of Israel, and you have led Judah and the people of Jerusalem to prostitute themselves, just as the house of Ahab did. You have also murdered your own brothers, members of your own family, men who were better than you. So now the LORD is about to strike your people, your sons, your wives and everything that is yours, with a heavy blow. You yourself will be very ill with a lingering disease of the bowels, until the disease causes your bowels to come out.”*

2Chr 24:20 *“This is what God says: ‘Why do you disobey the LORD’s commands? You will not prosper. Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you.’”*

2Chr 25:16 *“I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this and have not listened to my counsel.”*

Ps 91:9-10 *“If you say, ‘The LORD is my refuge,’ and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no*

disaster will come near your tent.”

Is 1:19-20 “*If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.*’ For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Is 28:16 “*So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic.’*”

Is 37:29 “*Because you rage against me and because your insolence has reached my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will make you return by the way you came.*”

Is 65:12 “*I will destine you for the sword, and all of you will fall in the slaughter; for I called but you did not answer, I spoke but you did not listen. You did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me.”*

Jer 7:13-15 “*While you were doing all these things, declares the LORD, I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen; I called you, but you did not answer. Therefore, what I did to Shiloh I will now do to the house that bears my Name, the temple you trust in, the place I gave to you and your ancestors. I will thrust you from my presence, just as I did all your fellow Israelites, the people of Ephraim.”*

Jer 13:25 *“This is your lot, the portion I have decreed for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘because you have forgotten me and trusted in false gods.”*

Jer 16:11-13 *“then say to them, ‘It is because your ancestors forsook me,’ declares the LORD, ‘and followed other gods and served and worshiped them. They forsook me and did not keep my law. But you have behaved more wickedly than your ancestors. See how all of you are following the stubbornness of your evil hearts instead of obeying me. So I will throw you out of this land into a land neither you nor your ancestors have known, and there you will serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor.’”*

Jer 18:8-10 *“and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.”* Again, God’s actions are contingent upon man’s decisions and deeds; and he will change his mind based on man’s choices.

Jer 23:38-40 *“Although you claim, ‘This is a message from the LORD,’ this is what the LORD says: You used the words, ‘This is a message from the LORD,’ even though I told you that you must not claim, ‘This is a message from the LORD.’ Therefore, I will surely forget you and cast you out of my presence along*

with the city I gave to you and your ancestors. I will bring on you everlasting disgrace—everlasting shame that will not be forgotten.”

Jer 25:8-10 ““Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp.’”

Jer 28:16 “*Therefore this is what the LORD says: ‘I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you are going to die, because you have preached rebellion against the LORD.’”*

Jer 29:18-19 “*I will pursue them with the sword, famine and plague and will make them abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth, a curse and an object of horror, of scorn and reproach, among all the nations where I drive them. For they have not listened to my words,’ declares the LORD, ‘words that I sent to them again and again by my servants the prophets. And you exiles have not listened either,’ declares the LORD.”*

Jer 35:18-19 ““You have obeyed the command of your forefather

Jehonadab and have followed all his instructions and have done everything he ordered.’ Therefore this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘Jehonadab son of Rekab will never fail to have a descendant to serve me.’”

Jer 39:18 *“I will save you; you will not fall by the sword but will escape with your life, because you trust in me, declares the LORD.”*

Jer 40:3 *“And now the LORD has brought it about; he has done just as he said he would. All this happened because you people sinned against the LORD and did not obey him.”*

Jer 44:23 *“Because you have burned incense and have sinned against the LORD and have not obeyed him or followed his law or his decrees or his stipulations, this disaster has come upon you, as you now see.”*

Jer 50:24 *“I set a trap for you, Babylon, and you were caught before you knew it; you were found and captured because you opposed the LORD.”*

Ezek 5:7-8, 11 *“You have been more unruly than the nations around you and have not followed my decrees or kept my laws. You have not even conformed to the standards of the nations around you. Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘I myself am against you, Jerusalem, and I will inflict punishment on you in the sight of the nations...Therefore as surely as I live,’ declares the Sovereign LORD, ‘because you have defiled my*

sanctuary with all your vile images and detestable practices, I myself will shave you; I will not look on you with pity or spare you.’”

Ezek 13:8, 22-23 *“Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Because of your false words and lying visions, I am against you, declares the Sovereign LORD...Because you disheartened the righteous with your lies, when I had brought them no grief, and because you encouraged the wicked not to turn from their evil ways and so save their lives, therefore you will no longer see false visions or practice divination. I will save my people from your hands. And then you will know that I am the LORD.’”*

Ezek 16:43 *“Because you did not remember the days of your youth but enraged me with all these things, I will surely bring down on your head what you have done, declares the Sovereign LORD. Did you not add lewdness to all your other detestable practices?’”*

Ezek 21:24 *“Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Because you people have brought to mind your guilt by your open rebellion, revealing your sins in all that you do—because you have done this, you will be taken captive.’”*

Ezek 22:19-20 *“Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Because you have all become dross, I will gather you into Jerusalem. As silver, copper, iron, lead and tin are gathered into*

a furnace to be melted with a fiery blast, so will I gather you in my anger and my wrath and put you inside the city and melt you.’”

Ezek 23:28-30, 35 *“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘I am about to deliver you into the hands of those you hate, to those you turned away from in disgust. They will deal with you in hatred and take away everything you have worked for. They will leave you stark naked, and the shame of your prostitution will be exposed. Your lewdness and promiscuity have brought this on you, because you lusted after the nations and defiled yourself with their idols’...Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Since you have forgotten me and turned your back on me, you must bear the consequences of your lewdness and prostitution.’”*

Ezek 25:6-7 *“...Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet, rejoicing with all the malice of your heart against the land of Israel, therefore I will stretch out my hand against you and give you as plunder to the nations. I will wipe you out from among the nations and exterminate you from the countries. I will destroy you, and you will know that I am the LORD.”*

Ezek 28:6-7 *“Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Because you think you are wise, as wise as a god, I am going to bring foreigners against you, the most ruthless of nations; they*

will draw their swords against your beauty and wisdom and pierce your shining splendor.’”

Ezek 29:8-9 *“Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘I will bring a sword against you and kill both man and beast. Egypt will become a desolate wasteland. Then they will know that I am the LORD. Because you said, ‘The Nile is mine; I made it,...’”*

Ezek 35:5-6 *“‘Because you harbored an ancient hostility and delivered the Israelites over to the sword at the time of their calamity, the time their punishment reached its climax, therefore as surely as I live,’ declares the Sovereign LORD, ‘I will give you over to bloodshed and it will pursue you. Since you did not hate bloodshed, bloodshed will pursue you.’”*

Hos 4:6 *“my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children.”*

Amos 5:14-15 *“Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.”* The choice is man’s. God does not predestine it.

Jonah 3:10 *“When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the*

destruction he had threatened.” God changed his mind based on man’s decisions and actions.

Mal 2:2 *“If you do not listen, and if you do not resolve to honor my name,” says the LORD Almighty, “I will send a curse on you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not resolved to honor me.”*

Mal 4:6 *“He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.”*

Mt 7:7-8 *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”* The ball is in our court.

Mk 5:34 *“He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has healed you...’”*

Mk 8:38 *“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.”*

Lk 11:10 *“For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”*

Lk 19:17 *“‘Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’”*

Lk 19:44 *“They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.”*

Jn 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* It remains our choice to believe. God does not interfere with that choice.

Jn 16:27 *“No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.”*

Ja 5:15 *“And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.”* The choice to offer the prayer is ours.

Since it is our conviction that everything in God’s Word is true, we must deal with this apparent dilemma and reconcile all of the passages we have cited. Now we will see Way More Good News!

If we review the first group of passages carefully, especially St. Paul’s words, we see that the writers were emphasizing God’s power and authority without balancing this out with mention of man’s portion of responsibility. Even though it is God’s responsibility to call us, predestine us, justify us and glorify us, if we do not *respond* to the call, or *fail* in our calling, the outcome will be greatly affected and we will not fulfill our predestined

calling, we will not be justified, and we will not be glorified. Paul simply did not mention man's obvious role in the process.

The Way More Good News is that the Bible is truly consistent when we look into the shadows behind the doctrines. Not only that, but he has decided to give the responsibility for the future to his sons and daughters. That means to me and you. This Good News has also been hiding in the shadow of these doctrines.

We are now liberated again to be owners of our eternal life, decision-makers, truly creative beings who have the power to disappoint God or to bring him great joy and happiness, comfort and excitement as his beloved children. How great is that! It's the best Good News yet.

5. God put *YOU* in control of your future

We've all heard the Good News that "*God's in control.*" "*Don't worry about anything. God must be in control. After all, he made the whole universe. He's so powerful. How could he not be 'in control?'*"

It's such comforting Good News to know that God is in control of whatever troublesome circumstances are going on in our life. What it means to most people is: "*My dog wouldn't have been run over by that truck yesterday if God didn't allow it to happen or make it happen. After all, God's in control.*" We need not fret or even try to take responsibility for all the ugly things we hear about in the news. It brings our blood pressure down and lets us breathe again.

Unfortunately, this perspective also lights a fire of rage in the hearts of many atheists among us. They respond to such a statement by ranting about what a heartless and cruel God he must be to be "*in control*" of such a corrupt and pain-ridden world. They say, "*Who needs a God like that, who is permitting or even*

orchestrating all the filth and sorrow that the people of the world are wallowing in?”

Some cold-hearted people might say, “*Who cares what atheists think? They’re going to hell anyway.*” But I’ve always subscribed to the belief that “*If what you believe diminishes your ability to love someone or something, then there’s something wrong with what you believe.*”

Of course, there are some passages of Scripture that have been interpreted to support this idea. One of the most widely recognized passages is when St. Paul talks about this in his letter to the Romans: “***Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?***” (Rom 9:11-21) This chapter of Romans seems to emphasize God’s power and authority, but elsewhere Paul clearly recognizes man’s responsibility and free will before God.

Could there be more Good News that we are missing somewhere here? What exactly do we find in the Bible about this topic? Let’s take a deeper look.

A full review of the text reveals that this perspective or idea is not found in the Bible at all. If God were in any way, shape and form “*in control*” of human affairs, then literally hundreds of expressions of God’s frustration and disappointment with man found in both the Old and New Testaments would have to be insincere and meaningless. No matter what wrong thing we may

decide to do, it is clear that God will not stop us. And likewise, even if we decide to do a good thing, God may not even help us. You would have to deny the entire narrative of the Bible from beginning to end to maintain that God is “*in control*” of human affairs.

Some people think prophesy in the Bible is evidence that God’s “*in control*” of human affairs. But such prophetic proclamations of God have always been contingent upon human cooperation, faithfulness and obedience. God made covenants with his people, only to see them dashed to bits by their faithlessness and disobedience. He was repeatedly betrayed by those whom he promised great blessings to. He withheld the punishments he planned for those who repented of their backsliding.

God has clearly made the decision to NOT be “*in control*” of human affairs but rather to reserve for his children a portion of responsibility to respond to him, one way or another. How God then relates to us depends upon our response to his calling. The message is clear. The Bible is consistent about this. There are no mistakes about it.

No one can deny that the God who created this entire universe is all-powerful. He certainly could do whatever he wanted at any time, anywhere, with anyone. Who could stop him? But at the same time, the Bible tells us that God decided to give man control over his own life, decisions and destiny. That’s amazing and incredible

Good News.

But even beyond that, God has decided he will never interfere in our decision-making or choices and it appears that he will not renege on that decision. If he were going to intervene and control our lives in any way, he would not have endured all the suffering we have put him and ourselves through for all these millennia.

He has lamented every step of the way. He has seldom been happy with the way things were going down here. He has given you and I responsibility for our future and destiny and he will not take that away or interfere in it. You are in control of your future. Wow! Now that's Good News.

6. Got apples? They were NOT the cause of sin

Those familiar with the Adam and Eve story in the Book of Genesis know that the word “apple” does not appear anywhere in the story. Somehow the forbidden “fruit” became casually interpreted that way and it has stuck ever since. To clear the air about the apple is Good News in itself. No need to be confused about that. However, there is Way More Good News when we carefully survey God’s Word.

Not only was the forbidden “fruit” not an apple, it was not even a literal “fruit.” What? How can that be, you might ask? And how can we know that? There are actually several pieces of Scriptural evidence that we can point to.

For beginners, we need to reflect on the reaction of Adam and Eve immediately after they “ate” the forbidden “fruit.” Their reaction was not to cover their mouths in shame, nor to hide their guilty hands in shame. Their reaction was to cover their sexual organs with aprons of fig leaves. When God saw this, his response to Adam was, ***“Who told you that you were naked? Have you***

eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

(Gen 3:11) God said this to Adam upon seeing that he shamefully hid his sexual organ from him.

The next piece of evidence can be found in the Book of Job. He poses a question in verse 31:33, ***“If I covered my transgression, like Adam...”*** Another revealing clue.

We also find that the “serpent” in the story was not such a creature after all but rather an angel whose name was Lucifer (Is 14:12) and who was described in Rev. 12:9 as ***“the deceiver of the whole world”*** and ***“that ancient serpent.”*** Tie this together with the explanation found in the Book of Jude wherein we find that the fallen angels were guilty of immorality and sexual crimes (Jude 6-8) and you have the makings of a pretty strong case that this forbidden “fruit” was not something you eat with your mouth.

Not only that, but Jesus lectured about this very same point when he was confronted about his disciples’ eating with unwashed hands. He explained, ***“What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.”*** (Mt 15:11-20) His full explanation is worthy of review. No apples. Sorry.

Finally, when we read Song of Solomon’s romantic poetry about his beloved (4:16), we get the adult spin on “fruits.” After all, what is a natural “fruit?” It is the part of a tree which contains the seeds by which the tree is reproduced. Every natural fruit

contains seeds for reproduction. That is what a “fruit” is, by definition. Thus, the forbidden “fruit” was no less than the sexual love of Eve being reserved for their upcoming conjugal life as mature husband and wife with God’s full blessing.

From the way they blamed each other following the fallen act, it is clear that they were not yet “mature” or Christlike and therefore not ready to consummate their marriage and raise children. Thus, in the end they found premature sex but they had not yet matured enough to have the Christlike agape love which they were created to pass down to their children. As supportive evidence, their eldest son murdered their second son. A dysfunctional family began human history. From a sociological point of view, it is no wonder we live in the world we live in today. It is exactly the “*world*” that Jesus was referring to when he said “*My kingdom is not of this world,*” as we will discuss in Chapter 15.

So what is the Good News here? The incredible Good News that was hidden again in the shadows of doctrine is that the Bible is totally relevant to our everyday lives today, and the Bible is also totally consistent. It’s all about love; God’s love, unrequited love; fallen love; selfish love; Christlike love; Perfected love. i.e., the root of the sickness of humanity is the lack of God’s love and the root cure is always God’s agape Christlike love. That is the

whole story from beginning to end. That's way more than any apple can offer you. That's Way More Good News.

7. Much more than forgiveness

If there is one piece of Good News that stands out above all the rest, it is that Jesus gave his life for us that we may be freed from the bondage of sin by his forgiveness. It is literally bringing us back to life from being spiritually dead. And, of course, it's a free gift if we have the humility to receive it through faith and obedience. The Scriptures which tell us that this was envisioned by God before it occurred are as follows:

Is 53:3-12 *“He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way;*

and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

Mt 16:21-23 “From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to

life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ‘Never, Lord!’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to you!’ Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.’”

Mt 20:25-28 “Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’”

Mt 26:53-56 “‘Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?’ In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, ‘Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.’ Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.”

Mk 10:33-34 “‘We are going up to Jerusalem,’ he said, ‘and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will

hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.’”

Mk 14:49 “Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.”

Lk 9:22 “And he said, ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.’”

Lk 17:25 “But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.”

Lk 18:31-33 “Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, ‘We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.’”

Lk 22:37 “It is written: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.”

Lk 24:25-26, 46 “He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’...He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Messiah will

suffer and rise from the dead on the third day...’”

Jn 17:4-5 “I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”

Acts 2:23 “This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.”

Acts 17:3 “...explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. ‘This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,’ he said.”

Curiously enough, however, hidden in the shadows of this perspective lies Way More Good News. There exists in the Bible a much greater abundance of evidence telling us that Jesus came with the desire and plan to give us far more than just forgiveness from our sins. (Refer to chapters 2, 13 and 15 for more perspective on this.) Let us consider some of this evidence in God’s Word which indicates yet another envisioned outcome for Jesus’ life 2000 years ago. For example:

Is 2:4 “He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up

sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”

How wonderful. This is what God wants to see happen.

Is 9:6-7 ***“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.”*** Wow! Jesus is coming to be King of Israel. The kingdom of God is coming.

Is 45:17 ***“But Israel will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation; you will never be put to shame or disgraced, to ages everlasting.”***

Is 60 This prophetic chapter describes how Israel will become the kingdom of God and prosper forever. This did not happen but it could have if Jesus had been received by the leaders.

Is 62:4 ***“No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married.”***

Jer 31:31-34 ***“‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with***

their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD. 'This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,' declares the LORD. 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.'" God is prophesying here about the people of Israel and Judah, not today's Christians.

Ezek 39:27-28 *"When I have brought them back from the nations and have gathered them from the countries of their enemies, I will be proved holy through them in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind."*

Amos 9:15 *"I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them,' says the LORD your God."*

Mal 3:12 *"Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,' says the LORD Almighty."* God wanted to establish the kingdom of heaven in Israel 2000 years

ago. But instead, Jesus had to proclaim: **“the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.”** (Mt. 21:43)

Mt 2:6 **“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”** Jesus the King!

Certainly, none of the above prophecies came to pass 2000 years ago, but that does not mean they were intended for a future “return” of the Lord in the distant future. (See chapter 15) Jesus came to make this happen in his own lifetime, but such an outcome required the faith and obedience of the leaders of Israel. As for prophesy in general, proclamations of God have always been contingent upon human cooperation, faithfulness and obedience. God has clearly made the decision to NOT be “in control” of human affairs, as was explained in Chapter 5, but rather to reserve for his children a portion of responsibility either to respond to him or not to respond to him. This is clearly expressed in the following Scripture passages:

Mt 4:17 **“From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’”** (KJV – ‘is at hand.’)

Mt 6:10 **“...your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”**

Mt 21:35-43 *“The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? ‘He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,’ they replied, ‘and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.”*

Mt 23:13 *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.”*

Mt 23:37 *“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your*

children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.”

Mt 26:21, 24 “*And while they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me... The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born...”*”

Mt 26:38 “*Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.”*”

Mk 1:15 “*“The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”*”

Mk 12:6 “*He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’”* Jesus was explaining to us in this parable God’s expectation in sending him to us and how it did not go as God hoped and planned.

Lk 1:17 “*And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”* Prepared for what?

Prepared to receive Jesus as the messiah and have faith and obedience in front of him. God’s kingdom was “*at hand.*”

Lk 1:32-33 “*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”* These kingship prophesies are referring

to Israel, not heaven.

Of course we must embody the kingdom **“within us,”** as Jesus said. (Lk 17:21) We must become citizens of the kingdom in our hearts. God’s kingdom cannot be a place full of unrepentant sinners. But Jesus taught us to pray for God’s kingdom **“on earth.”** (Mt 6:10) The shadows of doctrine have effectively hidden God’s hope and expectation for the kingdom on earth 2000 years ago. While Jesus said **“My kingdom is not of this world,”** (Jn 18:36) **“this world”** did not mean this planet “earth.” Jesus was speaking of **“this world”** in terms of this fallen, sinful, ungodly world; Satan’s world. (Rom 12:2)(see Chapter 15)

Lk 1:68-79 ***“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us— to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people***

the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.” Zechariah, filled with the Holy Spirit, tells what is going on in Israel, telling of Jesus (the “*horn of salvation*”) and of his son John and how they will bring God’s kingdom.

Lk 6:16 “*Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.*” “Traitor.” “Traitor.” Consult Websters.

Lk 13:34 “*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.*” Things did not go as Jesus wanted them to. He was frustrated and disappointed.

Lk 19:41-44 “*As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.’*” Could it be any clearer. This all transpired in 70 A.D. when 90% of the Roman army crushed Jerusalem. Jesus

called this God's "***punishment.***" (Lk 21:22)

Lk 22:3 "***Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve.***" Is Satan helping God to carry out his plans?

Lk 23:34 "***Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'***" Some people say this meant, "*they don't know what a good thing they are doing by killing me.*"

Jn 3:19-20 "***This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.***"

Jn 5:23, 37-47 "***Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him...***" Some say God did not want the leaders of Israel to honor the Son and thereby enable him to bring God's kingdom because Jesus needed to be rejected so he could atone for our sins by dying, the greatest of all sins being rejecting God's Son when he sent him. They see no salvation in God's kingdom; only in Jesus' blood sacrifice. (See chapter 9)

Jn 5:37-47 "***And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.***" *I do not accept glory from human beings, but I know*

you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. 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?"

Jn 6:70 *"Then Jesus replied, 'Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!'"* A "devil" does not help God.

Jn 8:37-44 *"I know that you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father.' 'Abraham is our father,' they answered. 'If you were Abraham's children,' said Jesus, 'then you would do what Abraham did. As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the works of your own father.' 'We are not illegitimate children,' they protested. 'The only Father we have is God himself.' Jesus said*

to them, **'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 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.'**” What is Jesus saying?

Read this carefully. The devil's desire is to kill Jesus. That is what he is saying.

Jn 13:2, 21 **"The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus... After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, 'Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.'"** Jesus said he was **"troubled in spirit."** If this was all according to God's plan, Jesus would have no reason to be **"troubled."** And again, what does the word **"betray"** mean? Some people defend Judas and say that **"someone had to do it."** That was clearly **not** Jesus' view of Judas. See above.

Jn 15:23-25 **"Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'"** Isaiah

53:9 came to pass, but their faithlessness and hatred was a **“sin.”**
Jn 16:2-3 ***“They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me.”***

Jn 18:36 ***“Jesus said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.’”*** This passage is interpreted by some to mean that Jesus’ kingdom is not an earthly one but one in heaven. However, he prayed and taught us also to pray ***“Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth.”*** Jesus is not saying in this passage that his kingdom is not an earthly one. ***“This world”*** refers not to the planet earth but to this fallen, sinful world rather than God’s intended world. (Rom 12:2)

Acts 1:24-25 ***“Then they prayed, ‘Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.’”*** Where are they referring to? They are saying Judas belongs in hell.

Acts 7:51-53 ***“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who***

predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”

1Cor 2:8 *“None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”* Paul acknowledges that it was what had to happen to Jesus, but he states here that their actions were done in ignorance. This does not alter the point that Jesus’ original and primary purpose was to bring God’s kingdom, but he was rejected and forced to fulfill the prophecies of Isaiah 53 instead.

Certainly no one is disputing the Good News that Jesus did have to give his life on the cross and atone for our sins with his blood. The question here is, was it Jesus’ sole purpose in being born? An overwhelming amount of Scripture tells that Jesus came to bring the kingdom of God on earth for everyone. This must include his salvation of forgiveness.

Those who insist that his ONLY purpose for coming was to sacrifice his life as an offering for our forgiveness need to explain away all the overwhelming number of Scriptures cited above which tell a greater story, one of God’s kingdom being *“at hand.”* They must explain away the many prophecies of Isaiah and others and redefine them as pointing the way to some distant future time in history. They must make up excuses for Jesus’ tearful remorse

over the failure of the people to recognize him and receive him. They must sweep under the carpet Jesus' stern warnings of what will happen to them because of their faithlessness. They must label Jesus' tearful prayer in Gethsemane the product of human cowardice and frailty because they can't imagine any other reason why Jesus might not want to die. And, they have to twist Jesus' final words on the cross to be a plea for God to forgive us because we didn't know what a good thing we were doing by killing his Son.

The Good News is that there is Way More Good News in the Bible than we had thought. Our doctrines have hidden the greater Good News in their shadows. There is no need to explain away Scriptures or redefine them in some way to make them fit our doctrines. We simply need to let the Scriptures speak for themselves and reconcile themselves consistently and perfectly. There is no tangled mystery. There is only Way More Good News.

8. Jesus' baptism was not wet and cold

Water baptism is an integral part of almost any Christian church. It is the starting point of most Christian converts and of many children born into the faith. How could you call yourself a Christian without being baptized? But, how do we look at baptism? We think of it primarily as an important ritual done in a big tub of water, river or stream, or perhaps sprinkled on our forehead as an infant. Any way we understand baptism, it is certainly Good News.

In the Great Commission, Jesus tells his disciples to ***“baptize them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the holy spirit.”*** (Mt 28:19) There are other instances where Jesus directed his disciples to baptize during his ministry on earth. Where did this practice or ritual come from and what was its purpose?

John the Baptist (John the Baptizer), son of the priest Zechariah and kin of Jesus, carried this practice throughout all of Judea. He said his was a ***“baptism with water for repentance.”*** (Mt 3:11) He baptized thousands of Jewish people and was

greatly respected for it. Even the leadership of Israel feared his growing influence among the people. (Mk 6:20) He even baptized Jesus.

However, we find an interesting statement in the Book of John: ***“in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples.”*** (Jn 4:2) Why would Jesus himself not do the actual baptizing? Was it below him to do so? Didn't Jesus believe in baptism?

We find the answer to this from the words of John the Baptist, himself. He said, ***“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”*** (Matt 3:11) Here ***“fire”*** means the Word of God or Truth of God. ***“Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD,”*** (Jer 23:29) Mark 1:8 echoes a similar statement. Likewise, John 1:33 says, ***“And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'”***

So the question is, did Jesus baptize with water? It seems not. Did he believe in baptism? He certainly did. But there is Way More Good News about baptism. Jesus' baptism was far greater than the water baptism of John. Jesus' baptism was of God's Word and the Holy Spirit, rather than water.

This has great implications for the Christian faith. Water baptism is still important since Jesus told his disciples to do so. Perhaps it was to connect with the well-respected work of John, to make a bridge to John's work of making ***“a people prepared for the lord.”*** (Lk 1:17) In any case, not only should a Christian believer receive the wet and cold water baptism of John for repentance, it seems clear that the baptism of Jesus must be obtained as well. One could make the case that the baptism of John is merely preparation for the true baptism of Jesus.

The author of 1Peter gave a somewhat different perspective looking back on John's water baptism as symbolic of Jesus' greater baptism. He wrote: ***“and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”*** (1Pet 3:21)

Certainly many, if not most, Christian communities stress the value of God's Word and God's Truth and that of the Holy Spirit. However, do we recognize these as the actual baptism which Jesus brought to us? It may be time to distinguish and explicitly recognize the greater baptism of Jesus in addition to the wet and cold water baptism of John. Jesus' baptism is FAR more consequential and beneficial than that of John. How great is that! It's just Way More Good News.

9. The blood became necessary

A huge pillar of Good News in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the fact that he loved us enough to shed his precious blood on the cross. It is the widespread belief that this was the only way our sins could be atoned for, or forgiven. A cornerstone of this doctrine can be found in a single passage of Scripture, namely Hebrews 9:22. What does it say?

“In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”

This passage is thought to be reinforced by several other passages wherein Jesus declares ***“I must go just as it is written”*** (Mt 26:24) and also passages such as Rev. 13:8, which reads: ***“All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.”*** The controversial rendering of this last Scripture passage was already

discussed in Chapter 4. On the face of Paul's statement, it would seem that a blood sacrifice is an absolute requirement for the atonement of sins. However, he also includes the words "*nearly everything.*" Why?

A general review of the Old Testament reveals that atonement for sin was most often satisfied by a blood sacrifice or burnt offering, but there were numerous other ways to atone for sin acceptable to God. These included the scapegoat, faith and obedience, money, oil, flour, live bird, incense, meat, drink, jewelry and shewbread.

Which method of atonement did God *prefer*, if any? You would think it would be the blood sacrifice/burnt offering. But NO! That is clearly NOT the case, according to God's Word in the Bible. Consider the following several passages of Scripture:

Hosea 6:6 "*For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.*"

Prov 16:6 "*Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for...*"

1Sam 15:22 "*Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.*"

Micah 6:6-8 "*With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be*

pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

Psalms 51:15-17 “Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.”

From these several passages of Scripture, we can see that God does NOT prefer blood sacrifice/burnt offering for the atonement of sin. How about the scapegoat method of atonement? Leviticus 16:10 explains what atonement by a scapegoat means:

“But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the wilderness as a scapegoat.”

It is commonly believed that Jesus was the scapegoat for our sins, but in what context? The shedding of Jesus’ precious blood on the cross was unquestionably atonement for our sins, but it

doesn't seem to fit the definition of a living scapegoat. Jesus was actually atoning for sin as the scapegoat when he went out into the wilderness for 40 days of fasting and enduring the temptations of Lucifer. As the scapegoat, he was a *living* sacrifice. After atoning for sin as a scapegoat, he forgave the sins of any individuals who showed faith and obedience to him. But that being true, if Jesus already atoned for sin as the scapegoat, then why would he have to *again* atone for sin as a blood sacrifice on the cross?

Jesus came to atone for the sins of all of Israel and even for all of mankind, not just for a handful of faithful and obedient individuals who came to him during his ministry. (Jn 3:16) Had the representatives of all the people of Israel, the priests and leaders, come to Jesus in faith and obedience to him, then the requirement to receive Jesus' forgiveness would have been satisfied on the national level and the living scapegoat could have declared the nation of Israel forgiven. Jesus had the authority to do that. But they came to him instead with scorn and disbelief. Thus, the nation of Israel could not be forgiven.

So, to atone for the sins of not only Israel but even for ALL people, beyond the handful of individuals who came to him during his ministry, Jesus had no choice but to walk the path prophesied in Isaiah 53 and make the ultimate offering of atonement with his blood.

This leads us back to our original question: *Was it necessary for Jesus to shed his blood to atone for sin?* The answer from God's Word in the Bible as we have just seen is obviously no. The Bible tells us there are many acceptable ways to atone for sin, as previously stated. However, it became necessary for Jesus to offer his life and shed his precious blood as an atonement for sin because of the faithlessness of the leaders of Israel.

So why then did Jesus say more than once: ***“I must go as it is written”***? (Mk 14:21) That is absolutely correct because when the prophecies of Isaiah 9, 11 and 60 became impossible to fulfill due to the rejection and faithlessness of the leadership of Israel, then Jesus had to ***“go as it is written”*** in Isaiah 53 and become the suffering and bruised Lord bearing our sins on the cross. The Good News is, it is all consistent. Jesus did not give his blood for our forgiveness because it was the only way to atone for sin. He did it because the faithlessness of the leadership of Israel made it necessary. It is just Way More Good News hidden in the shadows of our age-old doctrines of the faith.

10. Jesus' resurrection was better than physical

A cornerstone of the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that he resurrected from the dead. There is too much evidence from eye witness accounts to deny it. He lives on and continues to offer the salvation of forgiveness to whomever believes in him. That is certainly Good News. Yet, there is even More Good News hidden in the shadows of this.

The doctrines concerning Jesus' resurrection depict his return as being a physical one. The verses most often cited to prove that Jesus resurrected physically are these:

“They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it

because of joy and amazement, he asked them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.” (Lk 24:36-43)

And in the Book of John: *“A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’ Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’”* (Jn 20:26-28)

Add to these verses the four accounts in the Gospels of the empty tomb and this comprises the evidence most often cited to prove Jesus’ physical resurrection. And, the evidence may seem pretty compelling.

However, we will begin to uncover Way More Good News about Jesus’ resurrection when we consider the 14 other passages of Scripture below which speak of Jesus’ resurrection. They paint a very different picture.

When Jesus gave his eleven remaining disciples the Great Commission, the Book of Matthew recounts: *“When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.”* (Mt 28:17)

The Book of Luke recounts that Jesus *“came up and walked*

along with” two men going down a road. They had known Jesus but now they did not recognize him. He spoke to them at length, after which they recognized who he was and then he **“disappeared from their sight.”** (Lk 24:16-31) Mark also recounted this scene by writing: **“Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country.”** (Mk 16:12)

Soon thereafter we read: **“When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.”** (Lk 24:51)

The Book of John describes the resurrected Jesus’ encounter with a close friend, Mary Magdalene, outside the empty tomb.

“At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?’ Thinking he was the gardener, she said, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means ‘Teacher’). Jesus said, ‘Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” (Jn 20:14-17)

Then, in verse 19, John continues:

“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’”

In a later passage, ***“Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ None of the disciples dared ask him, ‘Who are you?’ They knew it was the Lord.”*** (Jn 21:12)

Paul explains that Jesus ***“appeared”*** to many, including himself (1Cor 15:8) but when Paul elaborates on this experience when Jesus ***“appeared”*** to him, he clarifies that no one actually saw Jesus but just saw a light and heard a voice. (Acts 9:3-7)

Soon thereafter, Jesus came to Paul in a vision: ***“The Lord called to him in a vision, ‘Ananias!’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he answered.”*** (Acts 9:10)

Another time, Jesus ***“appeared”*** to Paul while he was in a trance: ***“When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking to me. ‘Quick!’ he said. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.’”*** (Acts 22:17-18)

“The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, ‘Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.’” (Acts 23:11)

And Paul gives a lengthy and amazing explanation of how we are born in our physical body and then die and continue on with our spiritual body. A review of all of Paul’s writings makes it very clear that he had no belief whatsoever in a physical resurrection of Jesus, even though the resurrected Jesus ***“appeared”*** to him numerous times. (1Cor 15:35-52)

A related and very troublesome detail for many scholars is the fact that Paul never once mentioned the empty tomb. Paul spent time with Peter and Jesus’ brother James before he began his incredible missionary tours throughout the Mediterranean area. No doubt he debriefed them about Jesus to learn all he could from their first-hand testimonies. After all, no one was closer to Jesus than Peter, and James was Jesus’ actual brother. The point is, the incredible story of the empty tomb would most certainly be a topic of excitement and discussion for these three when they were meeting. One would expect that Paul would mention it at least once at some point. But, he did not. It raises questions that cannot be answered.

“If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful

labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.” (Php 1:22-24)

“For Christ ... was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits.” (1Pet 3:18-19)

Many theologians and scholars have settled on a compromise, calling the substance of the resurrected Jesus a “glorified body.” After all, as one Roman Catholic priest told me, “*It couldn’t have been a physical body because he appeared and disappeared even in the ‘locked’ upper room on several occasions.*” And, the priest continued, “*It couldn’t have been a spiritual body because Jesus said ‘I am not a spirit’ (or ghost). So, we call it a ‘glorified body.’*” I asked him, “*What’s that?*” He answered, “*We don’t know, but we have to call it something.*” Certainly the Bible is the place to resolve this dilemma and all the information we need is found therein.

There are two problems with our efforts to understand and reconcile this. The first problem is that our understanding of the nature of spiritual entities and spiritual bodies is weak. We must be reminded of how an angel wrestled with Jacob at the ford of

Jabbok and dislocated his thigh bone. (Gen 32:24-28; Hos 12:4) That takes substantial contact between a physical person and a spirit which has only a spiritual body. Not only that, but we recall that Lot invited two angels into his home and they “ate” a meal which he offered them. (Gen 19:3) And, some of the men of the town wanted to have sex with them. Some people also believe that angels had sex with earthly women and they bore giants. (Gen 6:4)

The point is, the Bible testifies to us that spiritual bodies can be very tangible in the earthly realm if they want to be. Thus, based on the Word of God in the Bible, it would not be necessary for Jesus to be physical to be seen, touched and even to eat a meal.

The second problem we have is our understanding of the use of the word “ghost” or “spirit” in the various versions of the Bible. We read in the Book of John, *“They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.’”* (Lk 24:37-39) In spite of all the other passages of Scripture we have cited, this one appears to be a “deal killer.” Jesus says I am not a ghost (or spirit in other translations). That would seem to settle it. However,

this would leave us with some very troublesome Scriptures which would seem impossible to reconcile with each other, as we have seen. The good news is, with a little more insight we can clear up this issue, as well.

In the King James Bible, RSV and others, Jesus says in this passage ***“a spirit hath not...”*** In the New International Version, it reads, ***“a ghost does not...”*** You may think this is insignificant, but it is far from it. In the King James Version, a “ghost” refers to a Divine spirit, such as the Holy Ghost. “Spirit” refers to a fearsome dark apparition, often not so substantial. In the NIV, the word “spirit” refers to a Divine spirit, such as the Holy Spirit and “ghost” refers to a fearsome dark apparition, often not so substantial.

Thus, upon closer inspection, Jesus is simply allaying the fears of the disciples. He is assuring them that he is not a fearsome ***“spirit”*** or ***“ghost.”*** He appeared and disappeared in the locked room where the disciples were meeting. There is no contradiction or mystery here. The resurrected Jesus is a Divine spirit (or ghost, depending upon which version of the Bible you are reading) and not to be feared. That is what he was making clear to his disciples.

A Divine spirit (or ghost) is very bright and substantial, it can be touched. Thus, Jesus even said, ***“a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”*** (Lk 24:39) That is the meaning.

Paul even warned us to be careful because we might entertain angels without knowing it. (Heb 13:2) The women embraced Jesus' feet (Mt 28:9) when they met him again after leaving the empty tomb. Again, Jacob wrestled violently with an angel, all night. A Divine spirit can eat a meal.

So what is this additional Good News we are speaking about? It may seem troubling to see such contrasting descriptions of Jesus' resurrection in God's Word. But no; on the contrary, it is very liberating Good News indeed. We can now see more than ever before that the Word of God in the Bible is consistent and without contradiction. We just have to consider all that it says, from beginning to end, in order to make sense of this.

Jesus resurrected in his spiritual body; tangible, substantial, but different in appearance. He appeared and disappeared numerous times and finally went home to his Father in heaven. We just misunderstood what Jesus was trying to convey to Doubting Thomas and his other disciples in Mark's upper room during his resurrected appearances to them. It is all very natural.

And, even more incredibly Good News is that since Jesus is alive in his spiritual form, he can be with you 24/7, whenever and wherever you may need him. He can be with you, not only in concept, but he can come to you in an instant, whenever and wherever you need him. You may have already known that before

and you may have even experienced it personally, but now you can understand why. He has no hinderance of the physical body now. He is totally free. Way More Good News for sure.

11. Raising the dead really did happen

We marvel at the thought of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. It is super-human. It is one of the most outstanding of the dozens of miracles which Jesus performed to show us who he really was and is. How many people do you know who have done that? It is really Good News. Jesus is clearly the man we need to follow. Who would want to be against him?

But let's be honest. There are plenty of skeptics out there, even among the faithful, though they may not admit it to you. After all, we are only human. Well, there is Way More Good News in the Bible for you to chew on in this area, too.

For one thing, we have to remind ourselves that this is the power of God coming through and making these kind of miraculous things happen. Let us not forget the incredible miracles performed by Moses and his brother Aaron. They were not the Messiah. They were sinners like the rest of us. Moses even murdered a man. But some feel the miracles done through them

outshone even those done by Jesus, like the parting of the Sea. No need to compare, but you get the point.

Secondly, we can have additional confidence in Jesus' raising people from the dead because the Bible tells us that Jesus is not the only one to do it. In the Old Testament, we read that Elijah the prophet raised a dead man back to life. (1Ki 17) Go back and review those Scriptures. And, not only Elijah the prophet, but his contemporary personal friend and a lesser-known prophet named Elisha also raised a man from the dead. (2Ki 4) Wow! And these men are not the Messiah or Christ, either. It is more Good News. And not only that, but it seems that Peter also raised a woman from the dead. (Acts 9:38-41)

Clearly, this is not a one-time unique display of God's power and grace. We can find abundant evidence in the Bible to bolster our confidence that this really did happen. Oh, we of little faith! This again is Way More really Good News, hidden in the shadows of our beliefs and concepts.

12. Happiness and joy beyond belief

Let's try to look at the honest reality of many, if not most, Christian people today. We are faithful. We are forgiven. We are blessed. We are happy. Our lives are sometimes overflowing with abundant joy. All of this can be attributed to our faith and belief in Jesus and his Gospel of true love. It is such Good News indeed. We cannot wait to tell the world about it.

And many, if not most, Christians will tell you that the only thing that is expected of them in order to have all this grace and benefit is to "just believe" in Jesus and his saving grace. In other words, just believe; just have faith. Those who say belief or faith alone is sufficient usually refer to the following passages of Scripture, among others:

Jn 1:12 "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

Jn 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Jn 6:29 “Jesus answered, ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.’”

Rom 3:22 “This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

Rom 10:9 “If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

1Cor 1:21 “...God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.”

Gal 3:22 “...what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.”

There are also many other believers who say ***“faith without works is dead,”*** usually quoting the Book of James. (James 2:26) Their perspective also has a solid basis in Scripture.

Both sides would agree that belief or faith alone is sufficient to receive the forgiveness of sins, as demonstrated in dozens of instances of Jesus forgiving and healing people during his life. Both sides acknowledge that belief or faith is an essential part of salvation. But, is it the *fullness* of salvation? Is this all that Jesus was expecting and requiring of us? Does forgiveness of our sins

through belief or faith fulfill the salvation Jesus came to give? The Good News is, apparently there is more that Jesus wanted from us and came to give us. Consider the following passages of Scripture:

Mt 5 (the beatitudes or Sermon on the Mount) This is the only complete sermon of Jesus that we have record of. It is the context of his “requirement” to ***“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*** The RSV reads ***“you must be perfect..”*** However, while this is not the salvation of justification through faith and the resultant forgiveness that Jesus gives us, it is part of the bigger picture of “salvation.”

Both justification by belief or faith and sanctification are included in the overall package of “salvation.” Here Jesus is teaching us about the “sanctification” component. And, there are numerous other passages of Scripture which indicate that belief is NOT enough. For example:

Mt 7:21-23 ***“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”***

Mt 16:27 ***“For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.”***

Acts 10:34-35 *“Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.”*

Acts 26:19-20 *“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds.”*

Rom 2:6 *“God ‘will repay each person according to what they have done.”*

Titus 1:16 *“They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.”*

Ja 1:22 *“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”*

Ja 2:14-26 *“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?...In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead....As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”*

Rev 2:5, 23 *“Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place...Then all the*

churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.”

Rev 20:12-13 *“And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.”*

Rev 20:13 *“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.”*

Rev 22:12 *“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.”*

What is this other half of “salvation,” namely sanctification? It means cleaning ourselves up from our self-centered, greedy and lustful sin-nature and making ourselves holy and acceptable to the Lord. The Bible says in Malachi: *“The Lord seeks godly offspring.”* (Mal 2:15) Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount, *“You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* (Mt 5:48)

However, both sides of this discussion are missing an even deeper part of the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The deeper message is this: Jesus is *not* simply telling us to do good things. It is not belief or faith alone and/or good works alone. It is

not walking the talk. It is not just *“faith with works.”* Jesus was not just talking about doing good things in the Sermon on the Mount.

He was talking about *becoming* new people; *becoming* the Word. He was describing the character that God wants to see in us; namely *his own* character. He was describing aspects of a perfect person; a person of mature personality in *God’s image*. (Gen 1:26) He was basically saying, *“Become like me.”* ***“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”*** (Rom 12:2) That’s *not* being content to become just an “apple” Christian, red only on the outside. It means becoming a “tomato” Christian; one who is red all the way through.

How much more fulfilled and soaked with joy and happiness our lives would be if we not only believe in Jesus and his salvation, not only follow and be obedient to his words, but even become like him as he commanded us to do?

If we truly ***“love one another as I have loved you,”*** (Jn 13:34) then we will see very little if any divorce, very little if any loneliness and despair, very little if any selfish greedy nature and abuse in us and among us, very little if any domestic violence, very little if any crime, etc., etc., Just imagine for a moment what Jesus had in mind for us. There is Way More Good News in the Gospels if we look at what is sometimes hidden in the shadows of our doctrines.

13. God had big plans for Jesus

We all know the Good News that God gave us his son Jesus Christ and that he gave his life and blood for our forgiveness and salvation. That is earth-shaking Good News. We could not imagine any more Good News related to this. However, there IS Way More Good News. Again, it was hidden in the shadows behind long-held and cherished doctrines of the faith. Let's take a closer look and we will see it.

Christian scholars and readers interpret Isaiah's Chapters 9, 11, 53 and 60 to refer to the coming of Jesus. However, Chapters 9, 11 and 60 are totally different from Chapter 53. Whereas Chapters 9, 11 and 60 paint the picture of a glorious reception of the savior and his unending kingship over Israel, Isaiah 53 speaks of the Lord's rejection, suffering and execution as he bears the burden of our sin. Everyone surmises that Isaiah 53 accurately describes Jesus' life 2000 years ago. But what do we do with Isaiah 9, 11 and 60?

Scholars have decided that these passages of Scripture must refer to the return of Christ in the unknown distant future, when he will literally reign as king over God's kingdom on earth. After all, these prophecies were not fulfilled 2000 years ago. What else could it be? That would seem to be a logical guess.

However, up until the time of Jesus' birth and even until today, the Jewish chosen people have been crystal clear about one thing: when they had faith and obedience before God, they were blessed as God had promised them. When they did not have faith and obedience before God, they were cursed for their sin and they suffered. They were exercising their human portion of responsibility before God and there were consequences for it, either way, good or bad.

For some reason, once Jesus was born, the concept of man's portion of responsibility before God faded into the shadows of doctrine. It became very weak. Our responsibility became mostly a personal one, to have faith in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross; disconnected from the big picture; disconnected from prophesy. The concept of a God who was "*in control*" of the big picture became much stronger, even dominant. We could choose to have faith in Jesus and be saved, but God must be "*in control*" of everything else, regardless of our faith or lack of it.

Thus, it doesn't even enter our minds today to consider the possibility that all four of Isaiah's prophetic chapters were

referring to Jesus' coming 2000 years ago and not to a distant future return. In other words, if the nation of Israel had responded to Jesus as God had expected (Mt 21:37) and embraced his son in faith and obedience, made him their king and received the forgiveness of sin that Jesus was ready and able to give even before his death (Mt 9:6), then the world today would not only have Jesus' salvation of forgiveness, but we would all be living in God's Kingdom on earth by now.

However, if the nation of Israel failed to recognize and embrace Jesus as the Messiah and, instead of faith and obedience they rejected him and killed him (Mt 21:39), then his atoning sacrifice would still extend forgiveness to any individual person with faith and obedience, but the earthly kingdom would be postponed until a more opportune time in the future. In other words, there was no reason to look beyond Jesus' life 2000 years ago in terms of God's intention for all four of Isaiah's prophetic chapters.

Doctrine says that God planned Jesus' rejection and future return from day-one; from the beginning. If we somehow forget the nature of prophesy in that it is contingent upon man's response to it, then this may be correct. But, man has always been responsible before God and the fulfillment of God's will has always depended upon it. We have continually disappointed him and broken his heart by our faithlessness and disobedience.

If we take into account man's portion of responsibility in this way regarding Isaiah's prophecies, and reconsider the rendering of a few other passages such as Rev 13:8 and 17:8 (see Chapter 4), then we actually have very little basis to think that all this applies to another time in the distant future. In other words, God may not have originally been planning a return appearance of his son. We are injecting a message into God's Word that simply isn't there.

God wanted to see his kingdom on earth 2000 years ago. Jesus told us so in his prayer. (Mt 6:10) Salvation would by definition be included in God's kingdom on earth. All would have been accomplished at that time if Jesus had been welcomed with faith and obedience, which is God's requirement for the atonement of sin. Is God incapable? Does God need a couple more thousand years of hell and suffering? Did God want to drag things out so a few more people could qualify for heaven while the multitudes predictably suffer forever in hell?

It is faithless mankind that has always frustrated God's work to bring his kingdom. The Bible testifies to this from beginning to end. The Bible says he wishes that no one perishes, not even one. (2Pet 3:9) And lest we forget about God's punishment of the faithless and disobedient, recall what Jesus said about Israel after its rejection of him:

“When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written.” (Lk 21:20-22) This was fulfilled in 70 A.D. by the Romans.

The bottom line here is, the belief that Isaiah 9, 11 and 60 were prophecies about the return of Christ in the distant future would seem like a logical deduction, but it has no basis in Scripture and creates inconsistency with everything both the Old and New Testaments are saying to us. God works through the partnership of himself and man.

The Way More Good News is that we can now see into the shadows and breathe a sigh of relief that the Bible really is totally consistent and doesn't need to be massaged and manipulated to say something that seems to fit our doctrines. It makes perfect sense as it is. Nothing has changed. God hasn't changed. Jesus hasn't changed. Man's responsibility before God and Jesus hasn't changed. The plan hasn't changed. God's kingdom is coming and we will transform ourselves and make ourselves worthy of living in it with complete joy and happiness and God's love. What more Good News can there be than that?

14. Jesus defeated Satan, but more...

Satan is real and he's not stupid. He has deceived humanity from day one, perpetrating his selfishness and immorality on nonbelievers and believers alike. Yet the Good News is that he was no match for Jesus. It was no competition. Jesus defeated the tricks of Satan for all of us to witness, not only when Lucifer confronted him in the desert while he fasted for 40 days, but throughout his life. That is huge Good News. But, there is even Way More Good News about this subject. It has again been hiding in the shadows of doctrine. Let's take a closer look and see what it is.

There can be no question that Jesus defeated Satan when he resurrected after his crucifixion. Satan thought that he had put an end to Jesus by instigating his betrayal and execution. (Lk 22:3-4) He was wrong. Jesus returned and has built his Church from the ground up; from scratch.

However, the question here is, did Jesus defeat Satan in your life and my life and in this earthly world, or only personally?

It is a widely-held belief that Jesus defeated Satan for us all, or at least for those who have faith and believe and call on his name. What is the basis for this belief? Is it based in God's Word in the Bible? Let's take a look.

While not written about explicitly, Satan was stalking Jesus to destroy him even from his birth, trying to work through King Herod and others to kill him. Then, Satan showed up in-person to tempt Jesus and try to destroy him in the desert. (Lk 4:2) And finally, the Bible says *“Satan entered Judas Iscariot...”* and he betrayed Jesus. (Lk 22:3-4)

Certainly, Jesus defeated the power of darkness and death in resurrecting after his crucifixion, but we cannot ignore what we find in the letters of Paul and others *after* Jesus' death.

Acts 5:3 *“Then Peter said, ‘Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart... ?’”*

Acts 26:18 *“...to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”*

Rom 16:20 *“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”*

1Co 5:5 *“...hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.”*

1Co 7:5 “...*Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*”

2Co 2:11 “...*in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.*”

2Co 11:14 “*And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.*”

2Co 12:7 “*Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.*”

1Th 2:18 “...Satan blocked our way.”

2Th 2:9 “*The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie,...*”

1Ti 1:20 “*Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.*”

1Ti 5:15 “*Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan.*”

Clearly the early disciples perceived that Satan was alive and well and working in the world and in the hearts and minds of fallen people, *including themselves*, after Jesus’ death and resurrection.

How about in the future, then? The Book of Revelation tells us that Satan will continue to do his dirty work until the end. He is

the great deceiver; *“the deceiver of the whole world”* (Rev 12:9) and Jesus warned about false prophets who would come, *“to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”* (Mt 24:24):

Rev 2:9 *“I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”*

Rev 2:13 *“I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.”*

Rev 2:24 *“Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s deep secrets, I will not impose any other burden on you,...”*

Rev 3:9 *“I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.”*

Rev 12:9 *“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.”*

Rev 20:2 *“He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.”*

Rev 20:7 *“When the thousand years are over, Satan will be*

released from his prison...” This reference to “a thousand years” refers to the future as many experts understand it, and not to today.

Few believers would deny that Satan is alive and well and working tirelessly in the world today. The question we have posed is, are those who have faith and believe and call on his name effectively outside of Satan’s influence today? From the readings above, it may be wishful thinking.

However, the Way More Good News is that Jesus showed us how to defeat Satan in our own lives by ourselves. We may not need to call upon Jesus every time we feel tempted. We do not need to continue as helpless little children in the jaws of Satan’s influence. We were trained by the Master. The path has been carved by Jesus through the darkness into the light.

When we embody the virtues that Jesus told us to and modeled for us, and sincerely live a selfless life for others, walking in the shoes of Jesus with unconditional love for God and others, Satan will be absolutely defeated in my life and your life, as well. Now that is Way More Good News.

15. God's kingdom is not of ~~this earth~~ world

“My kingdom is not of this world,” Jesus said. (Jn 18:36)
Truth be known, that is somewhat disappointing to many people. Don't we want to see God's kingdom here on earth? Of course. We want to live happily in it. We don't want to suffer any more. And if the first couple hadn't fallen into sin, wouldn't the world have become God's kingdom? Wasn't it God's plan in the beginning? Well, at least we will get to live in God's kingdom after we die, provided we believed in Jesus. That's Good News.

But the problem is, we have somehow interpreted *“this world”* to mean “the planet earth.” Hello! It is very doubtful that anyone was thinking about the planet earth 2000 years ago, long before planets were thought about or even discovered. Of course, the existence of planets would not be a mystery to God who created them, but what was Jesus really talking about here? That is the question before us.

While it may be fashionable to think that Jesus was talking about his kingdom not being on the physical earth but rather in heaven where we can enjoy it after we die, a simple survey of the Scriptures makes it abundantly clear that no one, not even Jesus, was talking or even thinking about the physical planet earth. Let's take a look:

Lk 16:8 ***“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.”***

Jn 8:23 ***“You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.”***

Jn 12:31 ***“Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.”***

Jn 14:30-31 ***“I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.”***

Jn 15:18-19 ***“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.”***

Jn 17:14 ***“I have given them your word and the world has hated***

them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.”

Rom 12:2 *“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”*

1Cor 3:19 *“For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight.”*

1Cor 5:9-12 *“I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people — not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?”*

Eph 2:1-2 *“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 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.”*

Eph 6:12 *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*

Jas 4:4 *“You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship*

with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”

Rev 11:15 *“The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.”*

We could also cite 23 other passages of Scripture to make a solid case for God’s literal earthly Kingdom, but that is not the focus of this chapter. We will leave that study for another time.

The point is, once again, in the shadows of our doctrines lies Way More Good News, this time that Jesus really DID intend and want to create God’s Kingdom on this planet earth for us to enjoy BEFORE we die and go to heaven. *“My kingdom is not of this world”* did not mean the third rock from the sun. He and others were talking about this fallen, selfish, greedy, lustful and corrupt human society that is the product of the Fall of the first ancestors. God did not create this gorgeous world to be stolen by and overrun by Satan and evil and suffering. He made everything and everyone to be his own, living happily in his bosom and in his kingdom, both on earth and after we die. Now that is Way More Good News!

16. God is God and man is man

God the Father is without form (Jn 1:18; 1Jn 4:12), unknowable and intangible except for his Word and that we can indirectly perceive him ***“from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”*** as St. Paul said. (Rom 1:20) In that way God can be very personal, in a sense whatever we wish and perceive him to be within the bounds of Biblical exegesis. Any reasonable, justifiable, Biblical understanding of God is certainly Good News!

Numerous Scriptures related to this in the New Testament and the many references to the Divinity of Jesus left the early Church fathers wrestling with a huge question: *“Who really are Jesus and the Holy Spirit in relation to the Father?”* They put their best minds to the task of fleshing it out. They debated this question for centuries. Their final conclusion by democratic process was that God the Father and Creator is but one person of a three-person God with Jesus and the Holy Spirit being the two other persons in the Godhead. Thus, the understanding or belief in the Triune God, the Holy Trinity, or Trinitarianism was born.

We are all more than familiar with *“God the Father, God the*

Son, and God the Holy Spirit.” It is recited in churches every week. This refers to the three persons in one God. It has become a MAJOR pillar of the Good News we hold dear.

Searching the Bible, the closest resemblance to an explicit trinitarian statement can be found in the Great Commission: ***“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*** (Mt 28:19) If you read it carefully, it’s actually not saying the same thing, but it’s as close as we can find.

There are certainly familiar arguments to support the Triune God based on several passages of Scripture in the New Testament. While these passages of Scripture can be interpreted to indicate that Jesus is the second person of the Triune God, or “God the Son,” in fact if we are honest about it, the treatment of some of these passages may seem presumptuous. For example:

Jesus said, ***“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”*** (Jn 14:9) This has been interpreted to mean that Jesus is saying he is literally God the Father in human form. But what does it really say? ***“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father”*** could mean that Jesus is saying he is God if one is predisposed to interpret it that way. However, it may simply mean that Jesus exudes the Divinity of God, namely God’s heart, character, personality and spirit. (Col 1:19; 2:9) In other words, Jesus may actually be saying, ***“I am a living expression of God.”***

In John 10:30, 38 Jesus said, ***“I and the Father are one... the Father is in me, and I in the Father.”*** (also Jn 14:9-11) However, Jesus also said in a prayer to God about his disciples, ***“...so that they may be one as we are one.”*** (Jn 17:11, 22) This means that the “oneness” that Jesus wishes to see between and among us, his disciples, is the same as the oneness he has with the Father. That would mean that Jesus is distinct from God while also being ***“one”*** with him, as we should be ***“one”*** with each another. This reveals it to be a relational “oneness,” rather than a literal, existential “oneness.”

There are other passages of Scripture that have been interpreted to support the idea that Jesus is the second person of the Holy Trinity, i.e., God the Son. For example, in Mk 10:18 Jesus says ***“Why do you call me good? No one is good — except God alone.”*** Some think this is saying that Jesus is good because he is God. But Jesus may simply be admonishing the people not to call him good but rather reserve that descriptor for God the Father, alone. This understanding would serve to help Jesus remain respectable in the eyes of those who were accusing him of claiming to be God; something the Jews could never accept.

It is curious that while Jesus clearly said ***“only God is good,”*** he also showcased human ***“perfection”*** as a goal we must all reach. He concluded part of his famous Sermon on the Mount by

admonishing us: ***“You therefore must be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.”*** (Mt 5:48) This again speaks of a qualitative oneness, rather than existential. Is this qualitative oneness with God what we regular people can hope to achieve, but for Jesus it is something different, or is this the same kind of “oneness” that Jesus and God the Father enjoy; i.e., a qualitative one? Such a qualitative oneness would be an internal resonance of heart, mind, spirit and character rather than an existential oneness of being. Jesus may simply be saying here that just as he is one with the Father (qualitatively), we must be also.

If Jesus is seen as God the Son, then was he born not only pure but birthed with this perfected Divine nature? Not according to St. Paul. He said in Heb 2:10 ***“In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered.”***

In 8:58 says: ***“‘Very truly I tell you,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was born, I am!’”*** We are told that Jesus is saying here that he pre-existed Abraham. That may be the correct way to understand it. However, if Jesus pre-existed Abraham, it must have been in spirit only since we know he was born of Mary.

Alternately, this statement may simply be expressing Jesus’ spiritual position as primary and superior to Abraham, who was considered the Father of the Jewish faith. John the Baptist uttered

a similar sentiment when he said his younger cousin Jesus was ***“before me.”*** (Jn 1:15) John’s words had nothing to do with age or time sequence. It was about Jesus’ spiritual position and authority.

Paul said in 1Cor 8:6, ***“there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.”*** If you focus only on the last phrase of this verse, it can be taken that perhaps Jesus is God the Son. But the entire verse together makes it clear that the ***“one God, the Father”*** is distinct from the ***“one Lord, Jesus Christ.”*** Again, there is no inference in the text that they are the same existential being.

Col 1:19; 2:9 ***“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,”*** Here we find that the fullness of God lives in Jesus. How marvelous! Jesus embodies all of God’s qualities, virtues, heart, spirit and character.

Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians 2:5-6 ***“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;”*** Is this a declaration that Jesus is God the Son rather than the Son of God? It would be easy to jump to that conclusion, but didn’t God create the original Adam and Eve ***“in his image and likeness?”*** And didn’t Paul also say that Jesus came as another Adam in 1Cor 15:45? And didn’t

Jesus stress that we all ***“must be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect?”*** (Mt 5:48) Are we reading too much into this Scripture?

Heb 1:2, 8 says ***“he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe...But about the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;’”*** Would God appoint himself heir?

We read in 2Pet 1:1 ***“through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ”*** Are we replacing the ***“and”*** with ***“=”***. This text itself actually affirms the distinction between the Father and the Son.

Like the citations before it, 1Jn 2:23 says ***“No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.”*** Again, rather than blurring the Father and the Son together into one existential being, this passage affirms that they are two distinct beings.

1Jn 5:20 reads, ***“We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”*** If you read this text carefully, Jesus is affirmed as the ***“Son of God”*** who has come so that we may know ***“him who is true.”*** Who is being called ***“him who is true?”*** It is God. The words ***“He is the true God and eternal life”*** are clearly referring not to Jesus but to ***“him who is true,”*** which this passage identifies as God.

It is certainly incredibly Good News whether you choose to see Jesus as God the Son or as the Son of God. But as you can see, the doctrine of three persons in one God has effectively hidden in its shadows some other extremely important Good News.

For one, it effectively separated the Son of God from us as a human mentor and example. How so? If we define Jesus as one person of the Triune God, as God the Son, then we humans cannot even hope to be “like him.” He is then too unique and super-human. If, on the other hand, Jesus is the Son of God, and a real human being much like you and I but perfected in qualitative and resonant oneness with the Father, then we can realistically strive to become Christlike and emulate him as our brother and teacher, or Rabbi. As you can see, the consequences become huge.

Way More Good News is that there are abundant passages of Scripture which make crystal clear that Jesus actually is the perfect Son of God, distinct but qualitatively one with the Father. After we survey the lengthy list of these eye-opening passages below, we will find that there is even *additional* Good News for us all. Let’s take a look.

Mt 24:36 ***“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”*** Here we see that there is something that God knows but which Jesus

doesn't know. Did God the Father hide this from God the Son, or are they really distinct but qualitatively one?

Mt 26:39 ***“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”*** Either Jesus is praying to himself or this is the Son of God praying to his Father in heaven. They are obviously distinct entities.

Mt 27:46 ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”***

Mk 9:21 ***“Jesus asked the boy’s father, ‘How long has he been like this?’”*** God the Son should know everything about this boy unless Jesus is actually the Son of God, distinct from but one with the Father.

Lk 23:46 ***“Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’”***

Jn 5:19 ***“Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”***

Jn 5:30 ***“By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.”*** Jesus seeks to please the Father who sent him.

Jn 14:16, 28-31 ***“And I will ask the Father...for the Father is greater than I... I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.”*** Jesus said: ***“The Father is greater than I.”***

Jn 17:11, 21-23 ***“I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them***

by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one,... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 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.” Here we have the full text of the citation used above. It even more clearly drives home the point.

Acts 10:38, 40 *“because God was with him....but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.”* God was *“with him.”* God *“raised him.”*

Acts 17:31 *“...by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”* God *“appointed”* him. God *“raised”* him.

Rom 4:24 *“for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.”*

Rom 8:11 *“And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies”*

1Cor 15:27-28 *“God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him,”* An

interesting Scripture describing the relationship between God and his distinct Son.

2Cor 11:31 ***“The God and Father of the Lord Jesus”***

Gal 1:1 ***“by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead”***

Eph 1:20 ***“he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,”*** God seated Jesus next to him.

5:2 ***“Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*** Jesus was an ***“offering and sacrifice to God.”***

Phil 2:9 ***“God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,”*** God ***“exalted”*** his Son.

Col 3:17 ***“...do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*** Give thanks ***“through”*** Jesus ***“to God.”***

1Tim 2:5 ***“For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus,”*** Jesus is in the position of mediator, or bridge. One cannot mediate for oneself.

Heb 3:2 ***“He was faithful to the one who appointed him”*** God ***“appointed”*** him.

Heb 4:15 ***“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.”*** James said God cannot be tempted (Ja 1:13, cited below)

Heb 5:7-10 ***“During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.”*** This Scripture passage is full of affirmations that Jesus is the Son of God and not God the Son.

Ja 1:13 ***“When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;”*** As above, Jesus endured Satan’s temptations but did not succumb. If this is true, he cannot be the second person of a Triune God.

To pull this all together, it is incredibly Good News to know that either Jesus is God the Son or the Son of God. Either way, God visited us and is always with us. We are beyond blessed by such Good News. But the HUGE additional Good News this chapter brings out is that the overwhelming weight of evidence we find in the Bible indicates that not only is Jesus the living embodiment of God, but he is also a real, human role model, mentor and example of what a normal human being such as you and I can be and should be.

Being a new Adam (1Cor 15:45) Jesus also reveals to us that he IS what God originally intended for unfallen Adam to be in the beginning. Jesus is showing us God's original plan for human beings. ***“You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.”*** (Mt5:48) This then was not some theoretical wishful thinking or a mistranslation of sorts. This is God's thinking about us humans; indeed about you and me. Wow! That means that it is somehow achievable. It is doable.

I met a pastor once who said to me: *“Well, Jesus didn't really mean that (about being perfect). Maybe he was kidding.”* That's how much a doctrine can hide the greater Good News in its shadows, and detrimentally affect our faith and relationship with Jesus, and therefore our relationship with God. Now Jesus can take on an even a far greater practical role in our everyday lives, knowing that we can and are supposed to become literally like him. Wow! That's incredibly Good News.

17. Jesus will return in a recognizable way

We know from the Scriptures that Jesus will return one day to bring God's kingdom and make an end of this evil world. It is promised. It is the Good News that many believers have founded their lives on. It is what we all hope for. We all long to see that day in our own lifetime, God willing. But, it is far from clear how we will be able to recognize him when he comes. It won't be by his name. Countless Latino men were given the name Jesus. It won't be by facial recognition, either. And, we won't believe just anyone claiming to be Jesus-come-again.

One Biblical viewpoint expects Jesus to literally return on the puffy white things in the sky, called clouds. (Mt 24:30) Another has him being born as a male child from a woman. (Rev 12:5) What do we do? Again, we will find Way More Good News when we peer into the shadows of the doctrines surrounding this issue. Let's dare to take a look.

In the Book of Revelation, Jesus speaks to a man named John

throughout the first three chapters and then John is given an excursion through the spirit world where he sees the future of things to come leading up to Christ's ultimate return. That view of the Book of Revelation is not accepted by all scholars by any means. It is the subject of discussion and debate. However, this traditional view is also my perspective.

As the Book of Revelation begins, the writer "John" describes the circumstances of his extraordinary experience. He explains that Jesus himself spoke to him and directed him to ***"write on a scroll what you see..."*** (Rev. 1:11). It must be emphasized that this is Jesus Christ, himself, speaking to John and to us. For the remainder of the Book of Revelation, John is taken into the spirit world where he witnesses a series of mystical and difficult-to-decipher events pertaining to the End Times and the Lord's return.

Within all of this is an enormously important message from Jesus that we have totally missed. It is right there, clear as day but hidden in the shadows of our doctrines.

The focus of Jesus' message has to do with ***"He who overcomes"*** (or ***"who conquers,"*** or ***"who is the victor"***). Traditional doctrine requires that Jesus be speaking here about wonderful, successful Christians... believers who overcome all trials and temptations of the Evil One and persevere in faith until the very end. Any of us could be one of those who ***"overcomes."*** That is what we have thought.

But, is Jesus really talking about wonderful, successful Christians when he talks about **“Him who overcomes?”** No, in fact he is not. Then is Jesus talking about himself in the third person (ex: *“the son of man”*) as he so often did in the Gospels? In fact, he is not. He is talking about one specific individual. He is talking about *someone*. Let’s take a closer look.

Just who is Jesus referring to? The key word in this question is **“he”** or **“him.”** Consider Rev. 2:17... Jesus said:

“...To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.”

What is the symbolism of the **“stone”** and especially a **“white stone?”** Will all faithful believers get a white stone with a new name on it? No. We will soon see that Jesus was not saying that.

And whose **“new name”** will be on the white stone? Consider Rev. 3:12...

“Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.”

Who is speaking here? It is Jesus Christ himself speaking, as

attested to by the *Expositor's Bible* and other major Bible commentaries. Jesus is telling us that the person he refers to as “**He**” will be given a new name. And it is the new name of Jesus (The Lord) himself. It will not be a familiar name. No one knows the name except the one who receives it. And who will do the writing? Jesus.

Clearly Jesus is not talking about giving this new name to all the saints who have been faithful to him. The following is more evidence that he is talking about a specific *someone*. Consider Rev. 19:11-16... Here John speaks of what he is given to see and experience in the spirit world after receiving the direct testimony of Jesus, himself:

“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is The Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of kings and Lord of lords.”

Here John *sees* the one who is coming with ***“a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.”*** Who is he? Christians everywhere have assumed this to be Jesus at his return! After all, he is making war and judging the world from atop a white horse. He is followed by the armies of heaven. The sword of truth issues forth from his mouth with which he smites the nations. He wears a robe dipped in blood. On his robe is written: ***“King of kings and Lord of lords.”***

But again, **WHO IS THE WRITER?** It is Jesus. Jesus is doing the writing. **WHO IS THE ONE WRITTEN UPON?** Someone else. Not Jesus. **WHO WROTE “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” UPON HIM?** Jesus! Is it becoming clearer now? Who is the one on the white horse?

Consider Rev. 2:26-27... Jesus himself is speaking to John:

“To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations -- he will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery, just as I have received authority from my Father.”

Jesus is clearly speaking of a specific *someone*; someone who is serving as an extension of himself.

These passages make three critical points. Jesus is saying, ***“I will give him authority over the nations.”*** The ***“I”*** is Jesus and the ***“him”*** is someone else. Secondly Jesus said, ***“He shall rule them***

with an iron scepter.” He did not say *“I.”* And thirdly, Jesus removes any lingering doubts by declaring, *“just as I have received authority from my Father.”* This makes it finally clear that Jesus is talking about someone else; someone very special who will serve as an extension of himself.

“But perhaps this is an angel talking for and about Jesus?” DEFINITELY NOT. This is Jesus Christ talking. There is no question about that. Jesus is referring to someone else who will come and rule the nations with a rod of iron, with the sword of truth issuing forth from his mouth, who will lead the armies of heaven in the final judgment of the world and establish God’s kingdom while Jesus supervises from the Throne of God. Jesus will then grant *this person* to sit with him on his throne in heaven. Consider Rev. 3:21... Jesus himself said:

“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.”

Will millions of good Christians sit with Jesus on his throne? No. We have not allowed ourselves to see, not only in these obvious passages but throughout this mystical experience, that Jesus is speaking of *“He,” “Him,” “His,”* etc., referring not to himself as so often in the Gospels, but to someone else; a specific special person serving Jesus as the return of the Christ.

Keep in mind as you review the following passages, taken almost entirely from the Book of Revelation, that John the Baptist came “*in the spirit and power of Elijah*” as announced by the angel Gabriel to his father Zechariah. John was not actually Elijah, but he clearly came as the return of Elijah, according to Jesus’ own explicit words. (refer back to chapter 2)

Notice the following, regarding the return of Christ:

will **he** find faith..... Lk 18:8
He will dash them Rev 2:27
he is coming Rev 1:7
out of **his** mouth Rev 1:16; 19:15, 21
him who overcomes Rev 2:7,17, 26; 3:12, 21
He who overcomes..... Rev 2:11; 3:5; 21:7
I will give **him** power..... Rev 2:17, 26, 28
acknowledge **his** name Rev 3:5
make **him** a pillar Rev 3:12
grant **him** to sit with me Rev 3:21
him who receives it Rev 2:17
his name Rev 3:5; 14:1; 22:4
his bride..... Rev 19:7

So, the elephant is now squarely in the middle of the tent. Dare we pose the question? Could it be possible that Jesus is saying to us through the Book of Revelation that he will return in a manner similar to the way Elijah returned 2000 years ago, through the person of a specific special someone “*who overcomes*” and is

qualified to represent him?

But two angels told Jesus' disciples in Acts 1:11...

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

What an ironic statement. The angels are admonishing the men for ***“...looking into the sky”*** anticipating the return of Christ. This passage is hard to decipher but it appears to be a mistaken notion to think that the Lord will return from the sky. We must recall that the word “clouds” in the Bible sometimes refers to people instead of the white puffy things in the sky. (Heb 12:1; Jude 1:12)

Consider also John 3:13... where Jesus says:

“No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.”

Jesus ***“came from heaven”*** but he was born of Mary's womb, as a human baby. No one saw Jesus float down from heaven. If we are to see him ***“come back”*** from heaven by the same way as we saw him ***“go into heaven,”*** but we are not to look into the sky, then how did we see him ***“go into heaven?”*** He came from heaven being born from the womb of his mother Mary, he was made perfect through the things that he suffered (Heb 5:8-9), and he rose from

the grave and went home to the Father in his eternal spirit body. As you recall from Chapter 10 of this book, the Scriptural evidence clearly indicates that Jesus resurrected spiritually, not physically. As St. Paul said, ***“It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body.”*** (1Cor 15:44)

Thus, Jesus went to his Father in heaven in the spirit, as eyewitnesses said they saw him go (Lk 24:51), and he will return just as the spirit of Elijah returned, through a special someone anointed and appointed by Jesus to represent him. Therefore, the angels were correct. There is no reason to look up into the sky anticipating the return of Jesus. He will return as we saw him go; in a most natural way.

Then, where should we look? Perhaps this is our cue to connect to the Book of Revelation where it says in verse 12:5...

“She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.”

When Jesus explained to his followers how they could find him when he returned, he gave a rather cryptic instruction:

“Wherever the body (or carcass) is, there the eagles (or vultures) will be gathered together.” (Mt 24:28) Jesus seemed to be using the word ***“body”*** to refer to the Lord at his return. The key

word in this passage, however, is not **“body”** but rather the word **“eagles.”** (or **“vultures”** in other translations)

Two-thousand years ago, eagles were not the symbol of freedom and democracy as in the United States today. Eagles (or vultures) were considered the king of predators.

What Jesus was trying to convey to us was that where you find the Lord, all the forces of evil will be gathered together to oppose him. Jesus himself defeated the power of Satan, but we still have not. (Rom 7:24; 1Jn 1:10) The Evil One is still alive and well in this fallen world, and he will not welcome the Lord’s return any more than he did 2000 years ago. Thus, the war of Armageddon.

Similarly, Jesus was not at all confident that his return would be acclaimed by believers, at least not at first. That’s why Jesus asked, **“Will he find faith?”** (when he returns). (Lk 18:8) All of the same kind of self-righteous religious leaders and skeptics that opposed and betrayed Jesus 2000 years ago are alive and well today. He will be branded a dangerous heretic and blasphemer because the Sword of Truth which comes from his mouth will go beyond the words already given to us in the New Testament. He will not come to simply read the Book of Matthew to us. Jesus said, **“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.”** (Jn 16:12) **“I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe. How then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things.”** (Jn 3:12) He will be hated and despised because the world prefers

the “*darkness*” over the “*light*.”

Those trapped in the shadows of the traditional doctrines surrounding this will decry him as the anti-Christ. He will be accused of every crime the devil himself is guilty of. Some evil people will call for his death. If crucifixion were in vogue, they would beg for that. Didn't Jesus warn that false prophets would deceive “*even the elect?*” How then will “*the elect*” be sure of the real one?

The Way More Good News is that God is not trying to trick us and make it nearly impossible to recognize him when he comes. How cruel would that be? He *wants* us to recognize him and embrace him in faith and love. But, God also doesn't want us to fall for deceivers and charlatans. He would not make it so difficult that even Biblical scholars could not figure it out. The Way More Good News is that Jesus will return in a natural way, just as he did before and just as he went. He will be recognizable. But are we alert and awake and not closed-minded, mired in the shadows of doctrine? That is the huge question that surrounds this Way More Good News.

18. Way More Good News

The rock-solid foundation of Christianity is the love of God perfectly embodied, expressed and modeled for us in his son, Jesus Christ. He is the Good News.

He modeled for us what it means to ***“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”*** (Mt 22:37) He demonstrated what it means to ***“Love your neighbor as yourself; love your enemy; love one another as I have loved you.”*** (Lk 10:27; Mt 5:44; Jn 13:34) He showed us the parental yearning heart of God for his wayward children; his ***“lost sheep”*** (Lk 15:4-6) and toward his ***“prodigal sons.”*** (Lk 15:11-32) He made atonement for and exercised his authority to forgive the sins of any who have faith, love and obedience before him.

His is a love that can be found nowhere else. Jesus was and is the embodiment of the Beatitudes. He was and is indomitable and perfectly resonant with his Father in heaven. He loved even those who hated and killed him. He showed God’s universal unconditional love for anyone and everyone. He gave his life for

all people, regardless of whether they were worthy of his ultimate sacrifice or not.

Jesus himself was and is the rock. He founded his church upon the rock of faith; faith in the Father, faith in him and faith in God's Word. This foundation is unshakable. This is the rock-solid foundation of the house that cannot be blown down in the stormy winds of time.

But within these pages we were reminded that not only was Jesus' mother amazing, she was much more than the pristine vessel through which the Savior was born. She was a loving wife and mother of a large family, completing her own womanhood in God's image and likeness. We likewise discovered that St. John the Baptist was a real, imperfect person like you and I, and that he did well to testify to Jesus but he could have done much more. God bless him. We found that Jesus' humble birth was actually miraculous. We were reminded that God is God and man is man, in spite of our best efforts to blur them into one. We rediscovered that God put you in charge of your life, your future and your destiny, and that he refuses to take that responsibility away from you. We were reminded that forgiveness is only the beginning, and that we are to experience incredible transformation within ourselves. We saw that Jesus' baptism was hot and transformative, rather than wet and cold, as was John's. We discovered that the shedding of Jesus' blood for us was necessary

because of the failure of man. We realized that Jesus resurrected tangibly but in spirit, wherein he can attend to all of our intimate, personal needs. We were reminded that we can not only have hope in Jesus, but we can actually have the joy and happiness that comes with being like him. We saw that God had an even bigger agenda for Jesus 2000 years ago than to bring forgiveness for our sins, and that he will complete the package when he brings his kingdom to come. We learned that Jesus showed us clearly how to defeat Satan in our own lives by doing it himself. We found that God's kingdom was meant for this earth, but not for this fallen "world". We were encouraged in our conviction that Jesus really did raise people from the dead. We uncovered that sin came into the human world in a very realistic and understandable way, and not through eating a morsel of tasty food. And, we discovered the heretofore unnoticed but unmistakable message that Jesus will return in a normal way that we can recognize.

Did this book help you discover some more Good News in God's Word? I certainly hope so. Keep looking in the shadows. There is still Way More Good News to be found.

- NOTES -

other books by Dr. Hentrich...

- *The Humanist God*
- *Dare to See*
- *God Doesn't Want to be God Anymore*
- *Angelic DNA*