

The Evidence for Jesus

The
Glory
of the
Son

The Evidence for Jesus

**Based only on His
Own Words**

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The Evidence for Jesus

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The Evidence for Jesus summarizes several volumes and over thirty years of research I have done on biblical proofs and prophecies.

This summary was written at the end of my teaching career. I dedicate it to some 9,000 students I had the honor of instructing in my 32 years of teaching at two universities.

The Evidence for Jesus is also dedicated to all Christians who have the desire and the courage to step out of their comfort zone of tradition, who are willing to examine unpopular ideas, who are *not* the kind about whom this prophecy was uttered:

The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

II Timothy 4:3 NIV

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The Urgent Message of this Book

We have two branches of sciences: physical and spiritual. In the last two centuries, as the physical sciences have advanced in prestige, the spiritual sciences have declined. The main reason is this: Scientists accept and apply only testable and provable standards. This principle is often violated in spiritual sciences. The violation often comes from blending the authority of Scripture with personal views.

In religion, unlike science, the opportunities for abuse are abundant. Anyone with ambition and desire for fame can create his own brand of faith. Dependence on testable and provable standards prevents such abuses.

The purpose of *The Evidence for Jesus* is to restore a sense of objectivity to religion, to introduce the kind of evidence that would appeal to saints and scientists alike. It begins by offering a set of testable and provable standards by which we can demonstrate, with absolute certainty, the divine station of Jesus Christ. It then discloses the popular but untestable standards that have led to widespread abuse of religion and sheer deception throughout the centuries. And finally, it introduces a totally novel interpretation of the prophecies of the second Advent, marked by the principle of absolute consistency.

I have no desire to be known as a founder or promoter of a new theory or school of interpretation of biblical prophecies. Yet I cannot remain silent; I have found one theory, one school of thinking, completely absent in all biblical studies. That theory is by far the most reasonable and comprehensive. It explains everything, yet has never been taken seriously. I can think of two reasons: It is not rooted in tradition, and it is not sensational. Those are the two most beloved and the most desired features of all theories of the second Advent. Together they capture and sustain the attention of the masses of believers.

The new theory proposed here is so radically different from all other theories or schools of interpretation that it deserves a new name: ***The School of Metaphoric Miracles***. Think of all the prophecies of the second Advent as pieces of a grand jigsaw puzzle spread throughout the Scripture. Each school tries to put the pieces together to create the most complete and harmonious picture. Which school is worthy of attention? The one that finds a place for *every* piece of the puzzle and shows absolute harmony among all the pieces.

Would God contradict Himself? As you will see, all the other schools of interpretation either ignore prophecies that fail to fit into their theories or alter their meanings to make them fit. In those schools, you will find many rules, and countless contradictions and exceptions. In this book, you will find only one rule with no contradictions or exceptions of any kind. The one rule it follows is this: All the prophecies that link the second Advent of our Lord directly with spectacular and heavenly events are ***metaphors***.

This is the only theory that has not been proposed or considered by Bible interpreters. What if this theory turns out to be true? Should we refuse to examine the evidence that supports it? The implication of ignoring this theory is awesome: we may end up denying our Lord! This book is written to minimize or perhaps prevent such a possibility. It attempts to inspire and instill a sense of reality, wholeness, and balance in our understanding of prophecies.

The prevailing narrow view of interpretation allows us to see only a limited range of reality. Which nights reveal the stars' splendors? Clear nights or cloudy? This book presents much evidence to show that the extreme literalism so popular in our time has created vast clouds of confusion. By presenting overwhelming biblical evidence, it removes the clouds and allows us to see the splendid stars unhampered, in a way we have never seen them before. *The Evidence for Jesus* stretches our vision and lifts our hearts and minds beyond the drifting clouds of narrow-mindedness and petty arguments. Only by leaving our comfort zones of tradition, only by soaring with the wings of courage and detachment can we arise and witness God's grand and glorious heavens of harmony.

The book's most urgent message is this: ***We must approach prophecy in a spirit of absolute humility.*** How can we do this?

- By acknowledging that prophecies are extremely complex and understanding their intended purposes is often beyond the comprehension of the most astute scholars.
- By recognizing that no one, no scholar, no religious leader, however intelligent or educated, has the right to regard his personal, private interpretation as the only version of truth:

...no prophēcy of Scripturē is of any privatē interpretatiōn... II Peter 1:20 NKJ

As long as we speak with total humility and open-mindedness, as long as we put forward our ideas only as theories—never as absolute truths—we are under God's grace. But when we cross the line—from theory to truth—we become worshipers not of God but of our own egos.

As human beings, we must constantly guard against an inborn tendency to think we are always right and others are always wrong. Is it not human to err? Is it not in our nature to sin and fall short of the Glory of God (Romans 3:23)? When we speak with absolute confidence, when we tell others that we are certain of the true meaning of prophecies, by our attitude we show pride; we imply that ***we are*** the Glory of God. It is in this spirit—that of absolute humility—that this book is written and offered to all lovers and seekers of truth.

The message of *The Evidence for Jesus* can be summarized in the following statement from the noted Christian author Dr. James Kennedy, who quotes Dr. Charles Hodge, regarded by some scholars as the greatest Christian theologian of the last century:

The great Princeton theologian of the last century, Dr. Charles Hodge, said...that ***though the Old Testament is filled with some 333 prophecies concerning the first coming of Christ; in spite of that...*** they crucified Christ because of a misunderstanding about what the Messiah was really coming to do. And we should because of that be somewhat humbled and modest in our attempts to interpret

prophecies concerning the second coming of Christ. ***It is quite possible that all of us [Christian leaders] are wrong as well.*** [Emphasis added.]¹

The Evidence for Jesus shows the possibility that Jesus may return the second time as He did the first time: as a humble human being. Is this far-fetched? I invite you to read the biblical evidence presented here and see this possibility for yourself.

By far the most distinguishing feature of the view presented here is consistency and harmony. After showing absolute harmony among the prophecies, this book presents a set of 19 standards by which we can know the Lord at both of His Advents, standards that no human being can ever copy, no deceiver can approach even remotely. To demonstrate our Lord's supreme distinction over all human beings, to show the infinite gap that separates the divine from the human, Jesus is compared, in relation to each of those 19 standards, with four significant religious leaders of the last two centuries.

While writing this book, I prayed to Jesus Christ to be my guide in my search for true knowledge. I pleaded with Him to teach me to speak the truth in love, to present my message in a language that will be understood and appreciated by all Christians who truly know Him and love Him.

I do not know if He answered my prayers and pleadings. Only the future can tell. Yet I have absolute hope in His promises:

What man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

Christ (Matthew 7:9-11 NKJ)

May the Son bless you with His everlasting Glory and Grace.

Hugh Motlagh

Prove All Things

1 Thess. 5:21

The Need for Testable and Provable Standards

If someone asked you, “Why are you a Christian?” How would you answer? Do you know a set of objective standards by which you can prove your faith to someone without faith? This book will offer you such knowledge. It will present a set of standards not only for the first Advent of our Lord but also for the second—standards that no human being, no deceiver can ever copy, no matter how ingenious he may be.

Why are there so many claims and so much confusion in religion? All the confusion and chaos can be traced to a lack of testable and provable standards. In the absence of objective standards, every belief looks as valid as every other. The vacuum—lack of standards—offers ample opportunities for abuse. In the last two centuries, many have taken advantage of it. Just like starting a new business, anyone with a little ambition can start his own branch of faith.

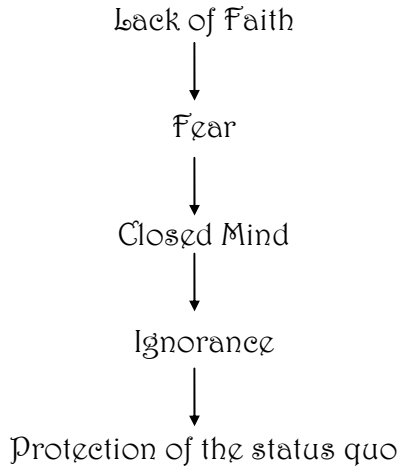
A good family and a good government are blessings from heaven. What about abusive ones? Surely it is better to have no family than a bad one, no political system than a corrupt one. Is this not also true with religion?

Religion in its pure form is the most glorious gift from God. What if it is abused? What if it leads to bigotry, hatred, separation, fanaticism, and war? What if it turns into a business venture?

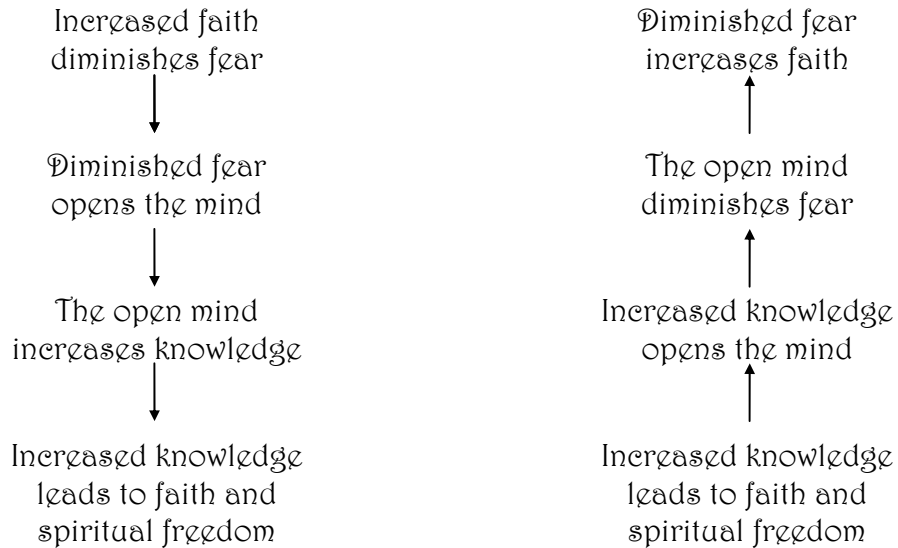
Where does the abuse come from? Religion is a lamp and faith its light. Today we have many lamps, but little light. Consider this cycle:

- Lack of faith leads to fear of the loss of faith.
- Fear closes the mind by preventing critical thinking and true understanding.
- A closed mind leads to ignorance. It protects and preserves the accumulated and compounded ignorance of present and past ages!

How can we break the closed cycle? By detecting or opening a crack at any of the four levels in this closed system:



Let us see how the closed system can be opened. We can either start from the top by strengthening the dimension of faith or from the bottom by strengthening the dimension of knowledge:



A closed system does not allow new knowledge to enter the minds. An open system encourages constant searching and fearless evaluation of new knowledge through critical thinking.

Through knowledge shall the just be delivered. Proverbs 11:9

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge... Hosea 4:6

...let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance...
Proverbs 1:5 NIV

The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly.
Proverbs 15:14 NIV

The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.
Proverbs 18:15 NIV

Now suppose we have many trusting and fearless people who thirst for knowledge with open minds. What then? How can they seek the truth? How can they come to points of agreement?

In no system of knowledge can we find as much chaos as in religion. Discovering the spiritual truth is like detecting one masked person among millions of others! The only way we can succeed is to unmask everyone. How can we do this? By following the scientific method, by using our rational powers along with a little common sense. All those resources—science, reason, and common sense—agree on this prime principle: to be recognized as true or false, an idea or a claim must be both *testable* and *provable*. As we shall see, the Scripture also supports this principle.

If there were no testing and proving, there would be no science and little if any advancement in human life. Suppose you claim you have invented a car that avoids accidents. What would common sense ask you to do? To make a testable model. Suppose you claim you have made a toothpaste that prevents cavities. You may be a good salesman and may persuade many people to buy your product. But does that prove your claim? No. The only proof worthy of attention is evidence based on objective testing.

Human beings make many of their critical choices by feelings, by personal needs and convenience. As long as we apply subjective tendencies and preferences and ignore objective testing and proving, the religious chaos will continue. In that environment, every claim looks as good as every other.

Can we find a testable and provable system in religion as we have found in science? Can we agree on a set of standards by which we can discover or detect the one masked person among millions? Yes, this book will do just that. It will present a set of such standards by which you can separate truth from falsehood with ease and confidence and with absolute certainty.



2

I Am the Bread of Life

Christ (John 6:35)

Part I

Signs and Standards Our Lord Used to Prove His Divine Mission

The Jews repeatedly asked our Lord for an evidence of His divine mission. And each time they were disappointed, Jesus told them what they did not want to hear! The following is one of the most direct and definitive responses our Lord gave to those who asked Him to prove Himself:

What sign (miracles, wonderwork) will You perform then, so that we may see it and believe and rely on and adhere to You?... [Jesus responded:] I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to Me will never be hungry. John 6:30, 35 AB

Imagine yourself giving the response Jesus gave! Someone asks you to prove yourself, and you defend yourself by saying, “I am a wonderful bread. Taste me!” That is what, in effect, our Lord said. That response contains a world of wisdom. It teaches us a critical lesson. We want quick fixes, an instant revelation of physical power. God simply asks us to taste His Bread! How different is God’s way from the human way! And how different the way He speaks!

...as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:9

What did Jesus mean by “the Bread of Life”? He meant He could satisfy the spiritual hunger. How could He do that? By His Word and teachings. In effect, He said, “If you want proof, try my Word and teachings. Examine them in the laboratories of your hearts and minds. Only by putting them to the test can you discover their richness and know their heavenly origin. Only then can you tell that the Breadmaker is indeed from God.”

How can we know something is good or bad? Only by putting it to the test. Why did God give us the gift of understanding? To separate good from bad. How can we do this? By testing:

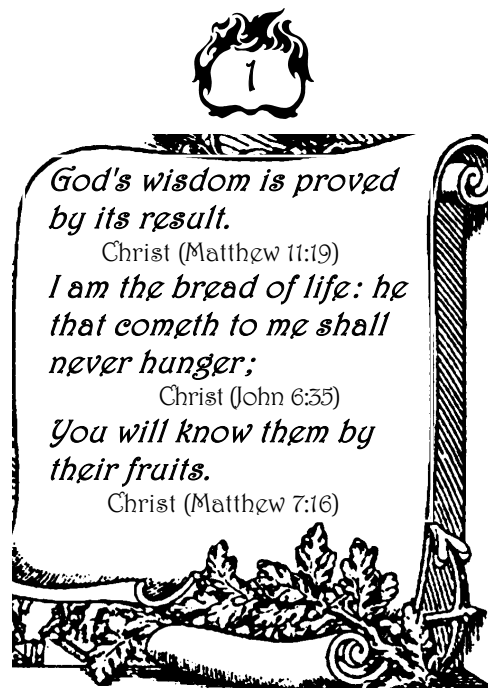
Test the spirits to see whether they are from God... I John 4:1 NIV

Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.. Matthew 7:7

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. I Thessalonians 5:21

Did our Lord give us the same standard for recognizing those who come after Him? Yes, once again, He offered the metaphor of food:

Watch out for false prophets...By their fruit you will recognize them.
Matthew 7:15-16 NIV



What are “*the fruits*” of a Redeemer from God? First and foremost are His *spiritual* fruits, which come from His Spirit—the Spirit of God. They consist of *His Self, His teaching, His example, and His influence on others*. Then there are His *physical* fruits, which consist of the unfoldment or fulfillment of specific prophecies in His *earthly* life, such as the place and the date of His birth and ministry. *Examining “the fruits” is the central topic of this book.*

The first critical fruits of a Redeemer from God are the virtues He manifests in Himself and inspires in others. Virtues are the most distinctive mark of our humanity. With them we are as noble and luminous as angels; without them we are as lowly as amoebas.

Examples of virtues include: love, peace, justice, joy, hope, wisdom, humility, courtesy, gentleness, patience, trust in God, honesty, chastity, self-respect, self-control, self-sacrifice, unity, cooperation, loyalty, holiness, generosity, courage, and purity of heart. Producing good fruits is at the very heart and soul of religion. If this is lacking, nothing else matters. The prime purpose of the Tree is to bear good fruits. “A fruitless tree is fit for fire” (Matt. 3:10).

The following verses contain a world of wisdom. They explain this critical question: Who was Jesus Christ and what was His purpose of coming?

...my Father is the gardener...I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned...***This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*** As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you...You did not choose me, but ***I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last...This is my command: Love each other.***

John 15:1-17 NIV

What metaphors and messages did Jesus present?

- God is the Gardener.
- Jesus is the true Vine, the Tree of Life.
- Human beings are branches.
- The ultimate purpose of the Gardener, the Tree, and the branches is to produce ***fruits*** worthy of the Gardener.
- Love is the richest fruit of that Tree; everything good comes from love.
- Love is a gift from the Gardener to the Vine. From the Vine it passes through the branches to produce heavenly fruits, lives laden with virtues.
- The evidence of our love for the Lord is obedience to His commands.

The following verses further clarify the meaning and give examples of ***fruits***:

But ***the fruit*** of the Spirit is ***love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness*** and ***self-control***.

Galatians 5:22-23 NIV

Bring forth ***fruit*** that is consistent with repentance—let your lives prove your change of heart...

Christ (Matthew 3:8 AB)

...walk as children of light...For ***the fruit—the effect, the product—of the Light***...[consists]...of ***kindly goodness, uprightness of heart*** and ***truthness of life***.

Ephesians 5:8-9 AB

Thus the ultimate purpose of our Lord was to give us spiritual nourishment. That nourishment raises us from the depths of despair to the heights of joy and hope; it changes spiritual death into ***everlasting life***. What more can anyone expect or hope for?

I am come that they might have [spiritual] *life*, and that they might have it more abundantly. Christ (John 10:10)

How can we connect our souls to the Tree of Life? The link is the Word of God:

...the words that I speak unto you, they are *spirit*, and they are *life*. Christ (John 6:63)

If a Redeemer manifests perfect virtues in His life and inspires others by His example to live virtuous lives, that is a supreme sign. However, this sign in itself does not present the full profile of a Redeemer from God. To leave no doubts, to assure the truth seekers, God offers not one but many signs and proofs. He makes the heavenly fruits so superb, so divine, that everyone who seeks can recognize them. He wants to help us separate truth from falsehood and see their difference as clearly as day from night. We may make mistakes if we consider only one sign, but when we put them all together, the possibility of making a mistake is reduced to zero. The zero possibility holds true only if these two conditions are met:

- ◆ If we are spiritually *ripe* and *pure*.
- ◆ If we follow *God's* standards, *His Map*, rather than *our own*.

A comparison between our Lord's two statements, the one about *future* Messengers or Prophets from God (Matthew 7:15-27), and the one about *Himself* (John 15:1-17) shows these common links:

The standard our Lord used for HIMSELF: "I am the true vine" (John 15:1):

You, my disciples, are my fruits. Your lives must reflect the Vine. They should manifest the same purity and perfection. The power that binds you to me and gives you everlasting life is love. That power must become manifest in you, who are my fruits. The evidence of your attachment and your love for me is your ***obedience to my commands***.

The standard our Lord offered for knowing FUTURE Messengers: "By their fruits you will recognize them" (Matthew 7:20):

The ultimate evidence of a Prophet or Redeemer from God is the fruits He produces. In judging God's future Messengers, use this standard. If you obey this and all other commands, you are my true disciples.

Comparing the preceding two statements, we can draw this conclusion: Producing good fruits is the ultimate goal of a Redeemer from God. And the ultimate evidence of a good fruit is obedience to the commands of the Tree. If a fruit refuses to obey—such as coming up with his own list of standards of judging a Redeemer—that fruit falls from grace and loses its connection to the Tree.

A study of the four Gospels clearly shows that when our Lord spoke to the Jews, He used the following words more than any others to prove His divine distinction: "***works***," "***deeds***," "***bread***," and "***water***." He asked the Jews repeatedly to look at His "***works***." What did He mean by that word? His responses show that He used "***works***" in the same sense He used "***fruits***" and "***bread***." He applied that word to ***everything He manifested in Himself and produced in others***. Consider these references:

Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me; or else believe Me for the sake of the [very] *works* themselves. If you cannot trust Me, at least *let these works that I do in My Father's name convince you.* John 14:11 AB

...*the works* that the Father has appointed Me to accomplish and finish, *the very same works that I am now doing, are a witness and proof that the Father has sent Me.*

John 5:36 AB

If we replace “*works*” with “*fruits*” in the preceding verses, we will find no change in their meaning.

The Gospel of John presents a most fascinating dialogue between our Lord and the Jews, who just like today's Christians, before submitting their souls, wanted to see some *physical signs or miracles* from Him. Jesus told them that *He Himself* was the miracle. If they saw Him without veils and clouds, if they “watched” Him with pure hearts, they would see His heavenly glory, they would realize that everything about Him was a wonder. Jesus' response clearly shows that physical feats are not needed. The Redeemer's “*works*,” “*fruits*,” or *the spiritual food* He brings is the most convincing evidence of His divine station. In this dialogue, our Lord used the words “*bread*” “*the heavenly Bread*,” “*the Bread of God*,” and “*the Bread of Life*” in place of “*fruits*.” If we replace one word for the other, there will be no change in His message:

The Jews: What are we to do to carry out what God requires? John 6:28 AB

Jesus: This is the work (service) that God asks of you, that you believe in the One Whom He has sent—that you cleave to, trust, rely on and have faith in His Messenger. John 6:29 AB

The Jews: What sign (miracles, wonderwork) will You perform then, so that we may see it and believe and rely on and adhere to You? What [supernatural] work have You to show what You can do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the wilderness. As the Scripture says, He gave them bread out of heaven to eat. John 6:30-31 AB

Jesus: I assure you, I most solemnly tell you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven—what Moses gave you was not the Bread from heaven—but it is My Father Who gives you *the true, heavenly Bread. For the Bread of God is He Who comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world.* John 6:32-33 AB

The Jews: Lord, give us this bread always—all the time! John 6:34 AB

Jesus: I am *the Bread of Life*. He who comes to Me will never be hungry and he who believes on and cleaves to and trusts in and relies on Me will never thirst any more—at any time. But [as] I told you, although you have seen Me, still you do not believe and trust and have faith. [All brackets and parentheses as original.] John 6: 35-36 AB

Bread and fruit look different but they serve the same purpose: they nourish us. As bearing fruits is the ultimate purpose of a plant, so is bearing grain, from which bread is

made. They are virtually identical in both their origin and purpose. As Jesus said, “I am the Bread of life,” so could He say, “I am the Fruit of life.”

In the preceding dialogue, our Lord does *not* say, “I can’t perform miracles.” We know all powers were in His hands (Matthew 28:18). That is not the point at all. Jesus had the power to bring down a million loaves of bread from the sky in an instant. He could cover the entire planet with bread. The question is this: Why would He *need* to bring bread from the sky? The question is so easy that even a child can answer. Jesus compared *Himself* to the *Bread* that came from heaven. Which “*bread*” would you want? *Jesus’ Spirit*, who was the Lord, or a million loaves of bread, even if they poured down from the sky?

Should we not be able to see the face of God hidden behind the barrier of flesh, in a humble human being? If you had the choice, which would you prefer to see? The spiritual Bread—the Spirit of God in our Lord—or pieces of bread that poured down upon you like hail?

Consider also this conversation:

Tempter: If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.
Matthew 4:3 NKJ

Jesus: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.
Matthew 4:4 NKJ

Once again Jesus refused to respond to a request for a miracle. We can discover all these gems of truth and knowledge in His brief response: True bread is spiritual; it is the Word of God. I have come neither to impress nor to entertain you. My evidence is the Bread of Life. Once you taste it, you will recognize its miraculous powers. I have come to offer spiritual wonders, to change the gloomy and stony hearts into the glorious light of love and joy and peace. That is a true miracle, and that is my mission.

On still another occasion, the Jews did not specify what they wanted from the sky. They asked for any sign as long as it came from the sky. Notice how strongly our Lord condemned their seemingly innocent request:

One day the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Jesus’ claim by asking him to show them *a miraculous sign from heaven*. He replied, “...only an evil, faithless generation would ask for a miraculous sign...”
Matthew 16:1-4 NLT

We find still another refusal from Jesus to perform miracles as a sign of His divine station:

Then the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, testing Him. But He sighed deeply in His spirit, and said, “Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation.”
Mark 8:11-12 NKJ

Why did Jesus not depend on His supernatural powers as the proof of His divine mission? Mostly because miracles have been, and still are, the most widely abused evidence. They are the weapons cult leaders and false prophets have always used to attract the gullible masses.

For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect... Mark 13:22 NIV

What does Jesus imply? He implies that miracles are so tempting, so deceptive, so unreliable that potentially they can deceive even the best among the Christians—the most righteous ones—if they put their confidence in them. What about the masses of people who are at best mediocre? They can certainly be deceived by miracles.

Jesus' prediction that even "the elect" can be deceived has come true. We find a number of Christian denominations founded by leaders or prophets who have claimed unproven miracles. In those denominations, we find many righteous and sincere Christians, whom Jesus called "the elect." If those leaders or prophets had not claimed miracles, they would not have succeeded in attracting millions of followers.

Consider also these verses:

If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. Deuteronomy 13:1-3 NIV

The preceding verses indicate that:

- False prophets can perform miracles.
- God allows false prophets to perform miracles to test the depth of our faith in Him as the Lord.
- Those who base their faith on miracles rather than on teachings (such as the oneness of God) are likely to fail in their heavenly test.

According to the Scripture, Aaron performed some of the most astonishing miracles:

But the magicians did the same thing by their secret arts. Exodus 8:7

If we put our faith in miracles, how could we separate the One who speaks for God from the magicians who can perform wonders by their "secret arts"?

People are deceived only when they disregard God's guidance, when they put tradition above the divine directions. Unfortunately that is the norm:

You neglect the commandment of God, in order to maintain the tradition of men. Christ (Mark 7:8 NEB)

Preferring miracles as an evidence over "Fruits" or "the Bread of Life" is a classic example of "neglecting the commands of God in order to maintain the tradition of men."

Why do people prefer miracles? Because they excite the imagination and entertain the eyes. Wouldn't you love to see someone walk on water or fly through the sky by flapping his arms? But what is God's way? Does the Lord of the visible and invisible come down to our level? Does the Creator of the universe turn Himself into a master of a magic show? Does He play to our wishes and weaknesses or depend on His supreme wisdom? Notice the enduring harms miracles can inflict on religion:

- They change religion from a spiritual experience to entertainment. They turn it into a magic show.
- They destroy or undermine the gift of faith.
- They encourage fraud and abuse.
- They lower the supreme station of religion by bringing it down from the scientific realm, where every claim must be tested and proved, to the level of blind faith, conformity, mere claims, and counterclaims of all kinds.

Depending on the supernatural is exciting, but its consequences have been devastating. Much of the prevailing confusion in religion has resulted from exchanging the testable and provable standards, which God has given us, for our own preferred magical and childish standards. How can we prove or disprove the records of miraculous acts claimed by many cult leaders? Suppose there were a hundred cult members with various beliefs, each of them claiming a bigger and better miracle for his leader. Is this the way God wants us to recognize His supreme Redeemers?

To see the critical significance of depending on testable and provable standards, consider one more example. In recent years, a famous Christian leader repeatedly claimed, before millions of viewers on national TV, that God spoke to him often and told him precisely how he should resolve a problem or run his ministry. He remained popular for many years until one of his trusted friends turned against him and divulged his well kept secret. The friend produced and offered to the court videos to show that the famous charismatic leader, who frequently heard messages from God, also frequently visited prostitutes! Those millions of wonderful but gullible Christians accepted every word he uttered as the truth. They really believed him. They did not have the slightest idea that they were being deceived. Why? They were all depending on untestable and unprovable standards.

How can we prove or disprove claims such as, “The Holy Spirit talks to me all the time!” “Jesus showed me in a vision!” “I discovered golden plates in earth with messages from heaven!” “An angel told me so!”? By accepting untestable and unprovable claims we open the door to abuse and sheer fraud. We send this invitation to every opportunist: “If you have any ambition, any desire for fame and fortune, come in and start a new sect or denomination. All you need is a letter of recommendation from God. As long as you merely claim that God has put His seal of approval on your letter by giving you an unprovable miracle, you are assured of success!”

If we pay attention to the way our Lord responded to those who doubted His authority, we find again and again this fundamental truth: He shied away from the untestable and the unprovable. Ponder also the following verses. Once again our Lord refers to His “*works*” as the evidence of His divine mission, and then links His *works* to His “*voice*.”

Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The *works* that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My *voice*, and I know them, *and they follow Me.*”

John 10:25-27 NKJ

What does our Lord mean by “*voice*”? Where can we hear His *voice*? Only in His *words and teachings*. As we can see, once again Jesus presents *His words as the ultimate*

evidence of His mission. Never does our Lord tell the doubters: “What miracle do you want as proof of my mission? I will do it for you.” He constantly refers to His “works,” His “fruits,” or “the heavenly Bread” as the ultimate evidence of who He was. By His words and deeds, He showed us **that miracles were simply an EXPRESSION of His divine nature, but not a PROOF of it.**

Here once again Jesus emphasizes His good works—His good fruits—as evidence of His divine distinction:

“Many **good works** I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?” The Jews answered Him, saying, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.”

John 10:32-33 NKJ

Let us replace “**works**” in the preceding quotation with “**fruits**” to see if there is any change in Jesus’ message:

“Many **good fruits** I have shown you from My Father. For which of those **fruits** do you stone Me?” The Jews answered Him, saying, “For good **fruits** we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.”

The Jews did not care what fruits Jesus was offering them. They saw no connection between “**bearing good fruits**” and “**being divine.**” Many Christians of this age are following their example. They show no appetite for “fruits.”

What is the purpose of “**bread**” and “**fruit**”? To satisfy hunger and thirst. If they accomplish this purpose, that is the most convincing evidence of their goodness. What more can we expect from food? What is the purpose of **spiritual** bread and fruit? To satisfy **spiritual** hunger and thirst. If a Redeemer accomplishes that, why should we have doubts? What more should we expect from Him? Jesus told the Jews that He could satisfy both their hunger and their thirst. All that God required from them was to taste the sweetness of His Word. All that God asked them was to obey this rule: **By their fruits ye shall know them.** All that God asked them to do was to test this claim: “**He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst**” (John 6:35 NKJ). How can anyone test this claim except by tasting the “**food**,” except by investigating, except by following this universal and unchanging law: “**Test the spirits**” (I John 4:1 NIV), “**Prove all things**” (I Thess. 5:21), “**Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you**” (Matt. 7:7)?

Which is more important? To have a drawing of the physical features of our Lord or an image of His Spirit. His Word is His spiritual image. We can see His spirit in every word and sentence He spoke. That spiritual image always remains pure and perfect. That is where we must look for Him, and that is where we can find Him. He was and always will be His Word:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God.**

John 1:1 NKJ

How can we bear the fruits of life? By planting “the seed” in our soul:

The seed is the Word of God. Christ (Luke 8:11 NIV)

This question can be asked: Were not miracles an element of Jesus' "*works*," a part of His "*fruits*"? Yes, they were, but not the essence of His fruits. ***They counted perhaps as much as the color or shape of "the fruits" He produced, but no more. They mattered as much as the shape or the package of His "Bread of Life," but no more.*** The true nourishment came from our Lord's teachings, from His Word, from His commandment to love God and all His creatures. That is what really matters, that is what changes the hearts and heals humanity.

Consider this example. Suppose you have a wonderful mother, much admired for her character and wisdom. Suppose she also has an exquisite taste for dress and jewelry that adorn her body and provide an aura of credibility for her wisdom. Now suppose that after a while people forget your mother's character and wisdom and begin to admire her dress and jewelry. How will she feel? Slighted and offended. In people's minds, she will begin to lose her *spiritual* beauty and be appreciated for her appearance.

Today we find many people who pay more attention to looks than to character. Instead of being viewed as spiritual beings, models are seen as physical objects who dress well and walk with grace. In a way, that is what happened to our Lord. He became known first and foremost as a miracle maker, who could change the weather in an instant. People were interested in seeing Him do what they always dreamed of doing themselves: "breaking" the laws of nature. ***Jesus became an object of entertainment and curiosity instead of a source of spiritual wisdom and wonder.*** Otherwise, why would He ask people not to spread the news of His miracles? If they were important, then He would have drawn attention to them, rather than conceal them. Note the number of times Our Lord had to remind the people to keep quiet about His miracles:

And Jesus earnestly and sternly charged them, ***see that you let no one know about this*** [miracle]. But they went off and blazed and spread His fame abroad throughout that whole district.

Matthew 9:30-31 AB

See also Matthew 8:4; Mark 1:44; 5:43; 7:36

We can see ***two opposite sets of instructions from our Lord.*** We see Him reminding the people repeatedly ***to consider His "works" as evidence of His divine mission; we also see Him reminding them repeatedly not to speak about His miracles.*** What does this mean? That our Lord did not wish to be known as a wonder worker, that He did not base His heavenly glory on His miracles, and that He did not want to use them as evidence of His supreme station.

Human beings are attracted by material objects and events. A rumor of miracles attracts thousands. What about a rumor of wonderful deeds? What about a rumor of wisdom?

Some years ago two con men from India conceived a well-planned plot to make money. They paid several people to claim to have been healed by their miraculous powers. According to their own testimony given later, the con men were pleasantly surprised: ***People went out of their way to believe them.*** The con men were amazed by their own easy success. They made a fortune from this scheme before divulging it. This is human nature. People see themselves as helpless pawns, at the mercy of natural laws. They dream of "breaking" or overcoming those laws, and admire anyone who can break them. People gain a sense of power by associating themselves with the powerful. And sometimes their expectation of a miraculous healing helps them heal faster.

Using miracles as evidence is undignified for still another reason. It serves as a bribe for enticing people to believe. It sends this message: “I will do something in exchange for making you love me and believe in me.”

Let us consider one more statement from our Lord. In the following passage, instead of mentioning His “*works*,” Jesus refers specifically to His “*teaching*” as the evidence of His divine mission:

If anyone *chooses to do God’s will*, he will find out whether my *teaching* comes from God or whether I speak on my own. Christ (John 7:17 NIV)

Study Jesus’ words carefully; they contain two critical points. He declares:

- What you need to do, your ultimate goal, is to verify if my teachings are from God or from my imagination. My teachings should be the focus of your attention.
- There is a way that you can reach your conclusion. That way is to obey God.

What is God’s will? In that verse, our Lord does not specify. But the study of the Scripture reveals that there are two sets of rules that must be obeyed:

- The *spiritual* rule: investigating with pure motives and absolute love for truth.
- The *factual* rule: choosing the right map, accepting and applying the divine standard for knowing the truth, tasting “*the bread*” or “*the fruit*” of the tree of life.

Jesus’ statement communicates this message: A Redeemer’s *teachings* and their consequences should be the focus of your attention.

The verses quoted so far clearly indicate that our Lord applied the standard of “*By their fruits you shall know them*” not only to the truth of future Messengers but also to the truth of His own mission. He wanted to be judged by *spiritual* wonders, not *material*.

This chapter revealed the first and foremost ingredient of the Bread of Life: the ability to cultivate and offer a food that manifests its supreme richness not only in the One who cultivates it but also in countless millions who consume it. The next chapter reveals the entire recipe for the Bread of Life.



3

I Am the Bread of Life

Christ (John 6:35)

Part II

Signs and Standards By Which We Can Know the Lord

A thorough search of the Scripture reveals many other *specific* features, qualities, or standards that clarify the meaning of “good” and help us to separate truth from falsehood as clearly as we can separate day from night. By knowing and applying them, we can readily recognize the distinctions of the Bread that can be baked only in heaven and the wonders of the fruits that can grow only in God’s garden.

All the features presented here are testable and provable. Every person interested in testing the bread can instantly find the ingredients, blend them, bake them, and come to the same conclusion: a heavenly bread is infinitely superior to the earthly bread. The presence of all those features or standards will leave no room for doubt, no chance for error.

This chapter examines 10 of the 19 features of the heavenly Bread. It reveals 10 objective and testable standards by which we can separate the heavenly Bread from the earthly. It specifies the precise level of goodness we must expect from the Bread of Life. Chapter 7 presents briefly all 19 features together.

To make the bread, all 19 ingredients must be present. *Their strengths lie in their togetherness.* None of them alone, in separation from others, can be sufficient or be fully convincing to most people. In our journey of the search for truth, this critical point should never escape our attention. If we did not need them all, our Lord would not have given them to us.

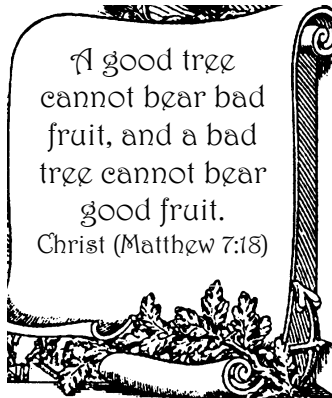


As discussed in the last chapter, the first and most critical feature of the Bread of Life is setting a perfect example in one's life and inspiring a harvest of virtues in others. A good harvest is an evidence of the goodness of the seed and the wisdom of the gardener. This is a universal law as dependable as the law of gravity.

In seeking truth and knowledge, this is our first and foremost guiding principle. Every fact, every rule must be judged in the light of this universal, and self-evident truth:



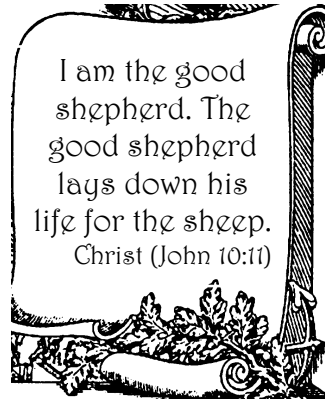
Fruits of Perfection



Aside from producing a harvest of virtues in Himself and others, the One who makes a claim must prove His sincerity and spiritual purity by accepting and enduring every pain and suffering imaginable. The One who comes to inspire devotion, service, and love in others cannot use His position of honor for selfish gains. He must reveal His celestial strength by making every sacrifice conceivable, even by laying down His life to save others.



Self-Sacrifice and Suffering



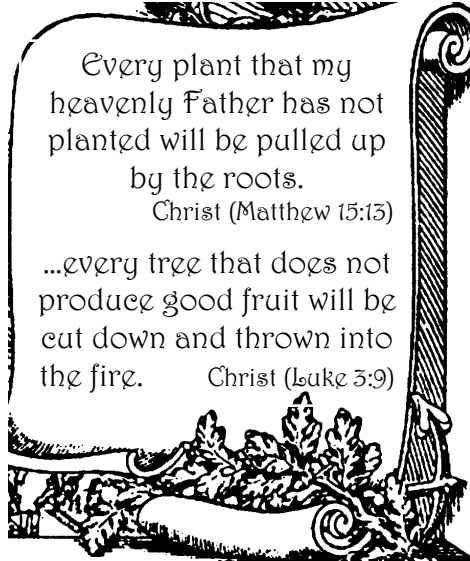
The relevance and significance of self-sacrifice is self-evident. A deceiver wants to *gain* something rather than to *give*. But if someone is willing to make *every sacrifice* to prove himself, even offer his very life, this is a positive sign. It adds to our confidence. If this feature is lacking, nothing else matters. For self-sacrifice is an essential fruit of the Tree of life. A Tree planted by God must bear *every good fruit imaginable*. It must be as perfect as God Himself. This sign alone eliminates most if not all deceivers.



What other features can we find in the Bread of Life? The Seed that God sows for the bread grows deep roots and endures. Endurance against the ravages of time and the winds of change is one more evidence of divine power at work.



Endurance



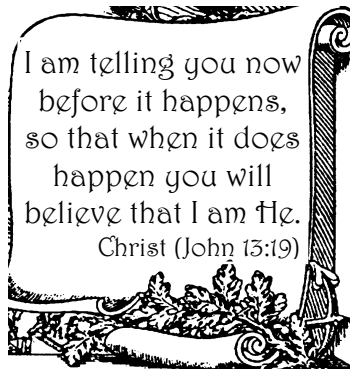
As we noted earlier, Jesus compared religion to a plant and what it produces to “fruits.” Here He talks not only about the fruit but about the plant itself. He promises that God does not allow a bad Tree with bad fruit to endure. This is one more sign of the prophetic profile. (For a detailed examination of this topic, study a book by this author titled: “Come Now, Let Us Reason Together” (Isaiah 1:18).



In the Bread of Life we also find this heavenly ingredient:



Knowledge of the Things to Come



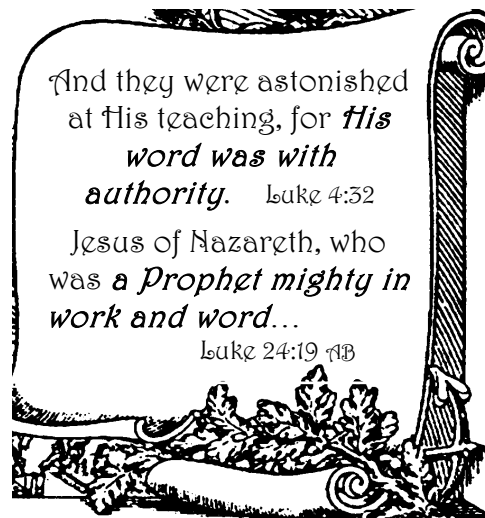
No one knows the future except God. If someone who claims to speak the Word of God can accurately predict the future, this too is a positive sign, a good fruit but not sufficient in itself.



Are there still more signs? With a little effort, we discover another feature of the Bread. We find that the *Word of God* is crowned with incomparable *power and authority*:



Speaking with Supreme Authority



The whole Scripture manifests God's supreme authority and power:

I have set before you [spiritual] life and [spiritual] death, blessings and curses. Now choose life. Deuteronomy 30:19 NIV

I have come to bring [spiritual] fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already [spiritually] kindled! Christ (Luke 12:49 NIV)

Whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. Christ (Luke 12:8-9 NKJ)

Those who heard our Lord's marvelous teachings acknowledged His gracious words of authority:

So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth (Luke 4:22). The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this Man! (John 7:46).

The One sent by God is so closely intertwined with His supreme Message, *He calls Himself the Word* (John 1:1; Revelation 19:13). Is there any way to know Jesus except through His Word?



What other signs or features can we find in the Bread of Life? We find absolute love and harmony among the Ones sent by God. We discover that instead of competing, they confess and glorify one another:



*Acknowledging the Station of
Those Sent by God*

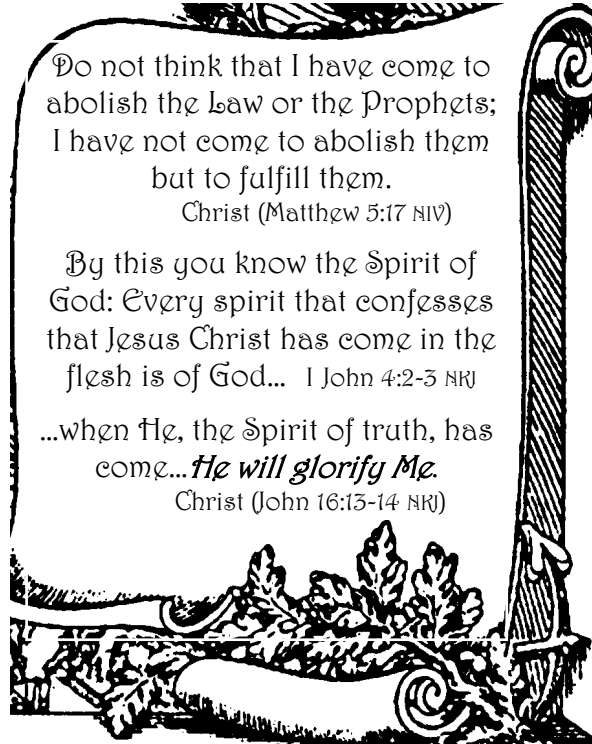
Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

Christ (Matthew 5:17 NIV)

By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God... 1 John 4:2-3 NKJ

...when He, the Spirit of truth, has come... *He will glorify Me.*

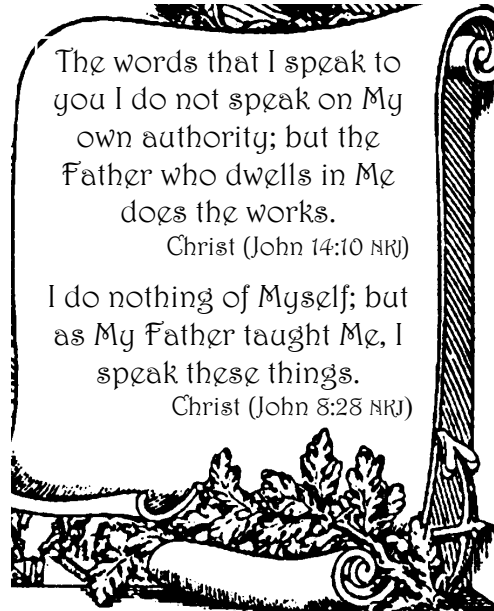
Christ (John 16:13-14 NKJ)



If we continue our search for truth, we also discover this essential ingredient in the Bread of Life: The One who calls Himself a Redeemer declares that *everything* He teaches comes from God, that He says *nothing* on His own, and therefore His Word *is the absolute truth*:



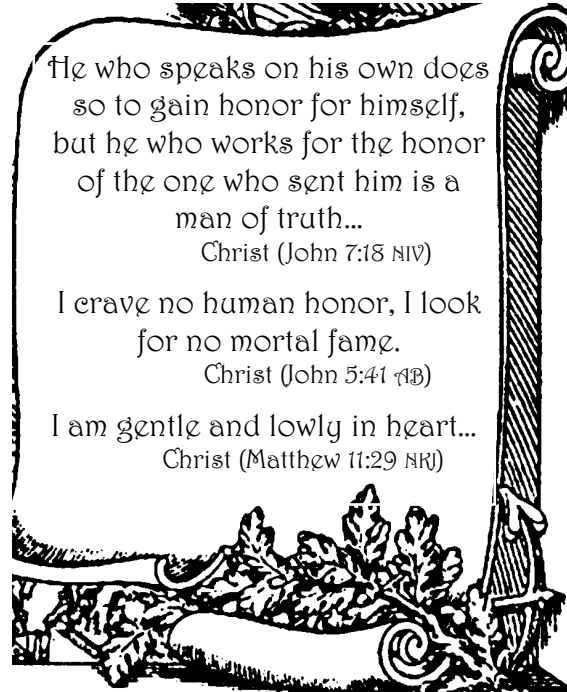
*Declaring God as the Source
of Every Act and Every Word Spoken*



In our journey of the search for the Bread and Fruit of Life, we also discover this sign or standard:



Honoring God, not One's Self



Note the extent of Jesus' humility before God:

Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. Matthew 19:17 NKJ

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ***He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit***, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. John 15:1-2 NIV

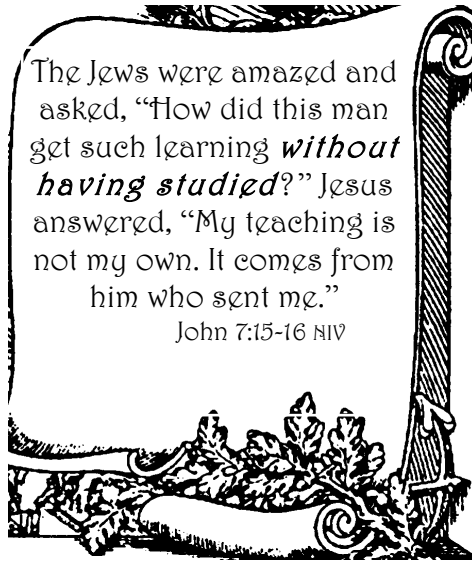
Jesus Christ was absolute perfection. He was the Lord—a heavenly tree laden with abundant fruits. He had no branches without fruits, yet He spoke of branches in Him that may bear no fruit. Humility is itself a sign of protection. The heavenly tree bears every fruit of goodness.



If we continue our search, we find that a Redeemer from God manifests supreme knowledge and wisdom, and yet He is ***unschooled and uneducated***. We discover the Tree laden with an abundance of heavenly fruits of knowledge and wisdom:



Knowing Without Learning



Are there still more ingredients in the Bread of Life, more signs or standards by which we can know the One sent by God? Yes, we will find one more sign that can set the seal of approval on all the other standards, that can reassure every sincere and faithful believer, that can convince every careful, concerned, and critical doubter that his or her choice is accurate without the least possibility of error. What is that sign? It is a long list of prophecies that predict the time and the critical events of the life of the One sent by God. Prophecies are, for the most part, the *earthly* fruits of the tree of life; they are not nutrients in the bread but the physical features of the bread:



Fulfilling Many Specific and Literal Prophecies



Jesus fulfilled many prophecies, but only **He** had the key to their inner meanings. Only **He** knew that when the Hebrew prophets predicted that the Jewish Messiah would be a king, they meant a **spiritual** king, not an earthly king. No one except Jesus had any knowledge of this great mystery. Even His disciples, who were the most spiritual and enlightened people of their time, did not know this secret.

Let us now review the main ingredients of the Bread of Life and the supreme power of the Plant that produces the Bread. Let us see how those ten signs or standards set apart, as day from night, a divine Redeemer from even the most gifted deceiver:

1. His power to set a perfect example of virtues in His life and to give rise to an abundant harvest of virtues in the world, like those produced by Jesus in countless millions of wonderful Christians, the ones who find more blessings in giving than in receiving.
2. His willingness to prove His sincerity by enduring every pain and suffering imaginable, even by giving His life.
3. His **spiritual** power to spread His message and establish a Faith that endures in the name of God to produce love and joy and all the other fruits of the Spirit.
4. His ability to make accurate predictions.
5. An expression of supreme authority and power in His words, spoken spontaneously, without pause or change of mind.
6. His acknowledgment of God's Messengers sent before Him.

7. His testimony that He does nothing of Himself, and that everything He teaches comes from God.
8. His glorification of God rather than Himself.
9. His supreme knowledge and wisdom in spite of a lack of education.
10. His *earthly fruits*: the fulfillment of many *literal* and *specific* prophecies in His *earthly* life, especially events over which He has no control, like the year and place of His birth.

The preceding ten signs are the prime pieces of the biblical jigsaw puzzle that form the profile of a Redeemer from God. They are the standards that the Lord Himself has given us. They are the ingredients of “*the Bread of Life*,” the features of “*the fruits*” of the Tree planted by the supreme Gardener. If we reject them, we face only one choice; we must depend on *our own* standards that reflect our weaknesses—our selfish desires, needs, illusions, and prejudices. That is the reason people have always failed to acknowledge their Redeemers:

Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?

Acts 7:52 NKJ

The failure of people to accept and apply *God’s standard* led to the cruel death of Jesus. The Jews ignored all the fruits of perfection manifest in Jesus. The only thing they could appreciate was physical power. That seemingly innocent but dangerous expectation was the domino that caused incalculable suffering, not only for the deniers, but for all humankind for centuries. That is how perilous it is to exchange *the heavenly signs* for *human wishes and desires*.

The common habit and the prevailing tradition of *preferring human standards over God’s* does not change from age to age, because human nature does not change. When we study ancient books, we suddenly discover ourselves in them. We learn that we are identical in our thoughts, wishes, desires, vices, and virtues to our ancestors. Noah came thousands of years ago, yet our Lord said that at the time of His Return people will act just the way they did in ancient times:

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

Matthew 24:37 NIV

Are not the people of this age as apathetic as they were in Noah’s days? They manage to find time to work, to travel, to shop, to play golf, to read popular magazines and novels of all kinds, to gamble, and spend hours watching their favorite shows, but somehow they can’t find time to devote to their everlasting destiny. I know because I give books and manuscripts to people all the time. Seldom do I find someone who is willing to read even a small book such as this! If you have read this far, you are very special, you are not the average person, like the ones who lived in Noah’s times. Congratulations for taking your spiritual life seriously!

Have you found any flaws in the message offered so far in this book? Any contradictions? Anything unreasonable? If you have, please take time and bring them to my attention. I will be honored to hear from you and to respond to your questions.

There are 9 more ingredients in the Heavenly bread; they are presented in Chapter 7. Before studying those ingredients, let us first examine the celestial Map that should guide our spiritual journey of the search for truth.



4

The Map for the Spiritual Journey

The following pronouncement from our Lord is a blueprint for building the mansion of truth and knowledge; it is a map to guide our spiritual journey; it is the divine touchstone that separates truth from falsehood. It contains the most critical instructions He ever gave to help His faithful followers recognize Him on His Return. His statement contains a warning to protect our faith from deceivers, and the most definitive way of telling the divine from the deceptive.

This brief instruction from Jesus, found in Matthew 7:15-27, contains precious gems of wisdom and knowledge seldom recognized. It is unique, ***the only statement of its kind***. It should be written in gold and placed on a wall in every home and every church. ***The wisdom, the counsels, and the warnings it contains are the key to our everlasting salvation:***

A critical warning:

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

The standard of knowing the truth:

By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ***Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.***

Obeying God's standard is the evidence of true faith:

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Prophesying or becoming preoccupied with supernatural acts or expectations are forbidden:

Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?” Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”

Obeying the standard of “fruit” is essential. It is the sign of wisdom:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ***But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.*** The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. Matthew 7:15-27 NIV

See also Matt. 12:33-35; Luke 6:43-45

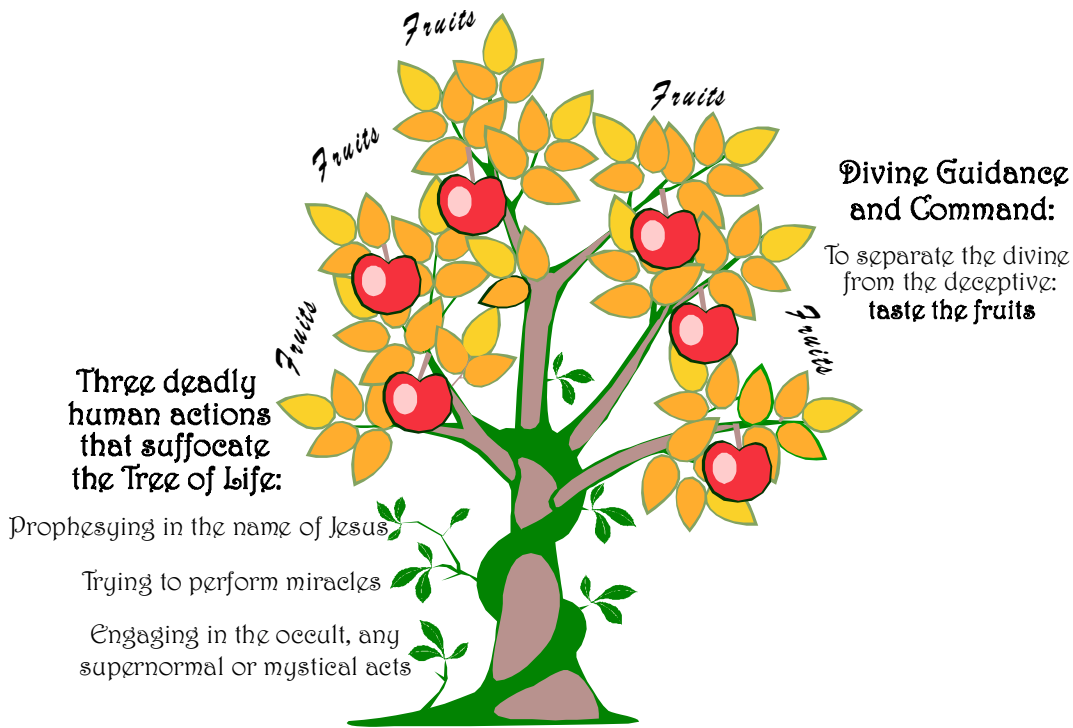
Let us see an outline of Jesus’ pronouncement, the critical points He covered, their connection and conclusion:

- Be critical in choosing your spiritual destiny. Beware of deceivers, who claim to speak the Word of God.
- This is the way you can separate the divine from the deceptive: By their fruits, by what they produce in their words and lives as well as the lives of others.

As your biological instincts guide you to tell the difference between good fruit and bad fruit, so can your spiritual instinct guide you to tell the difference between the divine and the deceptive.

- The way you can enter heaven is to obey my commands.
- There is no honor for those who prophesy in my name, perform miracles, or engage in mystical or supernatural acts. Such acts indicate deviation from my commands.
- If you practice “these words of mine,” these instructions, you are wise; otherwise you are foolish.

What is the connection between all the points covered in Jesus’ pronouncement? Consider this picture:



The Tree of Life

Human beings have a fascination for making predictions and controlling or breaking the laws of nature, and a preoccupation with the occult (such as witchcraft, the demonic, the mystical, and psychic forces). All these tendencies and desires move us away from reality.

Building our beliefs and everlasting destiny on these unprovable and untestable assumptions, illusions, desires, and theories, as our Lord declared, is like building the house of our faith on sand. Depending on God's fruits, which are testable and provable, our Lord declares, is like building that house on solid rock.

What conclusion can we draw from all the points covered by Jesus?

To know the truth, we must rely on what our own powers of reasoning and “**spiritual instinct**” tells us. In the path of the search for truth, we should not depend on the mystical, the magical, and the supernatural. Neither should we depend on prophesying. Only God knows the future. Human beings are unable to decode or unseal the prophecies. Would a faithful believer ignore our Lord’s warnings against prophesying?

What does Jesus mean by, “Everyone who hears **these words of mine**”? What words? The only instruction contained in the entire passage is this: ***In separating truth from falsehood, depend on “fruits,” not the magical, the mystical, and prophesying.*** Only by examining and pondering our Lord’s instructions repeatedly can we discover their critical points, their connection, and their final conclusion.

Our Lord’s instructions are absolutely critical to our spiritual safety and survival. Consider the analogy the noted author Stephen Covey presents in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. To succeed in any task, he states, the first rule is to find and then follow the correct map:

Suppose you wanted to arrive at a specific location in central Chicago. A street map of the city would be a great help to you in reaching your destination. But suppose you

were given the wrong map. Through a printing error, the map labeled “Chicago” was actually a map of Detroit. Can you imagine the frustration, the ineffectiveness of trying to reach your destination?

You might work on your behavior—you could think more positively. You still wouldn’t get to the right place, but perhaps you wouldn’t care. Your attitude would be so positive, you’d be happy wherever you were.

The point is, you’d still be lost. The fundamental problem has nothing to do with your behavior or your attitude. It has everything to do with having a wrong map.

If you have the right map of Chicago, then diligence becomes important, and when you encounter frustrating obstacles along the way, then attitude can make a real difference. But the first and most important requirement is the accuracy of the map.¹

Our Lord’s instructions, as cited in Matthew 7:15-27 and repeated several times in similar words throughout the Gospel, is the only statement of its kind in the Scripture. It is the only map that shows the way, that can guide us to our destiny. If we ignore **God’s** map, we get lost, no matter how hard we try.

Understanding **the exact** meaning and purpose of our Lord’s instructions is absolutely essential to our spiritual safety. Knowing **precisely** what He means is so critical that even a minor change in its meaning will totally reverse its intended purpose. Suppose you have the right map, but at some point make a left turn instead of a right. Will you find your destination?

Sometimes slight variations in a message can make a big difference in its meaning. Consider the difference between the following sentences:

- Beware of murderers in your town.
- Everyone in your town is a murderer.

The words in the two statements seem similar, yet they convey totally different meanings. On a scale of 1 to 10, what number would you select to show their difference?

Suppose you were a devout Jew living at the time of Jesus. One day while out walking, you met St. Paul who greeted you with great excitement and declared, “I have heard some amazing news! Do you have time to hear me?” Suppose you answered yes, and St. Paul continued, “As you know, God promised to send us a Prophet like Moses. I have heard about a humble young man who claims to be a Prophet or Redeemer from God,” and then he quoted you this prophecy about His coming:

And the Lord said to me [Moses]: “...***I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren***, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.”
Deuteronomy 18:17-18 NKJ

Suppose, in his desire to motivate you, St. Paul paraphrased and amplified Moses’ prophecy and encouraged you to listen, to pay attention to the news of the advent of the new Prophet:

Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets...***For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people;***

you must listen to everything he tells you...Indeed, all the prophets...have foretold these days.

Acts 3:17-24 NIV

After listening to St. Paul, **which of the following thoughts is most likely to pass through your mind?** And which of those thoughts is in harmony with the commands of the Scripture?

A thought based on reason and sense of duty: I will ask Paul: “What evidence do you have?” I will say to myself, “I should pay attention to this news. No harm will come from knowing.”

A thought based on negative or evasive emotions: I will be alarmed and take a defensive position for self-protection. I will say to myself, “One more deceiver. No wonder, our Scripture warns us of many false prophets. This news is not worth my time. It may even jeopardize my faith in Moses.”

A thought based on doctrines or theological positions (prophesying): I will try to use theology as my defense. I will look for some verses that will help me ignore the news. ***I will prophesy.*** I will say to myself, “All the prophecies point to a Messiah who will come with great power, who will conquer our enemies. A humble young man can never qualify for a Jewish Messiah.”

Which of the three sources of influence—***reason, emotions, or theology***—determined your choice? Think for a moment about all the religious wars and the millions of people killed in the name of God. What caused those wars? In virtually every case, they were activated by the twin forces of:

- ***Emotions***
- and
- ***Theology***

When negative emotions such as fear, anger, insecurity, and prejudice are fueled by personal theological positions, they turn into the most powerful explosive weapon in the universe. They persuade a young Muslim to go to an Israeli market, pull a trigger and kill himself along with many innocent shoppers, all in the name of God! It was this same deadly combination that caused the crucifixion of our Lord and the death of thousands of Christians.

If all those who heard about the advent of a humble young man, named Jesus, had used evasive ***emotions*** and ***theology*** as their guide, if they had all abandoned ***reason***, if they had all assumed, without investigation, that He was a deceiver, would there be a single Christian in the world today?

So far you heard about St. Paul and how you would have responded as a Jew to his news of the first Advent. Suppose the exchange between St. Paul and you as a Jew is happening now! Suppose you are a devout Christian living in this age. One day you meet a friend who greets you with excitement and says, “I have heard some amazing news! It is about a humble young man who claims to be a Prophet or Redeemer from God.” Which of the

following choices is in harmony with Jesus' intention of saying, "**Beware of false prophets,**" and which choice is quite likely to cross your mind?

Reason: *I should investigate*, but be *careful* and *critical*.

Emotions: *Everyone* is a deceiver. I should *not* investigate.

Theology (prophesying): If Jesus had come, I would have seen Him. He will come with great power and take me to heaven.

Which choice is in harmony with Jesus' instructions? The **first** one. But which choices do most people follow? The **second** and the **third**.

Let us now consider the latter part of our Lord's instruction—the standard He gave us for knowing the ones sent by God:

Ye **SHALL** know them by their fruits. Matthew 7:16

Examine the following statements to see how meanings can be drastically changed by a minor alteration of words:

- Let us get married, I **think** I love you.
- Let us get married, I **do** love you.
- Leave your baby with me. I **may** protect her.
- Leave your baby with me. I **will** protect her.

In guiding us, our Lord used **a word of commitment**. He said, "Ye **will** know them." But how do most people interpret that word of commitment? Do they view it as "**surely**," or do they subconsciously change "**will**" into "**maybe**," or even **ignore** the instruction altogether? How a believer interprets "**will**" is, of course, a test of his faith. The one who does not truly trust his Lord sees the word "**will**" as "**maybe**"; a trustful believer accepts it as his Lord meant: **for sure**, or **without a doubt**.

Let us consider one more example of how the mind can distort meanings to engage in selective seeing or understanding. Bible scholars often interpret prophecies with full confidence. Seldom do they acknowledge that they may be totally wrong in their views like the Jewish rabbis and scholars at the time of Jesus. Even today after 20 centuries, Jewish theologians continue to see what they **prefer to see**.

Nowhere in the Old Testament can we find a sentence like this: "**Ye will know the true meaning of prophecies on your own**." Why then did so many Jews at the time of Jesus act as if there were such a verse? Can we find that message in the New Testament? As we shall soon see, we find just an opposite message. Why then do so many people of our time ignore God's sure promise, "**Ye shall know them by their fruits**," and replace it with the desire of their hearts: "**Ye shall know them by the way ye interpret the prophecies**" and "**Ye shall know the true meaning of prophecies on your own**"? Is not such an alteration of the Word of God a deviation from divine guidance? Is not minimizing or disregarding the significance of fruits and creating a fictitious verse to imply that we **can** know on our own the meaning of prophecies as an evidence of the fulfillment of our Lord's prediction that in our time, "**Many will turn away from the faith**" (Mat. 24:10)? What faith? Faith in God's Word. Who are "the many" who turn

away from the faith? Can anyone say with clear conscience: “I am an exception”? Is there anyone who does not look clean in his own eyes (Proverbs 16:2)?

Most people ignore the supreme significance of “*fruits*,” and then they create these verses in their mind as substitutes:

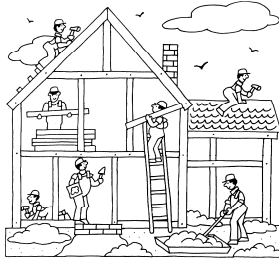
- *Ye shall know them by prophecies.*
- *Ye shall know the true meaning of prophecies on your own.*

Without knowing, they create those two verses in their minds, they make those two unfounded assumptions, and then begin to build their everlasting destiny on “sand!” No wonder our Lord said:

Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them... Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock...***But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.*** Matthew 7:20, 26 NIV

It is amazing to find so many wonderful Christians, who show nothing but fruits of love and charity in their lives, ***and yet they are so negligent about their faith***, about their everlasting destiny. They build their eternal life on sand—on verses that do not exist, on two false assumptions! This is incredible, yet it is the rule of the day. It is the way human beings have always acted and probably always will.

Prophesying in the name of our Lord is so popular in our time and its consequences are so devastating that it is examined in detail in the next chapter.



5

Did We Not Prophesy in Your Name?

Christ (Matthew 7:22 NIV)

Part I

Building the House from the Bottom up

Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name... Then I will tell them plainly, ***I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!***’

Christ (Matthew 7:22-23 NIV)

Why did our Lord condemn so harshly Christians who prophesy in His name? This chapter will clarify the reasons for His disapproval of using His name to make predictions.

God has given us a set of standards by which we can know His Redeemers. The standards must be followed step by step like a blueprint, without any alteration. Just as there is an order for building a house—from the foundation up—so is there an order for building the house of our salvation. In that house, prophecy is the roof; it must come last, not first. Most people reverse the order. They want to build the foundation with prophecy. This leads to nothing but failure. The consequence of this failure will be the same the second time as it was the first.

Over the course of centuries, Christian theologians have built certain expectations based on their personal interpretation of the prophecies. They assume that their interpretation is right, and that anyone who makes a claim but fails to fulfill their expectations must be a deceiver.

God has given us a set of specific directions on how to find and recognize His Redeemers. If we deviate from His directions, we will get lost. Obedience is the key; without it, the treasures of truth will remain forever hidden to us.

What is the divine direction? What is His blueprint? It is this: **Begin** your search with “works,” “bread,” or “fruits” and **end** it with prophecies. To dramatize the point, assume that our Lord has come exactly as He did the first time, as a humble human being. Suppose a Christian author, Dr. Martin, with several publications on biblical prophecy, hears His message and tries to argue with St. John who represents Him just as the Pharisees argued with Jesus’ disciples in the first Advent.

St. John: I speak for the Lord. I have come to bring to light the meaning of prophecies. Only the Lord is worthy of removing the seal of mysteries:

“Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. Revelation 5:2-3 NIV

Jesus is the One promised by God. Only He can bring to light what is hidden in darkness. Only He can unseal the mysteries:

He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals. Revelation 5:5 NIV

Dr. Martin: The One you call Jesus cannot be the Lord. The Lord must come from the sky. Jesus is an earthly being.

St. John: Then **you** must be the Lord, because **you** are interpreting the prophecies, you are opening the scroll, and you are removing its seven seals.

Dr. Martin: I am not interpreting. I am just repeating what the Bible says.

St. John: If understanding the Bible is easy, if you and other biblical authors and scholars can comprehend the Scripture, why does the Bible declare that only the Lord can unseal the book, and that others are not even worthy to look at it, let alone open it or interpret it?

Dr. Martin: Then how can we know that Jesus is the Lord?

St. John: Only by applying the standards that God has authorized you: By His fruits, by His works, by tasting the Bread of Life that He offers you. First examine His works. After you have recognized their perfection, supremacy, and divine distinction, then listen to His interpretation of prophecies. If you follow God’s command, you will find that He has fulfilled every sign, not according to your fallible judgment, but by His flawless and infinite knowledge.

Dr. Martin: But how can thousands of Christian leaders and people of wisdom and intelligence—Popes, Bishops, priests, pastors, Greek and Hebrew scholars—who have lived over the course of 20 centuries be wrong?

St. John: They can be wrong for all the following reasons. Be fair in your judgment, and see if you can prove any point, any principle, in the entire Scripture with as much evidence as I can prove this most undeniable truth to you. Judging Jesus by your traditional interpretation of prophecies is absolutely unsound and unbiblical for many reasons.

Let us once again bring St. John into this drama. Let us assume that he is present and he goes on to cite the following eight reasons to prove his point. Ponder in your heart if there is any truth, any principle in the entire Bible, for which you can find as much support as there is for the inability of fallible human beings to understand the meaning of prophecy.

Christian author: I am quite sure I can understand the meaning of prophecies.

St. John:

1. Consider the **historical evidence**. Ponder the mental, emotional, and spiritual state of the Jews. Like you, they also thought they could understand the prophecies. But did they? What biblical passage gives you the right to believe that you are more worthy than the Jews, that you are more open-minded, fair, and righteous? What makes you feel you are different? Do you have enough faith to believe in the predictions of the Scripture about the people of this age? Note these prophecies among many others:

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

Christ (Matthew 24:37 NIV)

They [those who live at the end of the age] are the kind...who are...**always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.**

II Timothy 3:6-7 NIV

Can you say you are an exception, and that this verse does not apply to you? You are a published author and scholar who is "**always learning.**" Does that mean that you also have the gift of acknowledging the truth? Then to whom does the prophecy apply? Many prophecies indicate that the people of this age are at least as unfaithful as the people of past ages. If they are like the people who lived in Noah's time and the people who lived at the time of my first Advent, what do you expect? Do you expect pride or humility? Open minds or closed minds? Fearful hearts or fearless hearts? Faith or lack of faith? Acceptance or denial? Why did Jesus in His first Advent ask this question?

When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?

Luke 18:18 NEB

Dr. Martin: What more evidence do you have?

St. John:

2. Consider the **biblical evidence**. Can you find a single verse that says: "You shall know Me by your interpretation of prophecy"? Can you find a single verse that gives you the authority to interpret prophecies? Just the opposite. You are asked to **refrain** from interpreting prophecies. Can a command or counsel be more clear than the following?

...**no prophecy** of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

II Peter 1:20 KJ

But first note this: **No one** can interpret any prophecy of Scripture by himself.

II Peter 1:20 NEB

Do the preceding passages even imply that there is one exception? It authorizes no one, and makes no exception for any verse. It says, “**no** prophecy.” Can anyone claim to be above this rule? Then who has the right to interpret? Who has full knowledge of the mysteries? Only the Lord:

...pass no premature judgment; **wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness.** I Corinthians 4:5 NEB

The verse asks you to wait for Him to interpret the prophecies for you. **If you already know, why should you wait?**

Jesus is the Lord. He is All-Knowing. Only He is authorized to interpret the prophecies. Your disagreement with His interpretation results from your fallible state of mind as a human being.

Once again ponder this prophecy, and ask yourself, “Why was it given?”

“Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. Revelation 5:2-3 NIV

He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals. Revelation 5:5 NIV

If you are not even worthy to look inside a scroll so sacred that it has been sealed seven times, how can you make such fantastic claims? How can you transgress your authorized boundaries? If you do, does it not indicate disobedience and lack of faith in His Word?

Dr. Martin: What more evidence do you have?

St. John:

3. Consider the principle of **human fallibility**. This evidence does not pertain directly to prophecy; it simply dramatizes the human weakness in understanding the coded language of prophecy. To experience humility, consider these simple examples. Christians are divided on the issue of immediate survival after death. Some of them quote the following verses to show that after death, the soul remains dead or unconscious until the day of resurrection:

...none can keep alive his own soul. Psalms 22:29

...the soul that sinneth, it shall die. Ezekiel 18:4

Others quote this verse to show that after death, the soul remains conscious and alive:

...today you [the thief] will be with me [Jesus] in paradise. Christ (Luke 23:43 NIV)

Some of the theologians who hold the opposing views are among the best biblical scholars, yet they cannot resolve this question. A third group rejects both of these views. It claims people exist in a waiting station called purgatory. What does this indicate? The inability of sincere, educated, and intelligent Christians to open the scroll.

Consider also the following simple and practical question: Are church leaders authorized to get married? Christian theologians with the best minds and education

have been divided on this issue for centuries. If as human beings, you are so incapable of resolving such a simple and practical question, how can you claim to understand the true meaning of prophecies, which are far more complex? Just open the Book of Revelation to see for yourself. Why then would you claim to know for sure something you are powerless to know?

Let us assume that the drama continues, that St. John presents still more evidence:

Dr. Martin: What more evidence do you have?

St. John:

4. Use a little ***practical wisdom***. Visit a Christian bookstore or library. Examine several books of prophecy by Christian scholars from various denominations and schools of interpretation to see the conflicting views of the best thinkers. Is not this observation in itself a clear evidence of this critical point: human beings lack the wisdom to know the true meaning of prophecies? Does it not indicate that they are unable to break the seven seals?

Dr. Martin: What more evidence do you have?

St. John:

5. Consider the clear ***testimony of Christian scholars***. If you are unable to compare books of prophecy written by various authors, then listen to what those authors say about each other. Consider the works of Dr. Robert Lightner, professor of systematic theology at Dallas Theological Seminary. He wrote a book titled *The Last Days Handbook* with the sole purpose of promoting peace among the various schools of interpretation. Notice this statement from him on the cover of his book:

You [lay people] have a right to know why ***men of God*** who agree on all the essential fundamentals of the faith ***differ so widely and battle so tenaciously over prophecy*** [emphasis added].¹

The publisher then adds:

Lightner's heartfelt concern is over the unChristlike fierceness of the battle.²

If there is so much confusion among the most eminent and educated scholars, among the most brilliant Bible teachers and leaders, how then can any reasonable and faithful Christian build his or her everlasting house of destiny on such shallow and shifting sands? Once again recall the guiding words of celestial Wisdom in Jesus' words:

...by their ***fruit*** you will recognize them...everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. Matthew 7:20, 26 NIV

Dr. Martin: Do you have more evidence?

St. John:

6. Ponder ***the example Jesus set in His first Advent***. Did He not show that prophecies can be understood ***after*** they have been fulfilled and interpreted by God's Redeemer rather than ***before*** or as understood by rabbis and Jewish scholars? Have you forgotten this verse?

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, *he* [Jesus] *explained to them* what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. Luke 24:27 NIV

That was the example He set in His first Advent. What makes you think this time is different? What makes you think that Jewish scholars failed but Christian scholars cannot fail? What makes you think that this time Jesus must ask you what the prophecies mean?

Once again, let us assume that the drama continues, and St. John presents even more evidence:

Dr. Martin: Do you have more evidence?

St. John:

7. Note this most critical warning Jesus addressed to interpreters of prophecy:

Many will say to me... ‘*Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name?*’ ... Then I will tell them plainly, ‘*I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!*’

Matthew 7:22-23 NIV

Could a warning be more severe? Why are so many believers ignoring it? Ask yourself: Why would God condemn so harshly those who prophesy in His name? There must be something evil about prophesying, especially when Jesus’ followers use ***His authority and His name, by saying, “This is what our Lord says,” and then tell people what they should expect.*** Suppose a rabbi makes this statement in his synagogue: “Our Lord God has prophesied in plain, literal, and unmistakable language that a king like David will come to save us from our humiliation. Jesus of Nazareth cannot be that king. He did not have even a home. How can he qualify for our Messiah and Savior?”

What is the rabbi doing? ***He is prophesying in the name of Jehovah. He is taking advantage of people’s trust in God and then telling them his own personal opinion of what God means.*** What if, based on St. Paul’s prophecy (II Thess. 1:7-8), you said, “The Bible teaches that the Lord will come from the sky with fire to burn all those who do not obey the Gospel, and to take all of us wonderful Christians to heaven!” Are you not doing the same thing the Jewish rabbi did? What has been the result of the rabbis’ prophesying in the name of the Lord? Denial of the Lord. What do you think will be the result of ***your*** prophesying? Will it not also be the same? Now do you understand why such a harsh warning—***wicked! Away from Me***—was addressed to those Christians who would repeat the mistake and follow the illusion that caused the Jews to deny their promised Messiah? Note Jesus’ statement once again to remember the harsh consequences of prophesying in His name:

‘*Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name?*’ ... Then I will tell them plainly, ‘*I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!*’

Matthew 7:23 NIV

Dr. Martin: Do you still have more evidence?

St. John:

8. Ponder in your heart upon the question of ***fallibility and infallibility***. You often quote the following verse. Do you also believe in its meaning?

...*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*...

Romans 3:23 NIV

Do you claim to be the glory of God? Jesus, the One who sent me to proclaim His Advent to you and all other Christians, is the Lord your God. He is His supreme splendor and glory. Only He can be infallible. Are you authorized also to make that claim? How can you discover that He is truly the glory of God? You can attain that honor only by obeying God, *by using His standards, rather than the forbidden standard: prophecy*. What are God's standards? His Heavenly Bread, His infinitely glorious Fruits, His supreme spiritual distinctions, His divine and unmistakable Words. What do you expect if you *start* with prophecy, the forbidden fruit? You will fall from grace and fail just as the Jews failed and are failing to this day to recognize Him. Note Jesus' impatience with the Jews, with their ignorance and their inability to understand the prophecies:

How *foolish* you are, and how *slow of heart* to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

Luke 24:25-26 NIV

In the preceding statement, Jesus rebuked the Jews both for their *narrow minds* by calling them foolish, and for their *entangled hearts* by calling them slow.

What has changed since the days of His first Advent? Can you claim to be superior to the Jews who have failed and are still failing to recognize their Messiah? If you read the Scripture, you will find numerous prophecies that proclaim the spiritual and moral decline of those who live at the time of His second Advent. The Scripture condemns more harshly those who live at the time of His second Advent than the first. Who are those who live at the time of His second Advent? All of you who claim His name and call yourselves Christians. Remember also this verse and be humble:

They [those who live at the end of the age] will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to *myths*.

II Timothy 4:4 NIV

How can you disregard such prophecies? How can you set yourself apart? Are you humble enough to admit that these prophecies refer to you and other scholars who disregard the biblical commands that prophecies should be left to the Lord to interpret? Will you continue to appear pure in your own eyes?

All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes...

Proverbs 16:2 NKJ

Let us assume St. John summarizes the evidence and concludes the discussion:

The time has come to summarize my definitive and undeniable evidence. Note once again the power of these most convincing and perfectly harmonious proofs that I have put forth here. All of them confirm a critical principle, one that may cause you to deny Jesus at His second Advent just as the people like you denied Him long ago. All of them proclaim this lesson: In building the house of your faith, in recognizing Jesus at His second Advent, you must *begin* with works and *end* with prophecy. Reversing the order is as irrational as building a house from top to the bottom; it is as catastrophic the second time as it was the first time. Remember and practice all these instructions and warnings that He has given you in plain literal language:

- Only the Lord can break the seal of the scrolls (Revelation 5:2-5).
- Christians who live at the time of the Second Advent lack true faith in their Master's Word (Luke 18:18).
- No one has the right to claim that his private interpretation of prophecies is right (II Peter 1:20).
- Only the Lord can reveal the mysteries and resolve the points of disagreements. Christians must not rush to judgment, but wait for Him to come and teach them the true meaning of the Scripture (I Corinthians 4:5).
- The inability of Christians to resolve even simple issues such as "What is the true day of rest, Saturday or Sunday?" and many others should teach them a lesson of humility. For prophecies are far more complex than doctrines.
- The diversity and conflicting interpretation of Bible teachers proves how difficult prophecies are. This realization must also make every Christian humble.
- The testimony of some Christian scholars that prophecy is complex and often beyond human understanding. Their acknowledgment that the interpreters of prophecies harbor so much prejudice that they often engage in wars of words against one another.
- The example Jesus set in His first Advent to show that prophecies can be understood *after* they have been fulfilled and *after* they have been interpreted by the promised Redeemer (Luke 24:27). If you start with the assumption that your interpretation is right, and if He fulfilled them differently, what do you think will happen? You will reject Him instantly. That false assumption prevents you from examining His Bread of Life, His works and teachings, and ***His way of fulfilling the prophecies***. Your false assumptions will turn into thick and dark clouds that will prevent your eyes from seeing His glory. That is exactly what happened at His first Advent.
- Jesus' harshest threat to and condemnation of those who use His name to make predictions (Matthew 15:15-27).
- Only the Glory of God, only Lord of Lords and King of Kings is infallible. Anyone who insists in the accuracy of his own interpretation has shown pride and has claimed to be the Glory of God. All human beings are fallible except Him (Romans 3:23).

Can you prove any point in the entire Scripture with this much evidence? If you continue to insist that you must begin your search according to your personal understanding of prophecies, what does that indicate? Does not your insistence show that you are fulfilling all the following prophecies, that all these predictions manifest the low state of your soul?

At that time many will turn away from the faith...

Matthew 24:10 NIV

They will act as if they are religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly.

II Timothy 3:5 NLT

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

II Timothy 4:3-4 NIV

You have freedom of choice. You can deny the Lord for any reason you wish, but remember the consequences:

... whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 10:33 NKJ

Once again remember the analogy given earlier: Finding and building evidence for a Redeemer from God can be compared with building a house. How is a house built? From the roof down or from the foundation up? Prophecy is an essential segment of the house, but it is not its foundation; it is its roof. You must raise the structure, put all the other essential pieces together, and then crown your search and efforts with prophecy. If you follow God's direction, you will be astonished by your spiritual achievements. You will find that knowing a Redeemer is a thousand times easier than you think. You will be able to build the house of your faith on solid rock with ease and confidence.

God's way of building is simple. Humans make it complicated by changing the blueprint, by disregarding any evidence that undermines the desire of their hearts. They try to build their everlasting house of joy and peace from roof down rather than from foundation up! They have never succeeded nor will they ever succeed.

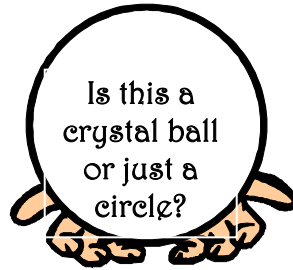
May my blessings descend upon all those who obey His Word.

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love...

Christ (John 15:10)

If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed...

Christ (John 8:31)



6

Did We Not Prophecy in Your Name?

Christ (Matt. 7:22 NIV)

Part II

...the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end.

Daniel 12:9 NIV

But who can unseal and open the words?

He [the Lord] is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.

Revelation 5:5 NIV

He [the Lord] will bring to light what is hidden in darkness.

I Corinthians 4:5 NIV

Why did our Lord condemn those who prophesy in His name? Because no human being has the wisdom to understand the mysterious language of prophecy. **Only the Lord has that wisdom.** To claim something that we are unqualified to do can be perilous. Claiming that we can navigate the mysterious and uncharted spheres of prophecy is like boasting that we can fly an airplane safely without any experience. No subject in the entire Scripture is more critical and yet more universally ignored. Because of its critical significance, and the resistance on the part of most theologians to acknowledge their lack of qualification, it deserves repeated and extensive studies.

This chapter presents many specific examples to show the complexity of the prophetic Word. Let us begin our study of the mysterious language of prophecy by an example of seemingly opposite predictions. One prophecy declares that Jesus will descend from the sky, the other predicts that He will come like a thief.

From the sky:

They will see the Son of Man coming ***on the clouds of heaven.*** Christ (Matthew 24:30 NKJ)

As a thief:

I am coming ***as a thief.*** Christ (Revelation 16:15 NKJ)
The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.
I Thessalonians 5:2 NIV

How do most people resolve these opposites? Here are the alternatives they have:

- Do not think about the conflict; simply ignore it.
- Choose the one you like, and find a reason or an explanation to justify your choice.
- Look at all the pieces of the biblical puzzle, and then make an objective choice with total freedom from traditional views or the influence of theologians, who serve as “the authority figures.”

How do most people resolve the conflict? As a rule, they cast their vote for the first two choices: either they ***ignore*** the issue or choose the one that presents ***an aura of superhuman power and majesty: Jesus shall come from the sky with supreme power surrounded with angels.*** Because of the overwhelming powers of tradition, most people do not even consider the third choice; they simply fail to carry out an independent and objective search.

But why? Consider this analogy. If you had to make a choice between two friends, which would you prefer?

- A humble friend who looks ordinary and can disappear in a crowd “like a thief.”
- An extremely powerful and famous friend who can work wonders.

Perhaps one in a hundred or even a thousand would choose ***a thief*** over ***a heavenly angel, a carpenter*** over ***a king, an ordinary*** friend over ***an extraordinary*** friend. Ordinary friends are easy to make; most people have at least one. Why do so many people stand in the street for hours, sometimes for days, to set their eyes on a Pope, a president, or a pop singer?

The choice between a carpenter and a king is easy and almost natural. The followers of every religion would like to think that the One they worship is One of a kind; no other Prophet or Redeemer can even come close to Him. Who cares for ***spiritual*** gifts and glories, for heavenly virtues? It is the ***physical*** powers and distinctions that carry real prestige.

To resolve the puzzle or paradox of the two sets of seemingly opposite predictions, we can make a third choice: Before coming to any conclusion, we can examine the entire jigsaw puzzle of biblical prophecies without any regard for tradition or personal desire. But who would take this less traveled road? This is by far the hardest choice. Carrying out a thorough investigation of prophecies requires a great deal of time and mental effort. Further, such a choice takes a supreme sense of self-confidence and a sense of absolute loyalty and devotion to the Word of God. It requires from the truth seeker a commitment

to resist, with all his heart and soul, any inclination toward personal desires, such as “***I do not like a ‘thief’ for my Redeemer. I would rather have One who can work wonders, who can destroy His enemies and rescue His friends in an instant.***” Who would think or act this way? Only a rare believer who puts the Master’s words above personal wishes, who discards all preconceived notions; the believer whose ***sole*** desire is the truth; the faithful lover of the Lord who has no preference for a king over a carpenter, no preference for someone who descends from the sky over someone who is born on earth in a slum.

How does such a believer resolve the puzzle of the opposites? He starts with an open and clear mind. He knows that the traditional or the prevailing view was adopted and promoted by fallible people like himself, who have always suffered from this enduring human weakness: a desire for dramatic display of glory and power. In fact, he is quite distrustful of tradition; he knows it can make him totally blind to new visions of truth. He remembers these critical and most enlightening words of our Lord:

You have ***a fine way*** of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe ***your own traditions!***

Mark 7:9 NIV

This human tendency to favor tradition does not change from age to age. It reflects our lower nature. By searching the Scripture, the sincere seeker who wants to resolve the seeming opposites, who wants to make a choice between coming from the ***sky*** and coming as a ***thief***, discovers a fundamental principle: he finds that the use of “***the metaphoric miracles***”—metaphors that imply or predict supernatural events—is as common in the Bible as “figures of speech” are in all great works of literature. He learns that it is hard to look at a page in the Scripture, without noticing an example of such language. With a little search he can even find an example from the past that is virtually identical to the puzzle of seemingly opposite prophecies about the future. He comes across this incredible claim from our Lord in His first Advent:

I have come down from heaven... John 6:38 NKJ

The Greek word used in the Gospel means “***sky***.” But the translators of the Bible into English choose “***heaven***” instead of “***sky***.” It is easier to pass over “heaven” and not be shocked by it. It is a poetic word, but Jesus was not speaking in poetry. He in fact did say:

I have come down from the sky...

How did our Lord come to this world? Through the process of birth from Mary. Why then did He make that incredible claim? Because “***the metaphoric miracles***” are a distinctive sign of God’s universal language. ***They are His hallmark.***

Hundreds of examples can be given from Genesis to Revelation. Let us examine a few of them to see if by ***human*** standard “***the metaphoric miracles***” make any sense. Study the following verses. They contain many metaphors identical with those found in prophecies of the second Advent, metaphors such as: “***heavens,***” “***clouds,***” “***fire,***” “***darkness,***” “***brightness,***” “***smoke,***” “***coming down,***” and “***lightning:***”

Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of ***heaven*** quaked and were shaken, because He [the Lord] was angry. ***Smoke*** went up from ***His nostrils***, and devouring ***fire*** from ***His mouth***; coals were kindled by it. He bowed the ***heavens*** also,

and *came down* with *darkness* under *His feet*. He rode upon a *cherub*, and flew; and He was seen upon *the wings of the wind*. He made *darkness canopies* around Him, dark waters and thick *clouds of the skies*. From the *brightness* before Him coals of *fire* were kindled. The Lord *thundered from heaven*, and the Most High uttered His voice. He sent out *arrows* and scattered them; *lightning bolts*, and He vanquished them. Then the channels of the sea were seen, the foundations of the world were uncovered, at the rebuke of the Lord, at the blast of *the breath of His nostrils*.

II Samuel 22:8-16 NKJ

- Does the Lord have nostrils?
- Does smoke pass through His nostrils when He is angry?
- Does He need to ride upon “the wings of the wind” to travel?
- Does fire pour out of God’s mouth?
- Does He surround Himself with “dark waters”?
- Does the brightness of His face kindle coal?
- Does God shout or “thunder” from above?
- Does God throw arrows at His enemies?
- Does the universe have a foundation to be uncovered?
- Does God show His power by “blasting His nostrils”?

Consider the next verse. It declares that the Lord in His second Advent will carry a sword in His mouth. Will He really?

Now out of His [Lord’s] mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. Revelation 19:15 NKJ

Ponder the following promise from our Lord; it has *a metaphoric message* just the opposite of “*coming down from heaven*.”

But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, ***will draw all men to myself***. John 12:32 NIV

Did our Lord keep this promise literally? Did He draw even one person from the earth, let alone all the peoples of Palestine or of our planet?

Consider also the next prophecy. Did our Lord also literally fulfill this promise?

And I assure you that ***some of you standing here right now will not die before you see me, the Son of Man, coming in my Kingdom***. Christ (Matthew 16:28 NLT)

Is this a false prophecy, or is it an example of “metaphoric miracles” a mode of speech that is the hallmark of God’s most common language?

If you made the following promise to a loved one, would ***not*** he or she take it literally?

And surely I am with you always, ***to the very end of the age***. Christ (Matthew 28:20 NIV)

This is the end of the age. Did our Lord stay with us to this age ***physically*** or ***spiritually***? Consider also the next example. We know thousands of Christians have been killed by their enemies. Was the following statement from our Lord a false promise or an example of “***metaphoric miracles***”?

All men will hate you because of me. ***But not a hair of your head will perish.*** By standing firm you will gain life. Christ (Luke 21:17-19 NIV)

Consider also these examples of seemingly conflicting instructions and prophecies:

- Every eye shall see Him (Revelation 1:7).
- Unto them that look for Him shall he appear the second time (Hebrews 9:28)

Question: Do you need to look for someone who is supposed to be seen by “every eye”? Do you need to look for someone who comes from the sky? Is it possible that by “every eye shall see him” is meant every “inner eye”? That meaning is in perfect harmony with “Unto them that look for him...”



- Every eye shall see Him (Revelation 1:7).
- On that day...Whoever has my commands and ***obeys them***...I...will...show myself to him (John 14:20-21 NIV).

Are not both promises from our Lord? Are not both of them equally valid? Why does our Lord say that He will show Himself to those who obey Him? What commands are critical and relevant to finding and seeing Him? Can you think of any commands other than these:

- Use God’s standard: By their fruits you shall know them.
- Do not use the unauthorized standard: Prophecy. You cannot unseal them.
- Remember the Jews and keep your inner eyes detached and pure from all preconceived notions, from all traditional powers.



- Every eye shall see Him (Revelation 1:7).
- What I say to you, I say to everyone: “Watch!” (Mark 13:37).

Question: What does “Watch!” mean? Pay attention! Why would “paying attention” be considered urgent? And when would a person need to pay attention? Answer: Only when an event can be missed, such as the coming of a thief, while the householders are asleep. Is that not the way Jesus came in His first advent? He was the light of the world, yet most people did not “see” His light. How can a person “watch”? By paying attention to the news of the coming of the Master, and by testing Him according to ***His*** standards.



- Every eye shall see Him (Revelation 1:7).
- Without holiness no one will ***see*** the Lord (Hebrews 12:14 NIV).

Question: Who was *the real* Jesus? Flesh and bone or a Spirit? Who saw His Spirit the first time? The holy ones, those with hearts pure from prejudice (preconceived notions) and selfish desires. Will not they be the ones the second time also?



- Every eye shall see Him (Revelation 1:7).
- As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:37 NIV). The coming of the Son of Man will repeat what happened in Noah's time (New American Bible).

Did every "eye" see Noah? Noah also came like Jesus: as a thief. He too was seen by every "eye." Unfortunately, He too found only a few with open or healthy eyes. If Jesus came with His awesome fire power, could people ignore Him as they did during Noah's time? The hallmark of the people to whom Noah came was denial. If Jesus came from the sky with thousands of angels, would anyone dare deny Him?



- Behold, he cometh with clouds; and
- Every eye shall see Him (Revelation 1:7).

Ask yourself this simple question: Why did our Lord use the word "cloud" in His prophecy? Can that word give us the critical clue to the whole puzzle? Yes indeed. Consider these questions:

- If a person wants to be seen by every eye, would he choose to come on a clear day or a cloudy day? Obviously on a clear day.
- What purpose do clouds serve? They conceal the light.
- What purpose do metaphors serve? They conceal the spiritual truth.
- How can we see the light of the sun? By passing beyond the clouds.
- How can we see the light of truth? By passing beyond the clouds of *Metaphoric Miracles*.

With this perspective, note how clear Jesus' prophecy becomes:

- ◆ **He comes with clouds:** all kinds of misconceptions surround His Return.
- ◆ Every eye shall see Him: But anyone who has an inner eye will be able to break through the clouds and see His Light.

Aside from using the jigsaw puzzle of biblical prophecies and clues to detect the true meaning of "sky," "eye," and "seeing," think also about these practical questions:

- ◆ The sun is more than a million times bigger than the earth. Yet to be visible by earthly beings, it must be that big. In spite of its size and the speed with which the earth moves (1,000 miles an hour at the equator), it takes several hours for the sun to become visible to most—but not all—earthly beings. Those at the poles live for six months at a time in darkness. In addition, much of the earth is covered by

clouds. Hence, to make Himself visible, Jesus must descend below the clouds and shrink His size wherever it is cloudy, and then expand His size and go thousands of miles up to be seen over large areas where it is sunny. Remember also that countless people live in deep forests, where they see only trees, some live in submarines, and millions are blind or suffer from poor eyesight. All these people have eyes but will be unable to see the Lord. What about people who are asleep or are bed-ridden in hospitals and hospices?

- ♦ If we are literal about “seeing,” we should also be literal about “killing.” As we shall see, prophecies predict the wholesale slaughter of billions of unbelievers. Ask yourself this simple question: Why would Jesus, the loving Lord of the universe, go through the effort of making Himself visible to the people He is going to kill later? We can always rationalize, but God asks us to reason: “Let us reason together, says the Lord” (Isaiah 1:18).

Those who draw a beautiful picture of a man floating in the clouds with a wonderful Christian family looking up, extending their hands, and smiling, never raise the other questions. And believers who see the picture, do not like to hear those questions either. Hearing those unwelcomed questions destroys all the fun! That is exactly what happened to the Jews. They pictured a glorious king, who by magical powers, would kill all his enemies, especially the non-Jews, and would establish a splendid kingdom. Should we not learn from their example? Should we not make an effort to break through the clouds of *Metaphoric Miracles*?

This parable explains clearly the meaning of the coming of the Lord like a thief:

At that time the kingdom of heaven [the second Advent] will be like ten virgins [Christians who have a desire to be spiritually married to the Bridegroom] who took their lamps [the Church, the Christian label] and went out to meet the bridegroom [the Lord at His second coming]. Five of them were *foolish* and five were *wise*. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil [of wisdom and insight] with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.

The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became [spiritually] drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight [the dark of unawareness] the cry rang out: “Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!” Then all the virgins woke up [heard the news of His coming] and trimmed their lamps [prepared themselves for the search]. The foolish ones said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.” “No,” they replied, “there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves [everyone must gain his own wisdom; it cannot be borrowed].”

But while they were on their way to buy the oil [were spiritually absent], the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were [spiritually] ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the others [who were not fully ready and failed to recognize Him] also came. “Sir! Sir!” they said. “Open the door for us!” But he replied, “I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.” Therefore keep watch [pay attention to the news of the thief who comes in the dark of unawareness], because you do not know the day or the hour [the hour arrives, the Bridegroom comes, but you do

not know because you fail to pay attention to the news of His coming].

Matthew 25:1-13 NIV

Questions:

- Who were the five virgins who missed Jesus? They were Christians; they too were waiting for His arrival.
- Why did they miss Him? What was wrong with them? According to Jesus, they were fools.
- Who is a fool? The believer who lacks true faith, who pays lip service to the Lord but does not follow His instructions.
- What instructions?

By their fruit you will recognize them....Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a *wise* man who built his house on the rock...But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a *foolish* man who built his house on sand.

Christ (Matthew 7:16-26 NIV)

- Who builds his house on sand? The one who exchanges the standard of “fruit” for “personal or traditional interpretation of prophecy.” The one who disobeys his Lord.
- What does Jesus call such a believer? A fool!

Does this parable in any way imply that “Every eye shall see Him”? No! It clarifies the meaning of eye and seeing. It indicates that only a wise, faithful, prepared, and pure eye will be able to see the Bridegroom and enter His banquet, exactly as it happened the first time. Those who lacked the oil of wisdom saw nothing but the clouds of their own prejudices and illusions, nothing but darkness.



- Every eye shall see Him (Revelation 1:7).
- I [Jesus Christ] counsel you to buy from me...salve to put on your eyes, so you can *see* (Revelation 3:18).

Question: What is “the salve” or the ointment that helps the believers “see”? Wisdom and insight, not eyesight. A blind person may have perfect eyes and a seeing person may be perfectly blind.



- Every eye shall see Him (Revelation 1:7).
- The words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end...those who are *wise* will understand (Daniel 12:9-10 NIV).

Who are the wise who can understand? The ones who obey their Master’s commands and instructions. What are the Master’s critical commands and instructions?

- Keeping one’s *heart* free from *selfish* clouds. What selfish clouds kept the Jews from recognizing Jesus? Conformity to tradition, fear of change, worldliness, complacency, lack of courage, and lack of faith.
- Keeping the mind free from ignorance. How? By knowing and using the only authorized standard: “By their *fruits* you shall know them.” What unauthorized standards prevented the Jews from recognizing Jesus? *Prophesying in the name of Jehovah and glorifying miracles.*

Why do most Christians pay attention to “Every eye shall see Him,” but ignore all the other instructions, parables, and prophecies that clarify the meaning of that promise? For the same reasons that the Jews living at the time of Jesus ignored the profile of “*a suffering Servant,*” but kept focusing on the glorious image of “*a king like David.*” For that reason—their failure to see the whole picture—Jesus called them fools (Matthew 24:25-27).

Are Christians of this age wiser than the Jews who lived at the time of Jesus? Can anyone make that claim and prove it? The picture that the Scripture portrays of the people of this age is as bad as anyone can imagine. It shows that the Christians of this age lack faith in the words of their Lord. It shows that they turn their hearts away from the truth. It indicates that they become preoccupied with “myths” (II Timothy 4:4 NIV). What is a “myth”? Anything that is not rooted in reality. Is it possible that the greatest of all myths Christians of this age cherish and promote relate to the way our Lord will return? Could the following be the myths prophesied in the Scripture?

- We Christians are wise; we know the true meaning of prophecies.
- We are authorized to prophesy in the name of the Lord.
- Prophecies about the return of Jesus from the sky are literal.
- The last time He came like a thief; this time He must come with physical glory and power.
- Fruits are irrelevant. To know Jesus the second time, we must depend only on prophecies according to *our* interpretation exactly as did the Jews.
- What our ancestors have believed is true. We will continue to support the traditional interpretations of those who came before us. We will ignore anyone who deviates from this perspective, anyone who takes away from us the pleasure of hoping for the miraculous and heavenly Return of our Lord. We will only publish and promote books and articles that support orthodox interpretation of prophecies. We will reject works that deviate from orthodoxy or offer a fresh perspective.
- Christians of this age are wiser than the Jews who lived at the time of Jesus.
- Prophecies in the past were both literal and symbolic. After the Advent of Jesus, God changed this rule. All miraculous prophecies are now literal.
- The Jews were the chosen people of God at the time of the first Advent. *We* are now the chosen people. Jesus will take us to heaven and leave the rest of humanity to suffer.

One of the best known prophecies of the second Advent is given by St. Paul. In the light of the new perspective we have—the common language of “*metaphoric miracles*”—let us put that prophecy to the literal test. Here is his prophecy from *The Amplified Bible* (AB)—a translation that offers a few aids, such as adding the various shades of the Greek words in parentheses:

...[when] the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels *in a flame of fire; to deal out retribution—chastisement and vengeance—upon those who do not know or perceive or become acquainted with God, and [upon those] who ignore and refuse to obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Such people will pay the penalty and suffer the punishment of *everlasting ruin* (destruction and perdition) and [eternal exclusion and banishment] from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.

II Thessalonians 1:7-9 AB

Take the word *fire*. Is it literal or symbolic? Most Christian scholars take it literally. Let us put that idea to the literal test.

God is both loving and just. Could He also be sadistic? Does He enjoy torturing His children? Certainly there is a better way of getting rid of all “the bad” people than burning them to death. The God who created the universe by His Word, should also be able to make all the bad people disappear by that very Word.

What happens if we take the word “*fire*” literally? How many people will be spared from the flame? Some literal-minded theologians have estimated the total number of people who qualify for the fire—atheists, non-Christians, and disobedient Christians, such as believers who engage in divorce or any form of sex outside marriage. They estimate the number of all these people to be about five billion. They believe only 1 in 10 residents of our planet will survive the global fire that our Lord will bring. There is much disagreement about who deserves to die. For instance, what should be the cutting age, or the birthdays, under which children and young people will be saved from the fire and everlasting ruin, and what level of opportunities people must have had before they qualify for the fire?

Ponder the implications of the following act to recognize the absolute senselessness of *literal* interpretation of “metaphoric miracles.” Hitler slaughtered six million Jews. For this horrible act, we label him *the most evil tyrant in human history*. An implication of *the literal* interpretation of St. Paul’s prophecy is this: When Jesus returns, He will eliminate the adult Jews! We do not know what is the year and the birthday from which our Lord will choose to spare or kill people. Why would He eliminate those Jews? Because they are among the billions who have refused “*to obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” The moral implications of this act alone should awaken every sincere and thoughtful Christian to the common use of “*metaphoric miracles*” in all prophecies, whether they pertain to the first Advent or the second.

All miraculous speculations and expectations have resulted from *literal-mindedness, from a failure to recognize the most common language spoken in the Scripture: that of “the metaphoric miracles.”* To save yourself from the agony of picturing our most gentle and loving Lord engaging in the slaughter of hundreds of millions of people by fire, all

you need to do is look for a verse that covers *the same topic* in relation to the *first* Advent. With a little effort, you will find this verse:

He [Christ] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and *with fire*. Matthew 3:11 NIV

Did our Lord baptize anyone *with fire*? Consider also this statement from our Lord:

I have come to bring *fire* on the earth, and how I wish it were already *kindled!*
Christ (Luke 12:49 NIV)

Did our Lord accomplish His stated mission of setting the earth on fire? Did He set *any* person or *any* house *on fire*? No! Jesus came to cleanse the world by setting fire to the decayed and destructive traditions and beliefs. Would the one who “died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6) return to burn the ungodly? Would the One who came to save the sinners return to destroy them? Did Jesus not say:

It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. Christ (Mark 2:17 NIV)

Our Lord and Master manifested perfect love and mercy. He said, “I am gentle and lowly in heart.” “How blessed are those of a gentle spirit...How blessed are those who show mercy” (Matthew 11:29; 5:5-7). Would the One who taught us to shine on all people like the rays of the sun (Matthew 5:45), the Savior who asked us to love our neighbors and even our enemies, change, on His return, as a literal interpretation of St. Paul’s prophecy indicates, into a global arsonist? Is such an act conceivable from our most gentle and loving Lord?

If “fire” can be a metaphor, cannot “heaven” also be a metaphor? Could not the Lord be born on earth the second time as He did the first time, and once again make that same claim, that He indeed has descended from the sky?

I have come down from heaven [sky]... Christ (John 6:38 NKJ)

Should we reject our Lord if He manifests all the fruits of perfection, but fails to bring fire to burn the bad people? Should we ignore His call if He is as gentle and loving the second time as He was the first time, but refuses to scorch even an ant, let alone millions of people? Should we deny Him because we fail to understand His unique metaphoric language? Should we ask Him for nuclear fire that destroys the structure of the physical world? Or should we expect from Him the fire of Spirit that burns the veils of separation from God, that destroys the prevailing apathy, complacency, and the age old and corrupt traditions and institutions that perpetuate ignorance, worldliness, war, hatred, poverty, fear, prejudice, and separation? Should not our Lord be able to do what He did the first time and still make this claim:

I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!
Christ (Luke 12:49 NIV)

But why does God, in His prophecies, often speak in the language of “*metaphoric miracles*”? For many reasons, such as:

- Drawing a sharp contrast between divine language and the human.
- Testing our obedience to His commands.
- Separating those who love “the letter” from those who love “the spirit.”

- Protecting the prophecies from abuse.

Let us explore these reasons in detail. God tests us in many ways. Every encounter and every decision is a test. He wants to assess those who claim loyalty to their Lord, so that He can separate the sincere from the insincere. He wants to manifest the hidden motives of His servants, to show who obeys His commands, who disobeys. He wants to distinguish those who follow ***His standards*** from those who pursue their ***selfish desires***.

God utters His prophecies in two languages: literal and symbolic. He then informs us that understanding the meaning of mysteries and symbols is beyond our ability; that they are sealed, and that no one can break the seal except Himself. He asks us to wait for Him to come and solve the riddles. Then He watches to see who obeys and who disobeys.

Consider this analogy. You ask a little girl to finish her meal, the main course, but not touch the dessert. You say, “Finish your soup, salad, and sandwich, but do not eat the dessert. Wait for me; I have to do some shopping before the stores close and will be back in an hour. When I return, I will give you your share of the dessert.” Now suppose you return after doing your shopping and see to your utter amazement that the little girl has finished all the dessert, including your share, but has not touched the main course! What does this indicate? Disobedience to your request and lack of respect for your wishes.

Prophecy, in most mouths, tastes as sweet as dessert. Almost every Christian loves it and wants a part of it. But fruits and bread, which are quite nutritious, are left virtually untouched! Check any Christian bookstore in your town. You will find no book that speaks about the ingredients of the Bread of Life or the Fruits of Perfection as the evidence for our Lord either in the first or second Advent. But you will find countless books of prophecy, each competing with the other! This same analogy applies to miracles. In fact, the sweetness of prophecies lies in their supernatural displays of power. If we remove the supernatural from prophecies, they lose virtually all their appeal, all their flavor. They may taste no better than salad or cooked vegetables!

This simple test separated the faithful Jews from the unfaithful at the time of the first Advent. It will serve the same purpose at the time of the second.

God tests us by His prophecies in still another way. He wants to distinguish those who prefer ***spiritual*** glories and blessings from those who prefer ***worldly*** powers and honors. He wants to know who has set his mind over a powerful king, and who is willing to accept even a poor carpenter for his Redeemer. It is easy to fall in love with “the letter” of the metaphor and most people do. No wonder Jesus said, “***Many*** are called, but ***few*** are chosen” (Matthew 20:16). ***The literal side—power—always gets far more attention and followers than the spiritual.***

How can our faith be tested? It can only be tested through adversity, only when ***events happen contrary to our wishes and wants***. Recognizing a Redeemer who looks like a friend or a neighbor is contrary to our expectations and selfish desires. In effect, God says, “Here is a treasure concealed in a field. To find the treasure you must do some digging.” The sincere seeker of truth instantly starts digging. The one who has little faith refuses to dig. There may be a hundred reasons why he refuses, but they are all selfish. Notice how clearly our Lord confirmed this point:

The kingdom of heaven is ***like treasure hidden in a field.***

Matthew 13:44 NIV

The metaphor of *treasure* is in perfect harmony with the metaphor of *thief*. The heavenly thief looks like any other human being. *His physical form is His mask. Our test is to un-mask Him.* We cannot find or know a treasure simply by looking at the field. We must do some digging. And this is the sole purpose of this book: To *Un-Mask the Thief*.

Does *the Master* have the right to test the servant, or does *the servant* have the right to test the Master? When we say to our Lord:

I don't care what *spiritual glories and distinctions* you present, what "*fruits*" or "*bread*" you produce. Before receiving my vote of confidence, you must prove yourself by doing something *physical*. You can be my Lord *only* if you do something miraculous.

Does not setting such a condition violate the commandment that:

Do not test the Lord your God... Deuteronomy 6:16 NIV

Starting with or demanding miracles and signs reverses the roles of the Master and the servant. It is the *Master's* right to test His servant. And how does He do this? Through "*metaphoric miracles.*"

Jesus demonstrated this same strategy *not only in the way He appeared (as a poor homeless man), but also in the way He spoke*. To the literal-minded Pharisees, He often spoke in metaphors and parables, but to His sincere disciples in plain language. *His disciples had already passed their tests*; they had already demonstrated their sincerity and loyalty. They had already fallen in love with the Spirit, with the heavenly treasure hidden in a seemingly ordinary person, in a poor young man. *But the literal-minded Pharisees needed a test to expose their hidden motives*. The following pronouncement of our Lord presents a world of wisdom. It shows how God protects His beautiful Bride of wondrous meanings with the veil of metaphors from the eyes of the strangers. Read it many times and ponder its meaning to discover its profound pearls of knowledge and truth:

Then the disciples came to Him and said, why do You speak to them in parables? And He replied to them, *to you it has been given to know the secrets and mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given*. For whoever has [spiritual knowledge], to him will more be given and he will be furnished richly, so that he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is the reason that I speak to them in parables, because having the power of hearing they do not hear, nor do they grasp and understand...But blessed—happy, fortunate and to be envied—are your eyes, because they do see, and your ears, because they do hear.

Matthew 13:10-16 AB

Jesus' disciples had done their share of digging. They had already reached the treasures of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but the Pharisees not only had refused to dig, they had even closed their eyes and plugged their ears! They did not deserve to see the pearls of truths unprotected.

Faith is a struggle between "the spiritual" and "the material," between "the visible" and "the invisible." We manifest our true essence by our choices. Unless we wear spiritual glasses, we cannot see the inner beauty and harmony of the Word of God.

But the natural man does not receive *the things of the Spirit of God*, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they *are spiritually discerned*.

I Corinthians 2:14 NKJ

With spiritual glasses, all prophecies fit perfectly; without them, there is nothing but conflict and chaos. Prophecies are from God; they are “the things of the Spirit of God.” As Paul declares, *anything that comes from God, must be “spiritually discerned.”*

The use of “*metaphoric miracles*” serves still another purpose: It protects prophecies from abuse. Imagine if all the deceivers in Israel knew the true meaning of all the prophecies of the first Advent. Imagine if they knew the appointed year of the Advent of the Lord and all the other details. Imagine how many deceivers and mockers would try to fulfill those prophecies in their lives! How many would have called their sons Jesus, and claimed to have had them from virgin daughters! Metaphors, like a jewelry box, protected the gems of truths from the strangers and abusers.

As a rule, the meaning of prophecies become clear only *after* they have been fulfilled. No one knew what the Hebrew prophecies meant until our Lord fulfilled them and explained them.

Then beginning with Moses and...all the prophets, He [Jesus] went on *explaining and interpreting to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning and referring to Himself*.

Luke 24:27 AB

Human ignorance is so deep and preconceived notions are so difficult to overcome, our Lord had to continue to enlighten His disciples even after His resurrection. As Christian scholar Herbert Lockyer notes:

After His Resurrection, meeting His disciples, He began by *interpreting* the Scriptures to them, and then went on to “unseal the barred doors of their perceptions...”¹

If people had known what the prophecies meant, would they have denied their Lord? *Why this rule—that the true meaning of prophecies is known AFTER they are fulfilled and explained by the One who knows them—should suddenly change in our time? Can you think of any reason?*

The sincere seeker intent on resolving “*the puzzle of the opposites*” continues his search for further facts. With a little persistence, he finds this most critical verse:

But first note this: no one can interpret any prophesy of Scripture by himself.

II Peter 1:20 NEB

The Amplified version of the same verse:

[Yet] first [you must] understand this, that *no prophecy of Scripture is* [a matter] *of any personal or private or special interpretation* [brackets as original].

Are not the interpretations of theologians their *personal* views? No wonder they disagree about so many issues. What value do those personal views have? Should we base our everlasting destiny on the interpretations of people who have no right to interpret?

Peter's clear warning that no one has the capacity to interpret "**any prophecy of Scripture**" is clearly confirmed by the words of Jesus. As we noted, our Lord condemned, in the harshest words, the Christians who use His name to predict the future:

Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name...?'
Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, **you evildoers!**"

Matthew 7:22-23 NIV

God in His supreme Wisdom has given us further guidelines. The following is not only an instruction but a clear commandment:

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till THE LORD comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and WILL EXPOSE THE MOTIVES OF MEN'S HEARTS.

I Corinthians 4:5 NIV

Read the preceding verse again and again and ponder its meaning. It indicates that the Lord will accomplish two goals:

- He will **expose** or manifest the inner meaning and mysteries of the Scripture and whatever people cannot understand.
- He will also **expose** or manifest the inner motives of those who hear His interpretation.

The following message is clearly implied in the preceding counsel and commandment: The Lord's interpretation of mysteries—issues that need explanation—EXPOSES THE MOTIVES OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO HEAR THEM. It will put to the test their faith and sincerity.

The preceding verse is the most clear and critical verse in all the Scripture about our right, as fallible humans, to interpret God's word, especially issues that need clarification, such as prophecies. Why is the command so critical? **Because we will deny our Lord if we fail to observe it.** We may say to Him, "If **Your** interpretation is not the same as **mine**, You are a deceiver!" **That is how critical that verse is, and how significant the consequences of disregarding it.**

The verses cited clearly show that human beings are **unqualified** to know the meaning of prophecies, that they are **unable** to decipher the inner treasures of mysteries and metaphors. Biblical history proves this point beyond any doubt. Why did the Jews deny Jesus? Because of a failure to reach the pearls of inner meanings of prophecies concealed in metaphors. The people of Israel were in the precise position we are today. They also had **two opposite sets of prophecies**. One set predicted the coming of "**a suffering servant**," the other "**a powerful king**." Which set did they choose, and which did they ignore? They acted as people always act and perhaps always will. They cast their vote in favor of a powerful king. They took the prophecies that contained messages of a "**metaphoric miracle**" literally and ignored the other set of prophecies that pertained to "the suffering servant."

Consider this statement from a Christian author about the Jews of the time of Jesus:

Two completely different portraits of a coming Messiah were described by the Old Testament prophets. The portraits, painted by the sure hand of God, were placed on the same canvas, framed in one picture...One portrait of the Messiah depicts Him as a

humble servant who would suffer for others and be rejected by His own countrymen. This portrait we may call “the Suffering Messiah.” (Look into the prophecies of Isaiah 53 for the perfect picture of this Messiah.)

The other portrait shows the Messiah as a conquering king with unlimited power, who comes suddenly to earth at the height of a global war and saves men from self-destruction. He places the Israelites who believe in Him as the spiritual and secular leaders of the world and brings in an age free of prejudice and injustice. ***It’s easy to see why this would be the most popular portrait*** [emphasis added].²

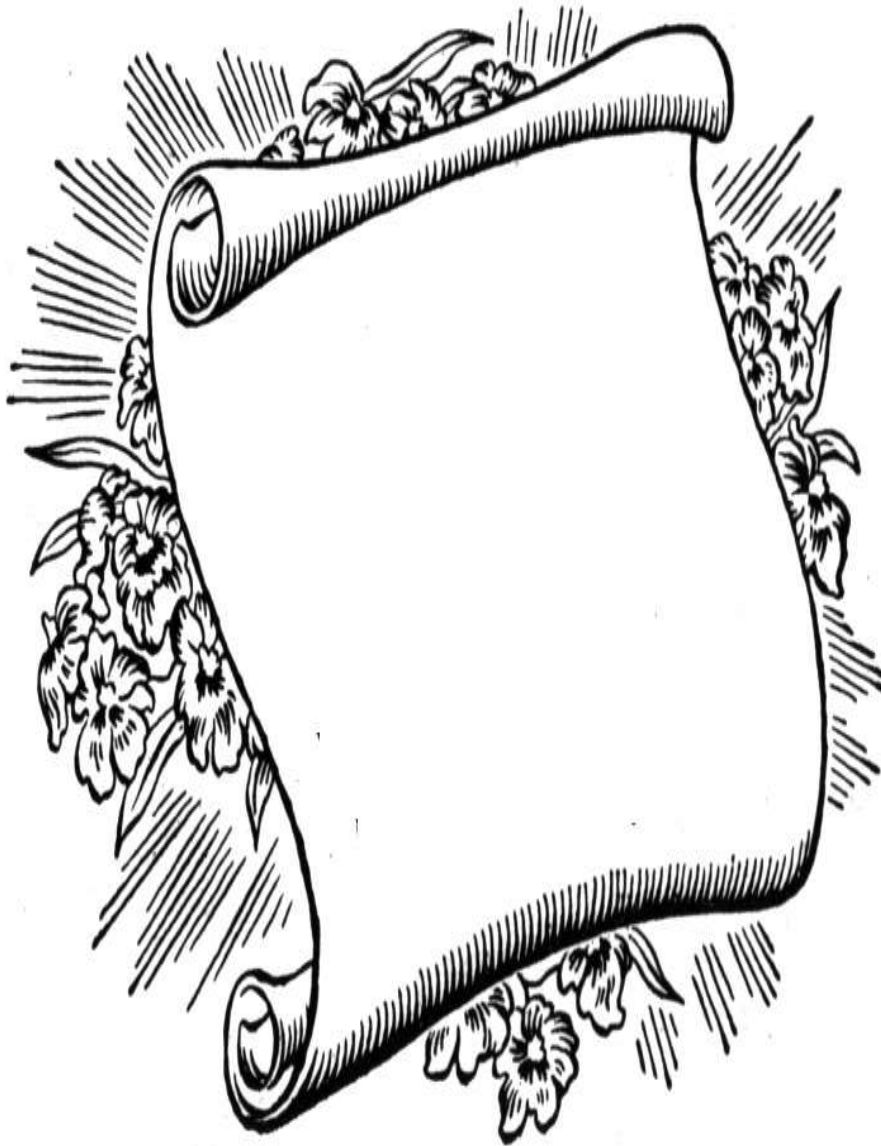
Bible interpreters often acknowledge the twin portraits of the Jewish Messiah, but I have never seen any of them ask, “***Why were the twin portraits given?***” Why was it not made clear which portrait would appear first? Why did God not warn the Jews that their Messiah would ***begin*** His Kingdom with poverty and suffering? As we noted, this was done to separate the sincere from the insincere, the faithful from the unfaithful. This purpose was achieved; the strategy worked perfectly. The narrow- and literal-minded Pharisees denied our Lord; the humble and the pure hearted ones recognized Him.

Let us go back again to that most significant and yet most widely ignored instruction in the entire Bible—this time from *The Amplified Bible*—about the role and authority of human beings in understanding the mysteries of the Word of God. ***The following passage contains the most clear and critical commandment concerning the right of human beings to interpret the Word of God.*** It is one of those verses that few Bible teachers and

*So do not make any
hasty or premature
judgments before the
time when the Lord
comes [again], for He
will both bring to light
the secret things that
are (now hidden) in
darkness, and disclose
and expose the (secret)
aims (motives and
purposes) of hearts
[brackets and parentheses
as original].*

1 Corinthians 4:5 AB

interpreters would like to notice:



The preceding passage should be at the beginning of every book of prophecy. It should be memorized by every Christian. Yet I have never seen it quoted in any book of Bible prophecy. Why? The mere mentioning it would undermine the value of the book. It would make void the interpretation of every interpreter! It would even indicate that the author has no regard for a command of the Bible. ***Anyone who makes any statement with any degree of certainty is making a premature judgment.*** That is exactly what he or she is asked ***not*** to do.

The preceding verses ask every believer to ***let the Lord*** unravel the inner mysteries. Resolving the puzzle of “***coming from the sky***” or “***coming like a thief***” is certainly of this category, just as was resolving the puzzle of “***a conquering king***” versus “***a suffering servant***” was at the time of Jesus’ first Advent. Observing the preceding command or

counsel will put to the most trying test the faith of every Christian, especially that of the leaders and scholars. Few believers would want to admit to ignorance, few would want to say, “I really don’t know. I have not yet made up my mind about the way our Lord returns. I have not carved my decision in stone.” Questioning a tradition that has endured for centuries is not easy. Acknowledging a sense of humility, open-mindedness, and detachment from tradition puts every believer to the most trying test. This is why our Lord said:

...the hour of TRIAL that is going to come upon the whole world to TEST those who live on the earth.

Revelation 3:10 NIV

The *TRIAL* and the *TEST* may be this:

- Jesus returns in the form of a humble human being as He did in His first Advent.
- Jesus again asks us to know Him by His inner light, by His *heavenly fruits*, and *celestial bread*, by His *spiritual* glory and power, not physical.

Is this far-fetched? Read on!

7

Beware of False Prophets

What is meant by “false prophets”? How can we know them? What are the signs? Many people use the word “false” as a reason to fear any claim no matter who makes it, and how much evidence may support it. This chapter demonstrates that it is absolutely essential to be careful and watchful, but never be fearful of investigating new ideas or of being deceived, because the line that separates a true Christ from a false christ is as clear as day from night.

Suppose someone came to you and said, “I am Jesus Christ. I have come the second time to save you!” How would you respond? Would you run away in fear, call him a deceiver, or would you start asking some questions? This chapter demonstrates that the best choice is the last one.

In this age, everything has been multiplied. Whether we want to buy a car, a camera, or a loaf of bread, we face a wide range of choices. What is the key to making a good choice? Wisdom! In the past, there were only a few ways to make a living; today there are countless ways. In the past, there were only a few ways to God; today those ways have multiplied. We have a vast assortment of religions, denominations, pseudo-religions, and cults to suit every taste, to satisfy every temperament imaginable. The ways to God are produced as rapidly as recipes. In Christianity alone, we have anywhere between 2,000 to 25,000 denominations! People are overwhelmed. Some have given up; others are in search of a compass that can guide them through life’s turbulent waters. Many have lost their inner guide and self-confidence to separate truth from half truths, and half truths from sheer deception. The spiritual scene is foggy; the view is blurred and shady:

...the day God visits...is the time of their confusion (Micah 7:4 NIV). It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime—a day known to the Lord (Zechariah 14:7 NIV).

Consider this example. Suppose you faced a huge mountain of gravel. You hear each bit of gravel shout: “Pick me! Pick me! Pick me!” How would you feel? Overwhelmed, frustrated, and stressed. Your inner instinct tells you to walk away or even to run away from the scene, holding on tightly to what you already have. At least you feel some sense of loyalty to the gift of faith you have received from your parents and grandparents. Why exchange the known for the unknown?

Now suppose there is a precious jewel somewhere in that huge mountain of gravel. Could you find it? How would you even suspect that there may be such a jewel in that pile? Even if you knew there was one, would you have the time, the patience, and the persistence to keep looking in that huge mountain for that one precious piece? This chapter presents standards and teaches skills that will make the job of digging, sifting, and searching at least a thousand times easier. Just read on and see! In the past, finding and digging for gold was hard work; modern technology has made that job much easier. That is the purpose this chapter serves.

Just as God hides treasures of gold, so does He hide treasures of truth! In searching lies the hope, the honor, and the joy of finding.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. Christ (Matthew 13:44 NIV)

But God does not leave us alone. He asks us to dig and then waits and watches to see who obeys Him, who takes the pick and the shovel! When He sees any sign of digging, He rushes to the aid of the diggers! In His supreme wisdom, He commands us to “Seek!” Then as a token of His infinite grace, He crowns that command with the glorious promise of “You shall find!”

Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! Christ (Matthew 7:9-11 NIV)

Our chief responsibility is to find the right tools and begin digging. The tools we need most are courage, thirst for truth, patience, persistence, trust in our Lord, and many prayers. When we raise the pick, the guiding angels rush to our aid.

Much of the confusion, disappointment, and difficulty in finding the gem of truth comes from making two false assumptions:

- There is no clear line between an independent faith and a denomination.
- There are no clear standards by which we can separate the truth from half truths and falsehood, no way to tell the difference between a jewel and gravel.

If you liberate your mind from those two false assumptions, you will experience a dramatic change of perspective. You will suddenly see the jewel of truth emerging with dazzling brightness from the pile and shining with supreme splendor. You will discover that the fault does not lie in the jewel but in your eyes. Note this instruction from our Lord about the critical significance of having good eyes:

...anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. Revelation 3:18 NKJ

Your awareness of those two false assumptions will enhance your insight immensely. Like an ointment, the awareness will remove the defects and allow your eyes to see with perfect clarity. Just as a little chip of wood in the eye can totally distort the vision, so can those false assumptions.

The first step to find the jewel is to look at today’s mountain of beliefs and see if we can progressively reduce its size. The best way to do this is to classify the stones. Our goal is to get closer to the jewel of truth through a process of elimination.

All religious systems that claim to be the true source of spiritual guidance can be classified into three categories:

- *Cults*
- *Denominations*
- *Independent religions*

Cults carry distinctive marks; they can be instantly identified and eliminated from the pile. Anyone with a little common sense can recognize them without any effort. At the center of every cult lies a charismatic leader who displays human weaknesses, yet claims superhuman powers. Every cult manifests some or all of these distinctive features: secrecy, brain washing, mind control, deception, worldliness, isolation, narrow-mindedness, emotionalism, fraud, violence, and suicide. Cult members also often engage in drug, alcohol, and sexual abuse. Anyone with even a trickle of common sense can instantly recognize the rotten fruits of cults.

This awareness substantially reduces the size of the mountain. The next step is to examine the next group on our list: denominations. Which one is the true one? What do they have in common? The belief that binds them together is loyalty to Jesus Christ as their Savior and reverence for the Bible as the Word of God. Besides this, we find a diversity of opinion, interpretation, and varied theological positions on every issue expressed in the Bible.

Let us now look more closely at their differences. Christians can be classified into two main categories: those who recognize the Bible as the *only* source of spiritual guidance, and those who add at least one *extra book* to the Bible. Let us call the first group orthodox, the second non-orthodox. The orthodox denominations include Catholics and Protestants with various doctrines, such as Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and many others.

The non-orthodox denominations consider their *extra book* an extension of the Bible and a valid source of enlightenment and spiritual guidance. This analogy will clarify their position. Consider the Bible as a tree. They believe the tree remained inactive for 18 centuries. Then it suddenly started to produce a new branch sometime during the 19th and 20th centuries. Each of those denominations considers its own extra book the only true branch grown out of the Bible since ancient times.

Orthodox Christians consider those *extra books* a product of human imagination and totally unreliable. They regard each of those branches as a stick of dead wood attached to the tree.

Denominations with the extra book are few. The best known are these:

- The Mormons or the Latter Day Saints, who revere and use *The Book of Mormon*, by Joseph Smith, along with the Bible.
- The Jehovah Witnesses, who use the works of Charles Russell, the founder of their church, as authentic teachings.
- The Seventh-day Adventists, who consider Ellen G. White a “prophetess” with authentic visions and views.

- The members of The Unification Church, known as the Moonies, who follow Reverend Sun Myung Moon. They consider his book *The Divine Principle* a source of authentic teachings added to the Bible. Some of Mr. Moon's followers regard him as a Messiah, although he has not openly made such a claim!

The purpose of setting these denominations apart is not to imply that the ones who founded them were equal in integrity and devotion to God. The only reason for setting them apart is that they attach at least one *extra book* to the Bible.

There may be others who may fall into this category, but the four groups cited are the best known and the most highly respected. They represent the finest in their category. You can find a cross section of believers, from the most pious to the least, in each of those denominations. I have not known any Moonies, but have friends from the other three. The ones I have known are people of integrity, sincere in their beliefs, and convinced they are doing the work of the Lord.

Let us now test both groups of denominations, those who follow only the Bible, and those with at least one extra book. Let us begin with the first group: orthodox Christians. Which is the true denomination? Do they differ substantially? Does it really matter which denomination one follows? The answer lies in the following statement from our Lord to someone who wanted to know God's greatest commandment:

One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'" Matthew 22:35-40 NKJ

Did Jesus set any theological conditions? Did He cite any doctrines? In that brief conversation, He taught us that the sign of a true Christian is to love the Lord and prove the depths of that love by good deeds. In effect, our Lord told us that our everlasting destiny hangs on the law of love. Would God reject a truly loving person because he or she was Lutheran and not Baptist, or was Roman Catholic and not Eastern Catholic? Would God send someone to hell because he or she was not baptized?

Next question: Are these orthodox denominations independent faiths? No, they all function under the authority of Jesus Christ. None of them can be considered an independent faith. They are all *branches* on the Tree of Life.

Let us now examine the second group, the denominations with at least one extra book. In the Christian world, most of the prevailing confusion, doubt, skepticism, and fear of being deceived can be traced to these few denominations. First, most of them are extremely active, and they often use aggressive methods to "witness for the Lord," and to convert and recruit new members.

Human beings cherish their freedom and privacy. They instinctively resent pressure, whether it comes from the one who sells real estate or redemption. The unrelenting pressures from these few denominations to gain converts have made most people resentful toward anyone with an invitation card! When they see one, they suspect a hidden agenda. In the Western world, it is hard to find someone who has not had several encounters with the followers of at least one of these denominations with that extra book.

It is also hard to find anyone without some negative feelings toward at least one of the four. If we put the total members of all four groups together, we will find that they total only about one percent of all Christians. Yet their impact is far greater than their numbers.

Surely each of them is unique, and not all of them use the same strategies for getting new converts. Yet orthodox Christians perceive them as being the same, because of their *extra books* attached to the Bible. That overrides everything else. Attaching any book to the Bible is seen as a sign of betrayal.

Aside from being perceived to be aggressive, the non-orthodox denominations add yet another negative dimension to the spiritual confusion of our time: Because of their extra books, they *appear* as independent faiths. But are they? Does any of them present a figure who fulfills the promise of the Return of Jesus Christ? No! All of them are twigs and limbs branched out of Christianity. They have extra books, but their main Scripture is still the Judeo-Christian Bible.

None of the ones who founded these denominations claims to be the Lord, the Return of Jesus Christ. Even if one of them made such a claim, would he have any evidence to prove himself?

To see more objectively the status of the founders of the four non-orthodox denominations, let us put them to the test, let us compare them with Jesus Christ according to the many standards the Bible presents as evidence of divine authority. Let us see how many of these standards the founders of those denominations can satisfy. The comparison sharpens our sense of spiritual vision, it brings us from the clouds of confusion down to the firm ground of certainty and clarity:



The Claim to Be the Lord

Jesus Christ:	Joseph Smith:	Charles Russell:	Ellen G. White:	Sun Myung Moon:
Yes	No	No	No	No



Speaking With Absolute Authority

Jesus Christ:	Joseph Smith:	Charles Russell:	Ellen G. White:	Sun Myung Moon:
Yes	No	No	No	No



**Testifying that Every Word Spoken
Comes from God**

Jꝛꝑꝑꝑ Christ:	Joseph Smith:	Charles Russell:	Ellen G. White:	Sun Myung Moon:
Yes	No	No	No	No



**Claiming to be Absolutely Pure
and Sinless**

Jꝛꝑꝑꝑ Christ:	Joseph Smith:	Charles Russell:	Ellen G. White:	Sun Myung Moon:
Yes	No	No	No	No



Absolute Self-Sacrifice

Jꝛꝑꝑꝑ Christ:	Joseph Smith:	Charles Russell:	Ellen G. White:	Sun Myung Moon:
Yes	No	No	No	No

The chief figures or founders of the Seventh-day Adventist church and the Jehovah Witnesses lived normal lives. Mr. Moon is still living. Joseph Smith was killed in 1844 by a mob of armed men. Why was he killed? According to *The Encyclopaedia of Britannica*:

In February 1844, when he [Joseph Smith] announced his candidacy for the U.S. presidency, however, suspicion and rivalry began to close in upon him. A handful of Mormon dissenters attacked him in their opposition newspaper on grounds of polygamy and political ambition. Mr. Smith thereupon ordered their press destroyed. Threats of mob violence followed. After Mr. Smith called out the Nauvoo militia to protect the town, he was charged with treason and imprisoned, along with his brother Hyrum, in the Carthage city jail. Despite promises of protection from the governor of Illinois, Thomas Ford, a mob of armed men with blackened faces stormed the jail on June 27 and murdered the brothers.¹

Does such a death fulfill the requirement of self-sacrifice? It is quite doubtful. First, Mr. Smith was killed mainly for political reasons; and second, he did not know he would be

killed. It is doubtful he had any intention of giving his life: he had just proclaimed himself a candidate for presidency. At the time of his death, he had grand political ambitions for the future. There is an infinite difference between a wise person who *chooses death with full awareness* and a person who is attacked and killed in any other way. As we know, many cult leaders are killed in this way.



Establishing an Independent Faith

Jesus Christ:	Joseph Smith:	Charles Russell:	Ellen G. White:	Sun Myung Moon:
Yes	No	No	No	No

The founders of all four denominations produced a branch from the Christian Faith. They used the authority of Jesus Christ to attract followers to their side. They have all considered themselves Christians and have looked forward to the return of Jesus Christ.



Making Accurate Predictions

Jesus Christ:	Joseph Smith:	Charles Russell:	Ellen G. White:	Sun Myung Moon:
Yes	No	No	No	No

There is no evidence that the founder of any of those denominations has made any specific predictions that have come true. Jesus' predictions will be examined later.



No Fear of Danger

Jesus Christ:	Joseph Smith:	Charles Russell:	Ellen G. White:	Sun Myung Moon:
Yes	?	?	?	?

It is very doubtful if any of the four figures could fairly claim no fear of danger. Yet, this is difficult to judge. Here the best answer may be a question mark.



**Speaking Without Pause or
Change of Mind**

Jesus Christ:	Joseph Smith:	Charles Russell:	Ellen G. White:	Sun Myung Moon:
Yes	No	No	No	No

It is doubtful if any one of the four figures could make and support such a claim.



**Acknowledging and Glorifying
Previous Messengers**

Jesus Christ:	Joseph Smith:	Charles Russell:	Ellen G. White:	Sun Myung Moon:
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Jesus acknowledged and glorified Moses and Hebrew Prophets.

Since the founders of these denominations are Christians, they have all glorified Jesus. They used His authority to establish their church. It is doubtful they could have had any success without this acknowledgment.



**Refusing to Gain Personal Honor
and Fame**

Jesus Christ:	Joseph Smith:	Charles Russell:	Ellen G. White:	Sun Myung Moon:
Yes	?	?	?	?

It is hard to judge people's motives. Many orthodox Christians attribute selfish motives to the founders of the four denominations. An accurate judgment requires a detailed study of their lives. Let me invite such a study by an impartial source. At this point, we should give them the benefit of the doubt and pass no judgment about their motives.



**Lack of Education and
Lack of Need for Human Knowledge**

Jøsus Christ:	Joseph Smith:	Charles Russell:	Ellen G. White:	Sun Myung Moon:
Yes	No	No	No	No

All four figures acquired knowledge from available sources.



Fulfilling Prophecies

Jøsus Christ:	Joseph Smith:	Charles Russell:	Ellen G. White:	Sun Myung Moon:
Yes	No	No	No	No

I have seen no evidence that any of these figures has fulfilled any specific prophecies.



**Speaking in a Unique
and Novel Language**

Jøsus Christ:	Joseph Smith:	Charles Russell:	Ellen G. White:	Sun Myung Moon:
Yes	No	No	No	No

Jesus' language has an indescribable, yet unique flavor. He did not imitate His contemporaries. His language has served as a model for countless authors and speakers.



**The Authority to Bestow
the Gift of Grace**

Jøsus Christ:	Joseph Smith:	Charles Russell:	Ellen G. White:	Sun Myung Moon:
Yes	No	No	No	No



The Authority to Forgive Sin

Jøsus Christ:	Joseph Smith:	Charles Russell:	Ellen G. White:	Sun Myung Moon:
Yes	No	No	No	No



**The Authority to
Bestow Eternal Life**

Jøsus Christ:	Joseph Smith:	Charles Russell:	Ellen G. White:	Sun Myung Moon:
Yes	No	No	No	No



**Manifesting Superhuman
Knowledge and Wisdom**

Jøsus Christ:	Joseph Smith:	Charles Russell:	Ellen G. White:	Sun Myung Moon:
Yes	No	No	No	No



**Having Miraculous Powers,
but Refusing to Use Them as Evidence**

Jøsus Christ:	Joseph Smith:	Charles Russell:	Ellen G. White:	Sun Myung Moon:
Yes	No	No	No	No

Why not use miracles as an evidence? To have any value, an evidence must pass two requirements:

- It must be present at all times for everyone to see. No seeker of truth should enjoy an advantage over others.

- The evidence must be testable and provable at all times and by all people who will ever live.

Bringing miracles into the picture directs the attention away from reason and evidence to hearsay, suppositions, assumptions, personal desires, superstitions, illusions, and all manner of false but untestable and unprovable claims. This is where cults have the upper hand; that is the way they prosper. The followers attribute all kinds of supernatural powers to their leaders. Gullible people, who lack critical thinking, believe what they hear. That is how cult leaders manipulate people and make themselves look credible: They know they are safe as long as they are not required to present testable and provable evidence.

Even if someone produced a miracle, would it have any spiritual value? No, as our Lord said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). Miracles are entertainment for the eye, not food for the soul.

We know for sure our Lord had supreme miraculous powers and sometimes used them to heal people. What was His motive? Could it be anything other than to help those in pain and suffering? Although the report of those miracles attracted huge crowds and impressed the viewers the most, Jesus never singled them out as the evidence of His divine mission. On the contrary, He repeatedly asked people to hide them. Why would a person hide an act? So that he would not be identified by that act. Jesus’ efforts to hide His miracles in itself point to His divine distinction and nobility: He refused to use the very evidence that impressed the people the most and could work in His favor better than any other evidence! Only the divine acts with such magnanimity; human beings behave in just the opposite manner.

8

Untestable and Unprovable Evidence

This chapter further examines the difference between the divine and the human. It shows how anyone with ambition can make himself a prophet by using the two untestable and unprovable evidences: prophesying in the name of the Lord, and claiming miracles in the name of the Lord. What kind of evidence did the founders of the four denominations with an extra book produce?



Joseph Smith claimed his book came to him through “buried golden plates.” Where are the plates? No one knows! Mr. Smith used both of the forbidden evidences to appear as authentic: miracles and prophesying. According to *The Encyclopaedia of Britannica*:

Smith grew up in western New York at a time of intense religious revivalism...His neighbors at Palmyra, N.Y., remembered him as a diviner [a person who engages in prophesying or telling the future] who dug for buried treasure. One day in the woods, at the age of 14, Joseph Smith experienced what he conceived to be an intense spiritual revelation of God and Jesus Christ. In 1827 he claimed that an angel had directed him to buried golden plates whose engraved surfaces contained a history of the American Indians describing them as descendants of Hebrews who centuries earlier had sailed to North America by way of the Pacific. This Book of Mormon he translated from “reformed Egyptian” with the aid of special stones. Published in 1830, the book was offered by him as scientific evidence of his divine calling. Most non-Mormon scholars, however, regard the book as a collection of local legends of Indian origin, fragments of autobiography, and current religious and political controversies (especially that connected with the Anti-Masonic movement), all transformed with remarkable ingenuity into a religious document.¹

Joseph Smith claimed that in a vision he asked a heavenly being, “Which of all the sects is right?” and “Which should I join?” This is the response he received about all Christian denominations (called sects at that time):

...all their creeds were an abomination in his [God’s] sight; that those professors were all corrupt...²

Notice Joseph Smith's response to those who asked him for testable and provable evidence:

As the entire foundation of the new movement was based on the authenticity of the gold plates, Smith's closest associates (Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris) began to press him for the privilege of seeing them. With that prodding Smith received a revelation for them: "Ye shall testify that you have seen them, even as my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., has seen them, for it is by my power that he has seen them, and it is because he had faith."³

Apparently the commandment that "Ye shall testify..." exerted its power. Smith's associates did as they were told; they served as his witnesses. They claimed:

...an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes...the plates...⁴

Joseph Smith not only claimed miracles but special gifts that even Jesus did not have:

I have more to boast of than ever any man had. I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam. A large majority of the whole have stood by me. ***Neither Paul, John, Peter, nor Jesus ever did it. I boast that no man ever did a work as I*** [emphasis added].⁵

Mr. Smith's claim of being the only leader to create a unified church failed immediately after his death:

Following Smith's death, his followers split into many factions, the largest being those who acknowledged Brigham Young as their prophet and who settled in the Great Basin. The second largest segment of Mormons, including Joseph Smith's widow Emma, later emigrated to Missouri and became known as the Reorganized Church. The remaining Mormons were split into a number of factions, each with a prophet claiming God's blessing.⁶



Ellen G. White claimed she received special knowledge in numerous visions. She also used the two forbidden evidences to appear authentic: miracles and prophesying. "A distinctive feature of Seventh-day Adventists is its reliance on the 'spirit of prophecy'—specifically coming through the visions of Ellen G. White."⁷

Mrs. White has been criticized for plagiarism, especially claiming previously published works of Christian authors as messages she received in her own visions:

Such "plagiarism" was not uncommon in the nineteenth century. But what some Adventist leaders found particularly disturbing was that "***she utilized the words of prior authors in describing words she heard spoken while in vision.*** In a few instances, she uses the writings of a 19th-century source in quoting the words of Christ or of an angelic guide." This concern threw a shadow over the very foundation of the Seventh-day Adventists, but the highest officials of the church strongly defended their founder/prophetess. "President Neal Wilson," according to a *Time* magazine article,

“holds to the position that a prophet’s thoughts can be divinely inspired even though they are not original.” At the denomination’s General Conference in 1980, Mrs. White was confirmed as a prophetess whose “writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth.”⁸



Charles Russell used only one of the two forbidden evidences. He did not claim miraculous powers and gifts, but made a daring prophecy. He said Christ would make a visible Return in 1914:

Basing his judgment on complex biblical calculations, he preached from 1877 that Christ’s “invisible return” had occurred in 1874 and that the end of the Gentile times would come in 1914, followed by war between capitalism and communism or socialism, after which God’s kingdom by Christ would rule the earth...Russell’s movement survived the embarrassment caused by the apparent failure of his apocalyptic prediction...⁹

Russell’s successor Joseph Rutherford also made predictions:

He downplayed the year 1874, in favor of 1914; he then focused on 1925 for “the completion of all things.” Taking his cue from the Book of Revelation, he reinterpreted the Battle of Armageddon, describing it as a universal war during which time all people outside the Watch Tower organization would be destroyed. Only a remnant of 144,000 would then go to heaven, and the remainder would spend eternity on earth... “Many gave up their businesses, jobs, and even sold their homes in the expectation that they would soon be living in an earthly paradise...Numerous Bible Student farmers in both Canada and the United States refused to seed their spring crops and mocked their co-religionists who did.”¹⁰

The Jehovah Witnesses learned a painful lesson: That prophesying in the name of the Lord along with a date that will test the prophecy is unwise. In a 1968 issue of their widely distributed magazine—*Awake*—they wrote:

True, there have been those in times past who predicted an “end to the world,” even announcing a specific date. Some have gathered groups of people with them and fled to the hills or withdrawn into their houses waiting for the end. Yet, nothing happened. The “end” did not come. They were guilty of false prophesying. Why? What was missing?

Missing was the full measure of evidence required in fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Missing from such people were God’s truths and the evidence that he was guiding and using them.¹¹

We also find this admission in their earlier publications:

There was a measure of disappointment...concerning the years 1914, 1918, and 1925...and they also learned to quit fixing dates.¹²

We should note that Jehovah Witnesses, like many other Christians, continue to prophesy in the name of the Lord, but refuse to set fixed dates.



Sun Myung Moon, like many others, claimed visions to appear authentic. He also used the two forbidden, untestable, and unprovable evidences to support his claim. According to *The Encyclopaedia of Britannica*:

In his book *The Divine Principle* (1952), which is the basic scripture of the church, Moon wrote that at the age of 16 he had a vision of Christ in which he was told to carry out Christ's unfinished task. Moon believed that God chose him to save mankind from Satanism...¹³

Did Mr. Moon also make predictions?

Moon and His close associates, like so many other leaders of new religions, have not been averse to setting dates. Young Oon Kim initially declared that 1967 would be when the Millennium would begin...¹⁴

In his book, *The Divine Principle*, Mr. Moon predicts that Jesus Christ will return from his native land, Korea:

Now we know...that Christ would not come again among the lineal descendants of Abraham...the nation of the East where Christ will come again would be none other than Korea...The Korean people will become the "Third Israel," God's elect.¹⁵

In all the examples presented, we see a common thread: The founders of all these denominations resorted to untestable and unprovable evidence to establish themselves. Consider the following incidence. It was reported recently in the news media that an investment club of elderly ladies, grandmothers, had substantially outperformed the *Dow Jones Industrial Average*. Their story soon captured the attention of the entire country and beyond. The ladies appeared on countless TV shows and documentaries. They signed a lucrative book contract and became instant celebrities. While this was going on, no one checked the numbers, no one asked for testable and provable evidence. By "coincidence" a reporter grew suspicious. When he checked the numbers, he found the story utterly false. He discovered that the ladies had performed substantially *below* *Dow Jones Industrial Average*, not *above* it! By then the ladies had made a fortune not on the Dow Jones, but on gullible news media and the rest of us who trust the news media!

This is a classic example of how even a whole country can be deceived when testable and provable standards are set aside. If this can happen in the stock market, where precise numbers are involved, how much more it can happen in the market of belief systems, where everything looks fuzzy.

The four examples provided clearly show that our Lord had perfect knowledge of the events of our time. He knew how His followers would use His name, and how they would take advantage of His authority to look authentic. This is the reason He issued this grave warning:

Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name..?
Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”

Christ (Matthew 7:22-23 NIV)

Many people are gullible; they believe whatever they are told. If someone shows love for our Lord and looks sincere, they go out of their way to believe him, especially if he uses the name of the Lord to guarantee his product. This abuse is not limited to the four figures already introduced. The abuse is widespread and is found in every Christian denomination. The four figures simply give us well-defined examples of the consequences of disobeying our Lord. They clearly show us what happens when people depend on two untestable and unprovable evidences:

- Prophesying with confidence—a knowledge no human being has.
- And claiming the gift of the supernatural: receiving visions, conversing with God, having a private line to the Holy Spirit, and discovering golden plates in the earth with special messages from heaven!

People who claim visions, miracles, and the gift of prophesying look very authentic until we ask them for testable and provable evidence. Suppose someone claims to have discovered thousands of ancient coins. Let us assume that he shows us a sample that looks authentic. How can we be sure he is telling us the truth? Only by seeing many samples of the coins. As we noted, Joseph Smith did not leave any sample of the buried golden plates for impartial scientists to test. Why not?

How did the four figures, the authors of the extra books score? In comparison with Jesus, they failed in all the critical areas. When we use testable and provable standards, we see infinite contrast between the Speaker of the Gospel and the authors of those extra books. We see them like little candles flickering against the bright light of the sun!

And how do those extra books compare with each other? We know the denominations that regard them as authentic differ sharply in their teachings. The contents of their extra books contradict each other radically.

We cannot deny that God in His infinite Wisdom bestows many gifts and honors on human beings. Indeed St. Paul speaks of such gifts (I Corinthians 12:9-10). We know that some people have dreams of the future. Several years before my mother passed away, I was shown in a dream that the span of her life would be 86 years. The dream did come true. But does this give me any status or authority? Suppose I also “healed” several people. Does that make me a credible person? Never! Anyone who uses any gift to establish himself as an authority, by his very action, shows pride and falls instantly from grace.

Once again, the main source of confusion and chaos in religion is: using and accepting untestable and unprovable claims as messages from God. Obedience to our Lord’s instructions eradicates all the confusion and establishes order and clarity. Further, it discourages ambitious people from starting new denominations.

Recently I met a young man who appeared to be a devout Christian. He began to prophesy and describe how the Lord will come. When I told him that no one has knowledge of the true meaning of prophecies, he replied, “How would the Lord who

gives me the power to heal so many people let me make false predictions?” I found his response a classic example of religious abuse. He represented precisely the kind of people who have undermined the supreme dignity and honor of believing. He spoke for all fanatical believers who have erased the clear line between religion and cult. In response I told him, “That is exactly how cult leaders influence their followers. They begin their careers by claiming miracles to make them look authentic. Gullible people then believe everything they say.” This Christian who claimed miraculous powers could not use those powers to produce a rational response to my simple objection! He appeared puzzled, and did not know what to say. I assume others, instead of questioning him, had simply praised him for his claims.

Do you know Steven Hill? According to a recent documentary shown on national TV, he was formerly a heroin addict with a long criminal record. Then he decided to become an evangelist and establish his own Church in Florida. He knew exactly what to do. He knew what it takes to attract and mesmerize huge crowds. Today thousands seek his presence.

We saw him on TV shouting to the crowd, “You need Jesus!” “You need Jesus.” He knew how to use those magical words. Many sick people surrounded him to be healed from their physical, mental, and spiritual maladies. He would touch their foreheads, and command: “Down!” The sick and the disabled would fall instantly on their back into the hands of supporters as if they were lifeless. There was such a stir in the air.

Mr. Hill makes two of the three popular claims others have made before him:

- That he heals the sick by the power of the Holy Spirit
- That he casts the devil out of the possessed in the name of Jesus

Another successful evangelist is Benny Hinn who claims that God speaks with him. According to a documentary,¹⁶ he has millions of followers who offer him at least 100 million dollars a year. He also bases his claims on miracles.

How amazing is the power of these unproven claims if they are advanced by a charismatic leader. When the authority of Jesus Christ is blended with Charisma and showmanship, it produces magical, even miraculous effects. The two unproven claims have given Mr. Hill such an authority that even kings may envy. He is being worshipped as a prophet of God.

The context in which our Lord used the words “prophesy,” “miracles,” and “cast out devils” tells us clearly how we should *not* use those gifts. He prefaces His pronouncement by “Beware of false prophets.” Who is a false prophet? Anyone who presents his own personal views or agendas as messages from Heaven. Who is a true prophet? Anyone who brings an authentic message from God. Whatever a true prophet teaches is the absolute truth. It is God’s Word.

Jesus Christ had many spiritual positions and honors. He was the Word of God by which the universe was created. He was also a prophet. The Scripture calls Him a prophet like Moses. We should never underestimate the word *prophet*. The message of a true prophet is the Word of God, and the message of a false prophet is sheer falsehood and illusion. The content in which our Lord spoke shows a clear link between the three claims of

“performing miracles,” “prophesying,” and “casting out devils,” on the one hand, and using those claims to appear an authentic prophet from God, on the other.

If a person, in a spirit of humility, makes an innocent prediction, such as “The moral state of the world will decline,” there is nothing wrong with this. But if he abandons the spirit of humility and ventures to make critical and specific prophecies—such as specifying the way our Lord will come—and then blends his authority as a leader or scholar and believer with the authority of the Lord *as if he really knows what the Lord meant*, as if he has received messages from the Holy Spirit, he should be considered a false prophet. The evidence against such a “prophet” multiplies, if he uses his predictions as a means of gaining status or establishing a denomination. As we noted, the authority to interpret the prophecies or making predictions is given to no one except to the Lord Himself. The same is true with using miracles and visions to look authentic and then engage in prophesying.

Predictions can be made in two ways:

- Under one’s own authority
- Under God’s authority, by bringing Him into the court as a sure witness to predictions

The first is innocent and will have little if any consequences. The second, if presented as the only version of truth, is extremely serious and has the gravest consequences. Note Jesus’ statement, “Many will say, ‘Did I not prophesy *in your name*...’” Jesus does not condemn all predictions. He condemns only those who use divine authority, the authority of the Lord to look authentic in their predictions. And He makes that statement in the context of *recognizing false prophets*. The only way anyone can do this—prophesying in the Lord’s name—is to claim true knowledge of the inner meanings of the Lord’s prophecies. This was the illusion the Jews had—and still have—and it is the illusion many Christians of this age have. The consequences of this illusion are as devastating and deadly today as they were 2,000 years ago. The same actions have exactly the same consequences.

Many people fear being deceived. They act as if they are buying a used car from a disreputable dealer! But can we blame them? They hear every stone in the mountains of belief systems shout, “Pick me! Pick me! Pick me!” The need for self-protection leads them to natural reactions: fight or flight. Most people choose flight; it is a lot safer and easier! As a result of widespread abuse of religion and rampant fraud, many people run away from a new message as if they have seen a snake or a lion:

Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him!

Amos 5:18-19 NKJ

People run away, yet there is no rational reason for their fears. We compared Jesus Christ with the seemingly four best candidates that the last two centuries have produced. We compared Him with the most successful and persuasive leaders, those who could move masses of people to their sides to establish new denominations. But when we applied a set of objective standards to them, they all failed miserably. If the differences are so clear

in every case, why have people so much fear of being deceived? Why run away? The difference between a true Redeemer sent by God and a deceiver is like the difference between the sun and a flickering candle.

Try to search for the most distinguished figure in the entire history of the Christian Faith and compare him with Jesus Christ by applying the 19 standards presented here. You will find that he fails and falls short miserably. Take any of the Popes—past or present—and the best known and most highly respected Protestant leader of our time—reverend Billy Graham—and compare them with Jesus Christ, according to those objective standards, and behold the infinite gap that separates the divine from the human.

As long as we use God’s standards, we should have no fear. The reason is this: Anyone who falsely claims to be the Lord is either crazy, evil, or both. If he is crazy, the fruits of his life will betray him. They will show that he is even less coherent and capable than any ordinary human being. Can you picture an insane or mentally disturbed person? If you cannot, just visit the psychiatric ward of a hospital! A mentally disturbed person cannot take care of himself; let alone guide others. Any intelligent person with any degree of common sense will see the signs of disturbance written plainly everywhere. Of course, if someone closes his eyes, then that is his problem. Millions of people walk through life with “drunk eyes” all the time! That is how cults prosper.

Similarly, if the person who makes a claim is evil, or evil and insane, once again the fruits of his life will betray him. Anyone with a sound mind, who falsely claims to be the Lord must be infinitely deceptive and evil. It is hard to imagine a lie bigger and more destructive than this. Such an infinitely evil person cannot hide himself. The enormity of his lie and the infinite requirements for being the Lord leave no room for mistake. The gap between the divine and the deceptive is so vast any thoughtful person will instantly recognize it. A mere glance at the lives of the deceivers will betray them. We do not even need to look for other signs. We do not need to see if they have fulfilled any prophecies or made any accurate predictions. We will see in their lives the many signs of deception and selfishness.

If the gap between a true Christ and a false Christ is so vast, why did our Lord say, “Beware of false prophets”? At the end of His pronouncement, Jesus gave clear and specific ways of knowing false prophets. What are the signs He gave? These three:

- Prophecy in the name of Jesus
- Claiming control over demonic powers in the name of Jesus
- Performing miracles in the name of Jesus

By false prophet our Lord did not refer specifically to anyone who claims the station of the Lord. He rather referred to Christian leaders, teachers, and scholars who prevent Christians from recognizing the Lord at His return. They are not the ones who claim to be the Lord but use the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to make predictions. People take their personal interpretation as the truth, as if they are coming from the Lord Himself. The predictors occupy positions of honor that only the Lord can claim. They are totally fallible leaders and authors, yet are considered by lay people as infallible or authoritative. Christians give them the kind of reverence that only the Lord deserves. Many high ranking religious leaders, who carry a variety of religious titles, are treated this way.

The most specific sign of a false prophet is false prophecy. Among the signs of false prophets, which one is most common? ***Prophesying in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ***. It is both easy and tempting to become a predictor as long as there will be no testing. Even a child can engage in making predictions. ***It is hard to find any Christian who does not engage in the pleasure and pastime of prophesying!*** Have you met any Bible teacher who said, “Prophecies are hard to understand. I really don’t know if Jesus will come from the sky with fire to burn millions of people, or if He will come like a thief as He came the first time.” The temptation to prophesy is extremely powerful, especially if the predictor can use the name of Jesus Christ to support His claim. And it is absolutely safe—untestable and unprovable—as long as the one who prophesies is not foolish enough to set a date that would fall within his or her life span!

What happens when these false prophets are reminded that they have no right to prophesy? In response they say, “I am not prophesying. I am simply repeating what the Lord says. Jesus spoke in plain language. How can we deny what the Lord Himself predicts?” But that is exactly the way the Jews reasoned. The prophecies about the coming of “a ruler” or a “king like David” were spoken in plain language. Yet Jewish leaders and scholars, who like today’s Christians prophesied in the name of Jehovah, failed miserably in all their predictions. Are not the following prophecies in “plain” language?

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and ***the government will be upon His shoulder***. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6 NKJ

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and ***the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever***, and of His kingdom there will be no end. Luke 1:31-33 NKJ

The Lord has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it: ***“I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body.”*** Psalms 132:11 NKJ

The following statement from Dr. James Kennedy, quoted earlier, teaches a lesson of humility to anyone who dares to prophesy in the name of the Lord:

The great Princeton theologian of the last century, Dr. Charles Hodge, said...that ***though the Old Testament is filled with some 333 prophecies concerning the first coming of Christ; in spite of that...*** they crucified Christ because of a misunderstanding about what the Messiah was really coming to do. And we should because of that be somewhat humbled and modest in our attempts to interpret prophecies concerning the second coming of Christ. ***It is quite possible that all of us [Christian leaders] are wrong as well.***¹⁷

Can anyone know the future, even if he or she uses the Lord’s name? Only God has such knowledge. What does this imply? It implies this: Anyone who tries to prophesy is a false prophet. Thus by “false prophets” who deceive people, our Lord does not refer to outsiders who come and establish a new independent Faith. By the evidence presented here, no one has ever dared to call himself the Lord, let alone establish a faith based on

that claim. There is no justification for such a fear. God will not allow a rotten tree to grow and endure in His name.

Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.

Matthew 13:15 NKJ

Thus all the fears Christians have for being deceived by someone who claims to be the Lord are unjustified, because no sane person with any sense of decency can consider even the *thought* of being the Lord, let alone claim it and promote it. As we noted, none of our four candidates, who established significant denominations, made such a claim. Do you know anyone who has claimed to be the Lord and has also established an independent religion?

Let us summarize the prime points of this chapter:

- The warning to fear false prophets is not directed at anyone who calls Himself the Lord and establishes an independent faith. Several reasons were presented to show that no sane person even dares to call himself the Lord, let alone establish a false faith under that title. We noted that none of the four candidates has made such a claim. Even if one of them did, he would fail utterly in comparison with Jesus.
- Similarly, the warning is not directed at cults. Any person with any degree of sanity can recognize the evil fruits of cults, such as brain washing, isolation, control of people's wealth, deception, violence, fraud, sexual abuse, etc.
- The warning does not apply to outsiders, but to Christian leaders who appear in the guise of Christianity and use our Lord's authority to claim various positions of honor for themselves. They use His name to appear authentic. How can we recognize them? By these signs:
 - ◆ Prophesying in the name of the Lord and telling people that their understanding of prophecies is correct.
 - ◆ Claiming miraculous powers and engaging in supernatural acts to appear authentic.
- Today, prophesying in the name of the Lord has reached epidemic proportions and can serve as the greatest obstacle to the recognition of Jesus Christ at His second Coming.

The realization of the preceding facts should reduce the size of the mountain of confusion to virtually nothing:

- We can easily remove cults from the mountain of "pebbles."
- We can remove Christian denominations from our pile. For as long as a person obeys the Lord, it does not really matter what denomination he or she follows.
- The true test of being a Christian is obedience. Anyone who uses the standard of *works*, also called *the ingredients of the Bread of Life*, or *the 19 wondrous fruits of heaven*, identified and described in this book, need not have any fear of being deceived. That is God's promise. Anyone who disobeys our Lord and builds his house on "prophesying" and on miracles must live in constant fear.

- We should not close the door to the possibility that our Lord will return again as a humble man as He did the first time. ***If someone fulfilled all those 19 signs to the fullest, should we deny him?*** If we do, what is the difference between us and the Jews who denied our Lord in His first Advent?

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