

# *Forerunner*

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 25, Number 6

November-December 2016



Looking for  
ISRAEL

# November-December 2016

Volume 25, Number 6

## 3

**PERSONAL** from *John W. Ritenbaugh*  
Leadership and the Covenants (Part Seven)

## 7

**READY ANSWER**  
Resolutions: Man's and God's  
BY RONNY H. GRAHAM

## 9

**PROPHECY WATCH**  
The Nation of Israel—Biblical Israel?  
(Part Two)  
BY PAT HIGGINS

## 15

**WORLDWATCH**  
Safe Spaces or Dangerous Places?  
The Assault Upon Our Future (Part One)  
BY JOSEPH BAITY

## 16

**BIBLE STUDY**  
Does the Bible Contain Discrepancies?  
BY MARTIN G. COLLINS

## Cover

When the term "Israel" is mentioned today, most people think of the modern State of Israel and its predominantly Jewish population. But when the Bible mentions Israel, it is probably not referring to the Jewish state or to Jews in particular. A thorough study of God's Word on the subject shows that, while Jews may be included, "Israel" most often points the reader to search for the Israelites in a different direction.

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# Leadership and Covenants

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## Part Seven

It is time to become reacquainted with an old friend. “Friend” may not be the correct term, but we normally feel very comfortable with it. In fact, we feel close to this friend because we have known it intimately since birth. We strongly desire to protect this friend’s reputation, and if accusations come its way, we do our best to shield it. We will try hard not to lose this friendship and will even resist those who urge us to rid ourselves of it.

This friend makes every effort to maintain its closeness to us. Sometimes the closeness is so constricting that it is tantamount to enslavement, persuading us that anything of true spirituality is not in our best interests. It tries to convince us that what is important is our enjoyment of life right now. It endears itself to us by suggesting that we are more important than we actually are. This friend will stick with us all the way to our final breath.

Most of us are aware that this friend has a weakness: It is shortsighted. It does not care to think much about the thoughts, words, and deeds it urges us to involve ourselves in. It reasons that the immediate reward is well worth any risk that may arise in the long run. It will argue that someone we know did what it wants us to do all

his life, and it never affected him adversely. The friend seems ignorant of the reality that life would be better without that potentially dangerous practice, instead trusting the positive things other people say about it. It puts great stock in what other people say.

Romans 8:7 describes our friend in this way: “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.” The Greek word underlying “carnal” is *sarx*, which *Strong’s Concordance* says refers literally to the meaty part of an animal or man. However, it has several figurative usages that commonly appear in the Bible.

### Flesh and Spirit

*The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* adds that *sarx* “is either the equivalent of the English word ‘material’ or describes human nature when under the domination of its lower, unregenerate impulses.” “Carnal” describes the way we humans think and act without the influence of God’s Holy Spirit that we receive when we are called, repent, and are converted. The carnal mind focuses on using circumstances in life to please the self.

In many modern translations, *sarx* is often rendered as “flesh,” its literal meaning. In the context of Romans 8, it is translated as such in the New King James Version to clarify that spiritually, there are two classes of people. Those who live according to the flesh allow their lives to be determined by their sinful nature. They set their minds on—are most deeply interested in, constantly talk about, engage in, and glory in—things that pertain to the self.

Those in the other category live according to the Spirit. They submit to the Holy Spirit’s influences, concentrating their attention on, specializing in, and choosing what is important to God’s Holy Spirit. In the conflicts between the pulls of the flesh and the influences of God, the first group sides with the self, and the second group sides with God, despite knowing that choosing that way may entail considerable sacrifice.

In Romans 8, Paul reminds church members that it is impossible to be on both sides at once. This choice is basic to our attitudes and sets the direction of our lives: We are either on God’s side or sinful human nature’s side. If a person persists in siding with the flesh, which is worldliness, then he must expect the world’s doom. Conversely, if the things of God and His Kingdom are a person’s chief concern, he can expect God’s love to be shed abroad in his heart (Romans 5:5) and his future to be full of unspeakable joy, as Paul later declares.

In the apostle Paul’s writings, “flesh” clearly indicates spiritual weakness. He teaches us that a person living by the flesh cannot be justified before God or please Him because the flesh does not appreciate God’s priorities. Living with a fleshly outlook leaves an individual vulnerable to the power of sin to excite him to temptations, self-gratification, pride, pursuit of praise, envy, selfishness, impatience, and a definite unwillingness to sacrifice for spiritual well-being. As Paul teaches, the spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak because it is not inclined to believe God.

It is the flesh, stirred to action by Satan, that drives this world. Even so, we must be clear on an important truth: Satan cannot make us sin. Scripture says unequivocally that the sins committed belong to those who committed them. Adam’s and Eve’s sins were not forced by Satan. He reasoned with Eve, and she chose to believe what he suggested and then transgressed. Neither was Adam forced by Satan to sin, nor was he deceived as she was. He chose to follow his wife into sin without Satan’s arm-twisting.

Romans 8:5-8 from *The Living Bible* will help summarize this subject:

Those who let themselves be controlled by their lower natures live only to please themselves, but

those who follow after the Holy Spirit find themselves doing those things that please God. Following after the Holy Spirit leads to life and peace, but following after the old nature leads to death, because the old sinful nature within us is against God. It never did obey God’s laws and it never will. That’s why those who are still under the control of their old sinful selves, bent on following their old evil desires, can never please God.

## Seeking God and Charity

This series of articles on leadership and the biblical covenants is not aimed at those who are of this world, the unconverted, but at those already convicted that the Kingdom of God is their life’s goal, yet who also desire more clarity in understanding God’s guidance toward it. Scripture, the only accurate resource that a faithful person can always trust, commands us to seek God and His way.

My hope is that these articles will firmly establish in us a worldview that will support us through the time leading to the return of Christ, a period crowded with events that may confuse us in terms of the direction our lives should take. The coming confusion may affect our decision-making to the point that choosing correctly may be stressful and difficult because we fear making a wrong decision. We must not allow our faith in God to crumble under the pressure.

In Part Six, we observed the institution of marriage by God, the original innocent and pure state of Adam and Eve’s relationship with Him, and their initial sins that exposed both their lack of faith in God’s Word and the strength of their self-centered disloyalty toward Him. This teaches that actively trusting Him rather than ourselves and other humans is the converted person’s central issue of life.

In addition, we observed the initial effects of the judgments God imposed on them, which is important to us because they remain in effect to this day. Because God did not destroy everything He created when Adam and Eve broke faith with Him, we are correct in concluding that He anticipated their sins, and His creative purpose moved forward. This is encouraging because what God reveals of His purpose is glorious. Because He finishes what He starts and actively rules His creation, this can be a source of hope to those who believe Him.

## Regarding Nakedness

Vital and helpful knowledge, centering on Adam’s and Eve’s physical nakedness when they were created, can be gleaned by comparing their relationship with God

before and after their sins. Understanding this helps in understanding our spiritual nakedness before God.

Genesis 2:25 reads, “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” This statement acts as a bridge, connecting directly to mankind’s first sins, exposed in Genesis 3. Their nakedness played a revealing role, instructing us about what happens when we sin. Undoubtedly, their nakedness in verse 25 was literal, not merely figurative.

Combined, the terms “naked” and “nakedness” are used 104 times in Scripture, a high number for fairly uncommon words, indicating their importance. Depending on the context, the terms can figuratively indicate innocence, defenselessness, vulnerability, helplessness, humiliation, shame, guilt, or judgment.

At times, nakedness may indicate several qualities within the same context or even within the same sentence, the different figures adding clarity to our understanding. A person may have to read the context carefully to grasp how God is specifically using it. In Genesis 2:25, He is using this distinctive illustration to portray Adam and Eve’s innocence and purity of conduct. In Isaiah 47:1-3, Jeremiah 13:26, and Ezekiel 16:37, nakedness emphasizes Israel’s and Babylon’s significant declines, falls from being seen as respectable national powers to being judged as despicable prostitutes by all who beheld them among the nations. They became objects of wondering scorn rather than of emulation.

## Seeing Nakedness for the First Time

The context involving nakedness continues in Genesis 3:7-11:

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?” So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.” And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?”

A reason God asked the questions of Adam was to make those of us reading this think about the subject of nakedness as it applies to its scriptural use and thus to our spiritual life. The answer is obvious: Nobody told

them. Before their sins, they were naked, but they were not aware of their nakedness. They simply accepted it as normal; they saw nothing unusual about it because they were naked from their first awareness of being alive.

This contains a vital lesson, one that is either never learned or quickly forgotten after being made aware of it. When Adam and Eve sinned, the first apparent result to them, the sinners, was that they were immediately aware of their nakedness. In this novel way, their proclivity to sin was exposed to them. Their innocence was forever destroyed.

A change happened in their minds or hearts, with no effort on their part. God created this reaction in them to bring an awareness of sin to their consciences, and guilt and fear became part of their “normal” makeup. Knowing immediately that God was aware of what they had done, fear entered their perception of themselves and their relationships. They no longer looked at others and events with their former innocence. Their reaction to all this was pathetic, making clothing of fig leaves, as if to cover their sin, and hiding from God after hearing His voice.

God is teaching this object lesson to those who are part of His new spiritual creation so they can be aware of their spiritual deficiencies. Consider the typical reaction people have when exceeding the speed limit on the highway and suddenly discovering a patrol officer with a radar gun clocking the speed of those passing his position. Similarly, most people resent the cameras that governing authorities have installed throughout cities to enable them to watch what is going on. Psychologists tell us most people become irritated when stared at.

Why do people react this way? Those under observation, believing their lives are being inspected, fear what the observers will learn. They feel exposed; they may even feel naked, though they are fully clothed. Yet, rioters have no qualms about breaking into a store and looting whatever is not nailed down because they know they can easily get away with their thievery since the authorities’ attention is elsewhere. It is as if they and their sins are invisible. Many people steal because they believe no one is watching. How wrong they are! Not only is God watching, but their own conscience is too.

Before Adam and Eve sinned, they had done nothing wrong. Even before God, they had nothing to be embarrassed about. This points to a safe conclusion that God had instructed them thoroughly about the Two Trees. If they had not been taught, they would have had no understanding that their actions were wrong (Romans 3:20). The moral perfection of both was erased in an instant.

We can deduce another effect of their sin: It changed their attitudes toward each other. Besides God and the Serpent, Adam and Eve were the only ones around, and

when they sinned, God was nowhere in sight. Despite there being only the two of them, the awareness of their nakedness motivated them to cover up in the presence of each other. Before their sins, they were not aware of either their own or the other's nakedness. If there was no sense of shame or embarrassment between them, why cover up? Yet, with sin, their attitudes toward each other had changed. It is as if each felt their nakedness needed to be hidden from the other. Humiliation, too, now appears to be a part of their relationship. Their untainted feelings for each other that had existed since their creation began turn immediately.

Hebrews 4:12-14 provides a foundation for a major spiritual lesson for us. It offers both comfort and motivation for a vibrant spiritual life, which will bring glory to God:

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Is our faith in God's existence of such clarity and strength that we know that we stand spiritually naked before Him in every circumstance in life? Our fear of Him should not be terror but a profound respect that motivates us to bring honor to Him always. He is not our enemy but our Savior. He is striving, not to "catch us in the act," but to spare us from the destructions of sin, which, as we saw in the example of Adam and Eve, changes the heart in an evil direction. Consider how mercifully He dealt with them when He could have obliterated them. That same, unchanging God deals with us in the lives we live before Him.

Genesis 2:25 provides a clear picture of how things began in Eden. Revelation 19:7-8 reveals how God desires things to end:

Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Sin exposed Adam and Eve. Righteousness will clothe us, and that is a fitting end.

### Sin Does Not Matter?

One of the most prominent aspects of mankind's first sin is that in one sense, nothing spectacular happened

at all. Lightning did not flash, and thunder did not crash and reverberate through the sky. There was no great earthquake; no huge crevasse opened at their feet and threaten to swallow them. We can take a lesson from this too: Most sins occur beyond the sight and hearing of others, and most people take pains to hide them.

Taking pains to hide one's sins suggests that if no one sees them, a person can get away with them, and nobody is the wiser. Even with this first sin, time seemed to move on as though nothing happened—despite being one of the most momentous events in mankind's history, affecting everybody born since! Our first parents' sins are the first indication that no sin is done in a vacuum, that a sin can be committed that affects nobody else. In Scripture, sin is typified by leavening. No one must induce leaven to do what God created it to do. Like yeast, sin spreads and infects others.

This process also sets a pattern for God's reaction to sins that we commit. There is almost never any outward indication that one sins. Notice that God called out to them in the cool of the day, suggesting the passage of some time since the sin occurred. It was certainly after they had time to dress themselves in fig leaves. Perhaps God called out to them in late afternoon or early evening.

God certainly did not arrive on the scene in a terrifying manner—with fire, hailstorm, and thunder. Apparently, He was calmly walking. But notice that the Bible indicates that Adam and Eve reacted in terror of meeting with him. The knowledge of their sin against their wonderful Creator filled them with great anxiety, to say the least. The sins were working internally, creating stresses in anticipation of His reaction. They knew enough about His character to know they had done wrong, and despite knowing they could not hide from Him, they nonetheless still attempted to do it.

### The Adamic Covenant

Researchers disagree as to whether a second covenant with mankind resulted when God imposed His judgments as penalties for Adam's and Eve's sins. Life went on, but there is no doubt that the environment within which Adam and Eve and all their progeny lived changed dramatically. The judgments indeed changed life almost completely.

Those who believe the sins did instigate a second covenant name it the "Adamic Covenant." Perhaps this covenant could be identified as the "Edenic Covenant, Part Two." This would indicate the judgmental additions are attached, but that the requirements of the Edenic Covenant continue.

Some aspects of the curses God imposed will not be

*(continued on page 12)*

# Resolutions: Man’s and God’s

On the Roman calendar that much of the world uses, one year has ended and another has begun. The beginning of a new year is the time when countless millions of people make New Year’s resolutions. Perhaps many church of God members have done so as well.

The tradition of making a New Year’s resolution—promising or vowing to oneself to do an act of self-improvement or something kind toward others—is more common in the Western hemisphere. As we know from experience, most of these resolutions focus on the self.

Not to be the bearer of bad news, but depending on which survey one reads, the success rate for accomplishing these resolutions is quite bleak: 88 to 92 percent of people never reach their goal. According to *Time* magazine, the top-ten most-forgotten New Year’s resolutions are

1. lose weight and get fit,
2. quit smoking,
3. learn something new,
4. eat healthier and diet,
5. get out of debt and save money,

The world would probably be a better place if people would keep their promises to themselves!

## Reasons for Failure

Many of the things church of God members endure over the last months of the year stem from pagan origins, and the New Year’s resolution is no different. This tradition is believed to have originated with the Babylonians making vows to their gods.

# Ready Answer

*Resolutions: Man's and God's*

Similarly, the Romans began each year making promises to their god Janus, after which the month of January is named. In the Medieval era, the beginning of winter was the time when knights would take the “Peacock Vow” to re-affirm their commitment to chivalry.

As it has done for centuries, Catholicism practices similar things during the time of Lent. Even Jewish people make New Year’s resolutions, though, of course, they do it when they believe the new year begins, at the Feast of Trumpets. Many church members do these same things. At the Feast of Tabernacles, one commonly hears people say something like, “After the Feast, I’m going to do such and such.”

Well, how did it go? If we made a promise to change something in our lives, are we part of the 10 percent who reach their goals, or have we succumbed to the pressures of life and failed like the 90 percent? Making resolutions and setting goals are not necessarily wrong, but why do so many fail? According to *Time*, the reasons people abandon their resolutions are actually twofold: First, they set unrealistic goals, and second, they set too many of them. It is commonly suggested that setting smaller goals on the way to reaching the larger or long-term goal will help a person see a progression of accomplishment.

Many of us have been in the church for decades. What kinds of goals did we set during our early years as babes in Christ? Have we made progress toward them, or are we still struggling to perform some of the basic things of God? Have we progressed to meat, or are we still taking milk, as Paul says in Hebrews 5:12-14?

Did we make any resolutions last year, perhaps last Passover or last Feast? It will not be long until Passover is once again upon us, when we are commanded to examine ourselves (II Corinthians 13:5). Doing so is not always an enjoyable task, but it is one we must face if we are to reach our ultimate goal of eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

While the words “goal” and “resolution” do not appear in the Bible, it contains endless instruction in how we are to live our lives, whether from a self-help, physical, or spiritual perspective. Perhaps the first set of instructions that come to mind would be that of God’s law in the form of the Ten Commandments. As we have all heard before, if everyone kept just one of God’s laws—say, “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15)—we would live in a totally different world! How much healthier would everyone be if the whole world kept the food laws given by God in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14?

## Apostolic Put-Ons

Consider another list of instructions. It is not a formal list of numbered laws, but it is indeed a list that we should be making a part of our everyday lives. The apostle Paul is

not the only one to speak in these terms, but throughout his writings he uses quite a few “put ons”:

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. (Romans 13:11-14)

It makes an interesting Bible study to go through the New Testament and note all the times the apostle tells us to put on some character trait or virtue. There are quite a few of them. We “put” something on or off or away or through or in or down or up all the time, and doing so oftentimes does not require a lot of thought. Being a transitive verb, “put” cannot stand alone; it must have an object. There must be a thing to which that the action is done.

The English word “put” is used several hundred times in the Bible. The Greek equivalent it is used 29 different ways, and the Hebrew uses its similar word in almost twice as many ways. It is a little word that we take for granted most of the time!

For the most part, Paul’s use of “put on” is positive, but in our day a put-on can be and is frequently used in a negative way: to mislead someone, perhaps as an act of teasing or for amusement. The entertainment world is full of these. Many televangelist do the same things, putting on an act to get the people to respond and support them.

In Romans 13, Paul, having mentioned several of the commandments of God, writes, “It is high time to awake out of sleep” and then “put on the armor of light” and “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” First, we see that he is attempting to wake the Roman congregation up! Maybe he is referring to the Parable of the Ten Virgins, in which the virgins were all asleep. The apostle says that we do not have time to waste! In his inimitable way, he is urgently scolding them: “You’ve been asleep too long! Wake up and get dressed!”

One of the first things we do after waking from a night’s sleep is that we dress—we “put on” our clothes for the day. The Bible contains scores of references to clothing, and depending on the context, its significance can be physical, economic, social, moral, or spiritual. While clothing is indeed functional, it has multiple uses: It can protect, conceal, decorate, or display or represent a person’s current moral and spiritual state, good or bad.

When we see what people wear—or perhaps worse,

*(continued on page 14)*

## The Nation of Israel— Biblical Israel?

### PART TWO

Who is the Israel of the Bible? As Part One demonstrated, it is not the house of Judah or the modern nation of Israel, as Bible speakers and teachers often claim. Rather, in the Bible, God applies the names “Israel” and the “house of Israel” to what has become known as the “Ten Lost Tribes,” and Judah is included only when those names identify *all* the tribes descended from the patriarch Jacob, whom God later renamed Israel.

The previous article also asked, “Are the ‘Ten Lost Tribes’ actually lost?” Prophecies tell us that these tribes will exist in “the last days” and that God will reunite them with the house of Judah (Jeremiah 30:3; Isaiah 11:12; Ezekiel 37:19; Hosea 1:11). While lost to the world and to themselves, these tribes are not lost to God (Amos 9:9).

#### WHO AND WHERE?

Because God does not lie and His Bible is true, these conclusions raise the question: Who is the Israel of the Bible, and where is it today?

In Genesis 49, God gives a prophecy through Jacob about each of his sons, providing distinct identifying characteristics that would apply to each in the “last days.” These prophetic descriptions make sense only if each tribe is an identifiable people, a nation. For those who believe that the Bible

is the inspired Word of God and that we are living in the last days, those prophecies apply to our time today and are therefore to be taken seriously.

Because many biblical prophecies speak about “Israel” and “the house of Israel” in the last days, how can we understand them if we do not know who they are in today’s world? God gave those prophecies for a reason. They are not interesting little vignettes of people who lived long ago but are descriptions for our present day. Just as God tells Daniel that the prophecies he received would have their meanings revealed at the time of the end (Daniel 8:26; 12:4, 9), the same principle holds true for other end-time prophecies as well (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17).

Jacob’s prophecy begins in Genesis 49:1 by identifying the time this prophecy applies to: “And Jacob called his sons and said, ‘Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you *in the last days*’” (emphasis ours throughout).

Do we believe we are living in the last days? If yes, then Jacob’s words apply specifically to our time. In this prophecy, God is talking directly to us, looking down through the millennia and preparing a message *especially for us* now. As far back as Genesis 49, He thought it important and necessary. Do we?

Proceeding into the prophecy, the message about

# Prophecy Watch

*The Nation of Israel—Biblical Israel?*

Simeon and Levi in verse 7 highlights an important point: “Now I place a curse on you because of your fierce anger. Your descendants will be scattered among the tribes of Israel” (Contemporary English Version [CEV]).

If Simeon and Levi are scattered now, then this suggests that the other tribes are not. Therefore, just as Judah has formed into a nation, we should expect that the other tribes, especially those larger than Judah, have each done the same. We are looking, then, for countries and peoples extant today that fit the profiles given by God to Jacob in Genesis 49.

## THE HOUSE OF JUDAH

Judah is the best place to start to test the validity of this prophecy. Part One explained that, because of their observance of the Sabbath, true to God’s promise, the people belonging to the house of Judah have not lost their identity—the whole world knows who they are. This fact makes the link between Judah today and the Judah of the Genesis 49 prophecy easily seen and undeniable.

Notice one tantalizing trait Jacob ascribes to Judah: “Judah, your brothers will praise you. *You will defeat your enemies*” (Genesis 49:8, *Easy-to-Read Version*; emphasis ours).

How have the descendants of Judah, the Jews of the modern State of Israel, fared against their enemies in our time—the last days? They began by defeating those who tried to keep them from being a nation in their war of independence, a victory that led to the founding of the nation of Israel on May 14, 1948. Since then, they have defeated their foes in the wars we know as the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War. In addition, they have fought and survived numerous, lesser known wars since 1948. (For a complete list see the Wikipedia article, “List of wars involving Israel.”)

An article on “Top 17 Miraculous Israeli Military Victories” ([israelvideonetwork.com/list/top-17-miraculous-israeli-military-victories](http://israelvideonetwork.com/list/top-17-miraculous-israeli-military-victories)) concludes:

At West Point Military Academy, while wars fought throughout the world are studied to learn military strategy, the Israeli wars are excluded from the curriculum. This is because according to military strategy, Israel should have lost them. Israeli victories defy logic because they are more often than not honest to G-d miracles. At West Point Military Academy, it benefits to teach logic and not the unexplainable miracles that make up Israel.

These frequent miracles should be expected rather than surprising because God is faithful to His promises. He is a miracle-working God: “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet

done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure’” (Isaiah 46:10). Though modern Jews have strayed from the faith revealed in God’s Word, following their own traditions (Mark 7:6-9), the God of their fathers still watches over them.

Another important, identifying characteristic about Judah appears in the last part of verse 8, “Your brothers will bow down to you,” and verse 10 expands on it:

The scepter or leadership shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until Shiloh [the Messiah, the Peaceful One] comes to Whom it belongs, and to Him shall be the obedience of the people. (*The Amplified Bible*)

Judah’s brothers, the other tribes, are to bow down to Judah in the last days. Verse 8 invokes the image of a subject showing deference to his monarch, an image that sharpens in verse 10 with the use of a “scepter,” a symbol of a ruler’s sovereignty, implying dominion, power, and authority. The symbol reinforces the point that Judah has a responsibility to rule, to lead.

If we are to believe what God predicts here, then we must ask, “Which nations have kings, queens, and leaders who have Judah as an ancestor?” According to God, when we find such a nation, we have a candidate for one of the tribes of the house of Israel.

Some commentators restrict these verses by claiming that the scepter image applies only to David, Solomon, and Jesus Christ. However, as we saw, this prophecy is not just about history or the distant future, but it is specifically about *today*—the last days. In Genesis 49, God describes the identifying traits of each tribe, of each nation they have become, as they exist in our day.

David Guzik writes about Genesis 49:10 in his commentary on the Bible: “Each of these refer to the *ruling* position Judah will have among his brethren. He inherited the leadership aspect of the firstborn’s inheritance.” This scepter promise was not only about rulership, but more precisely, that God gave Judah the gift of leadership.

It should not be surprising, then, that those who have Judah as an ancestor are often leaders in the fields they choose to enter. For example, in fields as diverse as politics, science, finance, business, entertainment, art, etc., we find descendants of Judah overrepresented as leaders, despite comprising only 2% of the American population. Even in the area of wealth, they represent 20% of the wealthiest 400 Americans. While some cry conspiracy, those who believe God and Genesis 49 instead see a God-ordained gift of leadership and fulfilled Bible prophecy.

In verse 10, Judah receives a special blessing and prominence. To Judah goes the promise of rulership culminating in the greatest and final ruler—Jesus Christ.

The day will come when every knee will bow to a Jew—Jesus Christ (Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; Philipians 2:10). While Judah was not promised physical greatness and prosperity, it received a promise of special prominence by being chosen as the tribe that would produce the Messiah, as well as rule and exercise leadership among the tribes of Israel.

## JOSEPH

Now that we see that the prophecies about Judah are operating in our day just as God said they would, we can be confident that the prophecies about the other brothers are just as accurate. What nations have kings or queens who have Judah as an ancestor? What nations have descendants of Judah as leaders in various fields of endeavor? The answers most frequently point to the Western democracies, some of which are still monarchies, giving us a starting point in our search for Judah's "lost" brothers.

In Genesis 49, besides Judah, one other tribe is given prominence over his brothers—Joseph. Because the prophecies about Judah point to the Western democracies, then the last part of Genesis 49:26 becomes a major clue: "because you are the leader of your brothers" (CEV).

This prophecy is about Joseph, but applies to both his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Jacob says in Genesis 48:5: "And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine."

In his commentary, John Gill comments on this verse:

... they shall be mine; that is, by adoption; should be reckoned not as his grandchildren, but as his children, even as his two eldest sons, Reuben and Simeon; and so should be distinct tribes or heads of them, as his sons would be, and have a distinct part and portion in the land of Canaan; and thus the birthright was transferred from Reuben, because of his incest, to Joseph, who in his posterity had a double portion assigned him.

So, if the Western democracies are the fertile ground to search for the tribes of Israel, have there been two brother nations that have consistently led other nations over the last century or so? If such a pair exists, would they lead at the same time or would one follow the other? The Bible has the answer.

In the blessings that Jacob pronounced on Manasseh and Ephraim recorded in Genesis 48, the last part of verse 20 reads, "And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh." Here, God establishes the order, the younger, Ephraim,

first and then the elder, Manasseh. In verse 19, Jacob says of Ephraim, "His descendants shall become a multitude of nations."

Remember, these prophecies are about the last days—*now*. According to God, at this time, descendants of Ephraim should exist who have become a *multitude* of nations. If we see one such nation, and no other, based on the inerrancy of the Bible, we know that we are looking at Ephraim. Of Ephraim's older brother Manasseh, Jacob says in the same verse, "He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great."

Therefore, if two brother nations exist today, leading the Western democracies, first one becoming a multitude of nations and later the other brother nation becoming a single great nation, according to God through Jacob, that profile fits Ephraim and Manasseh, respectively.

This article is not meant to answer definitively the question of who and where the "Ten Lost Tribes" are. Rather, it aims to emphasize the fact that Genesis 49 is for today and that many Bible prophecies speak of Israel and its place and condition in our world today. It seeks to inspire the reader to begin a journey of discovery to determine who and where is the Israel that the prophecies foretell will be active in the last days. We have determined that it is not Judah, the modern State of Israel.

## WHY IMPORTANT?

Why is it important to know who the Israel of the Bible is? Consider this warning from Jesus Christ:

And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. (Luke 17:26-27)

Those in Noah's day were oblivious to the reality that their world was about to come to an abrupt and devastating end, and so it will be at the end of this age. But it is not just unbelievers who will be caught unaware (Matthew 25:10-13). Prophecies abound in the Old Testament about the last days. Often they are warnings to Israel and include the consequences to *them* of ignoring those warnings. If those who believe the Bible do not know who God is talking to, they risk being asleep and as unprepared for what is ahead as unbelievers.

So, before we are caught unaware as those in Noah's day, we need to heed the warnings that God in His love gives in the prophecies. But to heed, we must know who He is talking to. We need to know who is the Israel of the Bible.

—Pat Higgins

(continued from page 6)

lifted until His purposes for mankind are completed, despite Jesus Christ being on earth governing all nations for some of the time. However, His presence governing humanity will greatly mute many of the curses' effects.

The judgments God imposed altered the living environment Adam and Eve were to live within. That environment is the state into which we are born. Their sins have made life considerably more difficult than it was beforehand. In this is a broad lesson for everyone: Sin never makes life better. It has only one overall effect: It destroys the beauty and rhythm of life as God intended for humanity.

In Romans 8:18-25, the apostle Paul personifies our natural environment to help us understand what was imposed on it by God's judgments:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope; but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

It is apparent to all who believe the Bible that, like Adam and Eve, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). To some degree, then, we share guilt with them. But because of our merciful calling from God, we are granted the hope of seeing the curses lifted and are urged to persevere, for they will indeed begin to be lifted when our Savior returns. Meanwhile, the curses continue affecting life to this very day.

Further understanding can be gained from Adam and Eve's anticipation of God's reaction following their sins, as well as God's revealed attitude in imposing the judgments. First, though, we must take into consideration the indisputable fact that Adam and Eve knew God in a way few others have. They already had a walking-and-talking relationship with Him. They were also greatly gifted, bringing Jesus' principle in Luke 12:47-48 into play:

And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few.

This places them somewhat in the position of converted persons: forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ, within a relationship with Him, justified, and having Christ's imputed righteousness. This is not a perfect match, but there are similarities because of their gifting, their relationship with God, and their innocence. Even with all they had working for them, they still sinned. How strong is the influence of human nature! We must resist it lest we, too, fall into sin.

A vivid example of mankind's persistence to continue in sin is that of Jonah's repeated attempts to flee from doing a job God assigned him. Nevertheless, God eventually got through to Him. Have we sufficiently learned the lesson Paul lays before us in II Corinthians 5:10, that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ? We would do well to keep in mind that our names will be called for judgment, as were Adam's and Eve's. We, like them, will be impelled to respond.

Consider how aware God is of our conduct:

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me, If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You. (Psalm 139:7-12)

David writes this psalm in a positive sense, showing God's ever-present kindness and mercy, but the same awareness could be used negatively. God's judgment can be rendered either of two ways: He could show mercy, or should He choose to do so, He has overwhelming evidence to convict us of the death penalty and justifiably carry out the curse of the law.

## The Rise of Self-Justification

By the time God calls us to account for our conduct, we will fully realize that we cannot hide from His awareness. Do we even now grasp this fact at anywhere near the level Adam and Eve did when they sinned? At that point, devastating effects began to unfold, even though

nothing appeared to happen. The effects silently involved every person born from then on. Death is tragic, yes, but we must learn that the tragedy of death is *earned* (Romans 6:23).

If we were to watch a stage play of what happened from Genesis 1:1–3:9, it would unfold something like this:

- The creation scene would come first, in which God would be alone but intensely active at what He is producing.
- The second scene would be a domestic one, portraying God preparing Adam and Eve in the Garden to live for the benefit of each other and to fill the earth with their children. There would be no indication of shame in their nakedness.
- The third scene would feature Adam, Eve, and the Serpent. It would include the temptation and their life-changing dirty deed.
- The fourth scene would have a somber, judicial tone, and it would involve God, Adam, Eve, and Satan. By itself, it would have four parts: an arraignment of Adam, Eve, and Satan; God's examination of them; His sentencing of them; and finally, God pronouncing His judgments.

In Genesis 3:11-13, the arraignment has already taken place, and some questioning follows. God's questions are not asked to gain more information; He already knows the answers.

And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate." And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

God asks the questions to impress them on their minds, allowing them to convict themselves with their thoughtful and honest answers. Honest, yes, and very revealing. Both cast a measure of blame away from themselves. They plainly believe that they are not to blame and should not bear full responsibility for their transgressions.

Thus began mankind's practice of self-justification in defense of sin. But neither Satan nor anyone else made them sin. Nobody twisted their arms. Notice how the sin of self-justification intensifies the original sin. By attempting to dodge responsibility, claiming that cir-

cumstances made them sin, they compounded their sin by lying.

Adam's sin is particularly egregious, blaming God's gift to him, Eve, whom he had held in such high regard just moments before. In a somewhat roundabout manner, he is blaming God, essentially saying, "God, if you hadn't given me this woman, I wouldn't have sinned!"

Similarly, Eve says, "If you hadn't allowed that Serpent into the Garden, I wouldn't have sinned." Today, we might say that it is in our genes to sin; that we grew up in a bad neighborhood; that our parents failed to teach us; or that our father or mother was a drug addict or alcoholic. Some of those circumstances may be true, but they do not *make* us sin.

God is teaching us that, regarding sin, circumstances offer us little assistance in God's judgment. Should a situation that invites sin arise, it is our responsibility to exercise faith and control ourselves, remaining in alignment with God's righteousness. When he told his audience that he had done something wrong, comedian Flip Wilson claimed, "The Devil made me do it!" and everybody laughed. But that, too, is simply a backhanded way of blaming God, as He created the angelic being who became the Devil.

We have learned a great deal so far from the context of humanity's first sin, and there is still more. However, we can reach a couple of brief conclusions from our evaluation of Adam and Eve's experience:

First, if we do not honestly and fully accept responsibility for our sins before God, we will surely reap their grim effects. Sin's fruit, regardless of the circumstances in which it is committed, is always the same. When sin occurs in the course of history makes no difference. Adam and Eve's sins occurred at the outset of mankind's history, and they are still affecting us. Not every sin has this level of power, but the potential exists. Besides the death of the sinner, like leaven, sin's effect is to spread from its initial point of origin.

Second, as shown by Adam's and Eve's excuses, self-justification tends to blind us to God's goodness, His gifts, because it intensifies what originally occurred. In our haste to absolve ourselves, we forget things that God has provided us: life itself, a mind that can gather information, the ability to reason, the ability to remember, and a spirit that, not only makes us human, but confers the potential to be like God. Adam's blaming of God for His gift of Eve reveals his horrendous ingratitude for what he had been given.

In Christian love,



(continued from page 8)

do not wear!—in public, most Christians are astounded or perhaps dumbfounded. Too much is being displayed that ought not to be! How people clothe themselves can give an observant person a window of insight into the wearer's moral character, social status, or just his or her present circumstance. When we add a situation to a person's choice of clothing, as shown by the man not wearing a wedding garment in the Parable of the Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1-14), we can also ascertain a great deal about a person's attitude toward others, especially toward God.

What do we put on for the world to see? What spiritual state or attitude toward others do we display in what we put on? When I was growing up, and as boys do, would get a hole in my clothes, my mother would patch them so I did not have to go to school with clothes that were full of holes. As my mother used to say, "You don't want to go out looking like a hobo!" But now it is fashionable to buy clothes with holes already in them!

## More Than Clothing

Needless to say, the world around us is in a sad spiritual state, but its condition does not mean that we are without options. We always have a choice in how we react to what is going on in our culture. Job provides us succinct guidance in Job 29:14, saying, "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me."

His words parallel what Paul writes in Romans 13:12: "Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light." "Cast off" can also be translated as "put off," but the translators probably used "cast off" to indicate a stronger action, meaning not just "remove" but "fling away." Kids do them when they change their clothes, usually flinging them all over the room!

In this verse, the apostle paints a word-picture of someone casting off clothing that is so foul and disgusting that all he wants to do is to throw it as far from him as possible. He does not want to be contaminated by it anymore, nor does he want to be identified by it any longer. As Christians who live under the light of God's truth, we should likewise not want to have any contact with those "works of darkness."

The goal of putting on Jesus Christ should be at the top of our list. It is a lofty goal that will take our entire lifetimes to accomplish. It goes hand in hand with, as Paul states it, "put[ting] on the armor of light." As we know, light illuminates. It is a symbol for truth, which we have been granted the insight and help, not only to understand, but also to practice. Given that our society is moving toward uncritical open-mindedness and false tolerance for all, truth is becoming a rare and thus valuable commodity that we must hold closely—in fact,

wear it as a garment! As deceit abounds, it becomes more urgent that we put it on and guard it!

In Colossians 3 appears another passage in which the apostle Paul expands this "put on" metaphor, instructing us what to put off and then what to put on:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. . . . Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. . . .

But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. (verses 1-2, 5, 8-14)

First, Paul tells us why we should start making changes: We have been raised with Christ in baptism, and now it is time to seek heavenly things. But this means putting to death whatever is in us that reeks of earthliness—all those sins of the flesh. This is putting off the old man, what we were before our calling, along with all our evil deeds.

Then we must get to work on the new man. Paul even provides a list as to how to go about it! As we diligently begin to put on the attitudes and actions of Christ, the weaknesses and sins of the old man will begin to fall away because the heavenly and the earthly, the old and the new, cannot coexist for long. If we keep at it, and it becomes an ingrained habit, putting on the new man will become as easy as getting dressed for the day!

Our list of goals or resolutions have already been made for us in the pages of God's Word. Unlike this world and its New Year's resolutions, we cannot just abandon them after a week or two. They must become part of us as we prepare to put on eternal life and immortality in the Kingdom of God.

—Ronny H. Graham

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# *Safe Spaces or Dangerous Places?*

## *The Assault Upon Our Future (Part One)*

Freedom of speech is a major tenet of Western democracy, born of a people once steeped in the Judeo-Christian ethic. While the United States was a trailblazer for its support of free speech, the idea that mankind is better served when individuals are granted the freedom to express themselves openly dates to as early as the fifth or sixth-century BC.

In this context, educators throughout the Western world have advocated for an educational (and civic) experience free from unwarranted or unreasonable censorship to encourage the growth of the marketplace of ideas crucial for the advancement of civilization.

Unfortunately, many of these same educators have also pursued a more liberal mindset to govern and administer their hallowed halls of learning. This mindset, under the guise of free speech, has artfully overrun the educational experience in the West. Over the past century, it has slowly given rise to an elitist, progressive “group-think” among academicians that actually works in opposition to free speech.

Patiently and persistently, this group-think has promoted an anti-Western, anti-capitalist, and anti-Christian bias within the entire academic culture. In addition, academia has shown a stubborn inclination to repress conservative values and to indulge, coddle, and indoctrinate our youth rather than to educate them.

Christians and conservatives have decried this liberal agenda because it teaches sensitivity over truth, “tolerance” over discipline, feelings over facts. With the rejection of traditional values, classroom instruction—and much of the entire educational experience—becomes unbalanced and deficient. We are left with generations of troubled and ill-prepared graduates to inherit the positions of power and production in our society.

Over the past century, the contaminated mindset has grown by small degrees to the point that it now dominates the academic culture of the self-obsessed Millennial generation. Accordingly, we witness across college campuses throughout the Western world the inception of what are called the “safe space” and its close relative, the “trigger warning.” Both are coordinated efforts by students and schools to eliminate their exposure to the “harmful” or “dangerous” words, concepts, and “micro-aggressive” ideas of the right.

The “thought police” have met the self-esteem generation.

A sexual rights advocacy group, Advocates for Youth, claims the safe space movement provides an environment “where anyone can relax and be fully

self-expressed, without fear of being made to feel uncomfortable . . . or challenged on account of biological sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, [or] cultural background.” In practice, the safe space functions by creating overly restrictive environments around the campus that are hostile to challenges—particularly from conservative or Christian viewpoints—where only like-minded, “tolerant” persons who agree in advance to avoid disagreeable language are allowed to share their “opinions.”

The “trigger warning” is defined roughly as a notice that certain media (books, videos, movies, music), classroom discussions, lectures, exhibitions, or even live theater, might contain pictures, words, or references to ideas or concepts that might be considered damaging to the self-esteem of certain “marginalized” or previously injured or abused persons. In practice, trigger warnings actually serve the secular/progressive group-think by discouraging contact with material or ideas that might “trigger” unpleasant memories or that are contrary with their politically correct dogma.

Both of these over-protective crusades rely on the perpetuation of a narcissistic “victim mentality,” already prevalent among self-focused Millennials. But the definition of “victim” has been expanded to include all who are made to feel discomfort when exposed to ideas disagreeable to them.

With the one-sided group-think favoring coercion over free speech, vital exposure to opposing viewpoints or exercises in reconciliation is lost. Since comfort, unity, and tolerance are valued over critical thinking, morality, and conviction, any effort to prepare for real-life situations, to define “right” versus “wrong,” or to encourage initiative and leadership is severely diminished.

When our children—seeds for tomorrow—having been soaked for years in self-esteem and vanity, are planted in a secular institution devoid of the nutrients of virtue, fertilized with indulgence, and cultivated by the removal of all that may provoke, what sprouts is a feeble crop incapable of any meaningful engagement with reality. Naïve to the self-inflicted damage of their self-indulgent zeal, it is little wonder that the “Millennials” are referred to as the “Snowflake Generation.”

Having identified the problem, in the next issue we will address some of its more frightening implications upon our world today and tomorrow.

—Joseph Baity

# Bible Study

## Does the Bible Contain Discrepancies?

The apostle Paul writes in II Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Is this verse to be taken literally, or as many Bible critics allege, could the inspired Word of God—the Holy Bible—contain discrepancies? Can we find conflicts within the books of the Bible’s many authors, or is there a consensus of truth and inspiration that transcends all other written works?

To the nonbeliever, the Bible is full of contradiction and error, but this opinion is predictable, coming from one who lacks the guidance and direction of the sacred book’s Divine Author, our great God. But by the same token, the Bible is not an easy book to read and understand (see Acts 8:30-31). Even for the elect of God, there are difficult passages that at first read may seem to conflict with others.

While there are various contributing factors, most alleged biblical discrepancies are likely the result of two factors: 1) spiritual confusion and misunderstanding, and 2) honest misinterpretation.

In light of this, how should Christians deal with these so-called “inconsistencies” of Scripture so as to avoid the dangerous traps that any resulting misconception may produce? How do we ensure that we can provide a “ready answer” (I Peter 3:15) to those who may inquire?

First, consider the most common contributing factors that may confuse and obscure our understanding of the most important Book ever written:



1. There are vast, fundamental contrasts between the cultures and dialects of the modern West and those of the ancient Middle East. These contrasts add a layer of difficulty and uncertainty to prevailing translations from the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages.

Consider also that the Bible was written by over thirty different Middle-Eastern authors over a span approaching two thousand years. Some wrote prose, while others wrote poetry. God inspired some to describe visions of the future, while He moved others to write more historical narratives. Some authors, like the apostle Paul, created accounts that even the apostle Peter found nearly impenetrable (II Peter 3:16). Moreover, since languages are constantly evolving, many words tend to change meaning and usage over time, while others virtually disappear from the lexicon altogether.

2. God’s truth is often paradoxical (Ecclesiastes 7:15; Ecclesiastes 8:17; Psalm 73:1-16). While God reveals Himself and His truth in His Word (Daniel 2:22; Job 12:22), He also actively conceals Himself and His truth as well (Proverbs 25:2; Job 36:26). With focused effort, almost anyone can learn about God from the Scriptures, but in His wisdom, He places restrictions on what He allows to be revealed, sometimes masking His truth through the use of parables (Job 11:7; Romans 11:33; II Thessalonians 2:11; Mark 4:11-12, 33-34). Regardless of individual effort, faith, or closeness with God, there are certain mysteries that—by design—remain unexplained for now

(Deuteronomy 29:29).

3. Satanic influence and human nature have exploited the inherent biblical complexities to prompt translator bias, transcription error, and even not a few perplexing and confusing translations.

While God inspired Scripture to both reveal and conceal in accordance with His will, Satan, in concert with human nature, has always worked in direct opposition (Romans 8:7; II Corinthians 4:4; Matthew 13:19-22; Ephesians 4:18; II Thessalonians 2:9-10). We should never underestimate our evil adversary’s desire to influence the Bible’s many translators, “inspiring” transcription inaccuracies, ambiguity, and obscurity wherever possible (II Corinthians 3:14-15; Revelation 12:9; Mark 4:15).

As Christians, we are tasked with gaining a deeper understanding of God through the study of His inspired Scriptures. This requires great faith and personal effort to dig far beyond the superficial meanings of translated words and phrases, and with the aid of divine revelation, to discover the genuine intentions of the divine Author. By recognizing that difficulties do exist, and by anticipating the satanic effort to exploit those difficulties, we can hope to avoid the pitfalls caused by misconception and poor translation (II Timothy 3:16; Romans 15:4; I Corinthians 10:11).

In future issues, we will highlight potentially misleading scriptures in an effort to shine light on their inspired meanings.

—Martin G. Collins