



Complete eBook

By

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Chapter One

Why do we exist? Why are we here on planet Earth? What's my purpose in life? What does the future hold for me? What will happen to me after I die? Why is there evil in the world? Why did God create the devil?

These are typical, yet important questions that most of us ask at different points in our lives. I'd like to share what I believe are the answers based on a deep-dive study of the Bible during the past 50+ years. These are not my opinions. Everyone has an opinion. What we need is some evidence to corroborate what's 'really real.' I pray these thoughts are helpful to you in your life.

Why Do We Exist?

Let's begin with what may be the most basic question: why do we exist? I could expand the question to this – why do we exist rather than not exist? By 'we' I mean humans. Why do 'humans' exist?

If you had asked me that question when I was an atheist, my answer would be much different than my answer is now. As an atheist I believed that we 'just are.' There was no reason for the existence of humans. We had 'evolved' from some lower species – a 'common ancestor.' However, evolution has a big problem because there was 'nothing' before there was 'something.' The supposed 'common ancestor' evolved from something else that evolved from something else that evolved from something else, etc.

Question: from where did the first ‘something else’ come?

Answer: nothing. That’s what I believed as an atheist. Something came from nothing. I’m embarrassed to even admit that’s what I believed, but it’s what the public school system taught and I believed it was true until my early 20s.

That ‘something’ could come from ‘nothing’ is not logical and makes no sense. There is no ‘evidence’ for it. Yes, there are ‘theories,’ but no verifiable evidence. The fact is that the ‘theory of evolution’ is probably on its last legs in the scientific world. Many atheists today have turned to the idea of a ‘multiverse’ or series of ‘multiverses.’ The planet Earth just happens to exist in one that can sustain life on at least this one planet. However, the multiverse ‘theory’ still doesn’t explain what started the process that led to multiverses.

The 'Big Bang Theory' (no, not the television show) is just a theory. How does 'nothing' go 'bang?' I've read the supposed 'evidence' behind the 'Bang' and none of it holds water. The 'universe' has not always existed. There are physical 'laws' that support that as true. However, from where did those 'laws' emanate?

Searching for Answers

I studied Hinduism, Shintoism, Taoism, and Buddhism prior to becoming an atheist. I didn't find any good answers to my basic questions about why the universe, the planet Earth, or humans existed from those worldviews either. It was not until I investigated Christianity that I found a worldview that made sense and answered my questions. Since the Christian worldview contained more than ample answers based on verifiable evidence, I became a Christian.

I share that with you so you will know I didn't 'buy into' Christianity because it's what my parents believed or the society in which I was raised. I was drawn into Eastern religion because of my martial arts training that began at the age of 12. I found it far more interesting and fulfilling than the Christianity I had known earlier. I became an atheist at 18. It seemed the best choice out of everything I had experienced. I attempted to disprove Christianity through an investigative process, but became a believer at the age of 23.

So, the answers I'll share in this series will be based on more than just the 54 years I've lived life as a Christian. I will also bring in my experience and research into multiple other religions and worldviews. If you're interested, you can read more about that research in a book I wrote almost 20 years ago. It's called *[A History of Man's Quest for Immortality](#)*.

Chapter Two

The objective of our new series is to answer some basic questions that many people ask –

1. Why do I exist?
2. Why am I here on planet Earth?
3. What's my purpose in life?
4. What does the future hold for me?
5. What will happen to me after I die?
6. Why is there evil in the world?
7. Why did God create the devil?

These questions will lead us to many other questions as we go through the series, but we'll use these five basic life questions as 'jumping-off' places for other questions.

I mentioned in the introduction to this series that we'd do a 'deep dive' into these questions. What I mean by that is going 'below' the surface answers that we often hear from people. I personally think that 'surface' answers or no answers at all are a big part of the problem we see today in Christianity. Tens of thousands of people who grew up in Christian churches are abandoning their basic beliefs in Christianity every year through a process known as 'deconstruction' and/or 'deconversion.' I've written a lot about both of those on my Apologetics blog, FaithandSelfDefense.com, so feel free to click over there sometime and search for the words 'deconstruction' or 'deconversion' to see what articles you find. I also wrote an eBook you may find helpful. It's titled *[EXvangelical – What's That?](#)*

Question #1

Keep in mind that I'm going to answer questions from a Christian perspective. Having studied many worldviews (and even lived several), I don't think you'll find good answers elsewhere. Probably something else you should know about me is that I believe Jesus Christ is the Eternal Son of God and has ALL of the answers to every question. I also believe the Holy Spirit is a Member of the Godhead and inspired human beings (primarily prophets and apostles) to write the individual books we know collectively as 'the Bible.' The Holy Spirit also has ALL of the answers to every question. If you disagree, please share your thoughts in the 'Comments' section below and we can 'discuss' so others can read our supporting evidence for each position.

Why do I exist?

You exist because God wants you to exist. God created the heavens and the earth. 'He is that He is' ('I AM that I AM'). God is 'Self-Existent,' meaning that He is the 'Necessary' Being. Humans, and every other life form on the Earth, and the universe itself, is 'contingent' on God's existence. God exists. Nothing or no one else has to exist. God existed in Eternity before 'anything' else existed. He exists because He exists. We exist because He exists and wants us to exist. God is the 'uncaused Cause' of all things. He exists because He exists – always has and always will – 'Even from everlasting to everlasting, You *are* God' (Psalm 90:2).

You and I exist for a reason. That would be God's reason for our existence. We discover His reason by reading what He revealed about His reason –

Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. Genesis 1:26-28

Image and likeness

Both of those words are very important in light of the other life forms God created in His image and likeness. However, as far as we know there are none. The Bible does say that God made humans 'a little lower than the angels' (Psalm 8:5), but it doesn't say that God made angels in His image and likeness. The Bible does say that angels are 'ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation' (Hebrews 1:14). We also know that Jesus Christ is 'so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they (Hebrews 1:4). The Bible says that each true Christian is 'an heir of God through Christ' (Galatians 4:7) and 'heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ' (Romans 8:17). The Bible says that Christians will 'judge angels' (1 Corinthians 6:3) and 'rule and reign' with Christ (Revelation 5:10; 20:4-6; 22:5). Based on what we see in Scripture, it seems likely that God made only humans in His image and likeness.

God's Purpose

God explained His purpose for creating human beings in the first Book of the Bible and the last Book of the Bible –

... let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. Genesis 1:26-28

A ‘key word’ here is ‘dominion.’ It’s the Hebrew word רָדָה (*radah*) and means ‘to rule.’ The word ‘subdue’ will play an important part in our series, but I’ll save that part of the deep dive for another time.

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. Revelation 20:6

There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. Revelation 22:5

Notice that humans ‘ruling and reigning’ with God are His purpose for us. There’s just one problem with this – humans are not ‘ruling and reigning’ with God. Thousands of years have gone by without God’s purpose being realized by humans on earth. So, what do make of that? How did humans lose their way and how will they get it back?

In the last part of our new series we saw that God created humans to ‘rule’ (have dominion) over the earth. We find that in the first chapter of Genesis. In the last Book of the Bible, Revelation, we find humans ruling and reigning with God forever. If those were the only two portions of Scripture we

read, we'd think everything worked according to God's plan and purpose. However, there are thousands of years where humans did not (and are still not) ruling and reigning with God on the earth. Why? What happened?

Chapter Three

God's eternal plan and purpose is for humans to rule and reign with Him. However, His plan includes training us to reign with Him (*Train to Reign*). The training period began soon after God created the first human being – a male named Adam.

God the Creator made a place for Himself to dwell on the earth with the humans He created. It was called Eden. God created Adam in Eden, then took the man to live just east of God's land in a place called the 'Garden of Eden.' Lots of homes around the world have beautiful gardens near them, so that should be a surprise that God built a special 'Garden' for humans to live.

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. Genesis 2:7-8

Think about that. You are living next door to God! You live in His Garden!! And what a Garden –

And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Genesis 2:9

Every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. Yummy! But wait a minute – what’s this? “... and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.’ ?? We know about ‘good’ from Genesis 1, but why a tree that contained knowledge of ‘evil?’ Did somebody sneak into the Garden overnight and plant the ‘evil’ tree? Nope. Genesis 2:9 says ‘the Lord God made every tree,’ including the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God created that tree for some reason – but why?

Basic Training

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. Genesis 2:15-17

We have just been introduced to God's plan for 'basic training.' It started in the Garden. God gave Adam his first orders –

- tend the Garden
- keep the Garden
- eat from the Garden, except for the fruit of one tree

The Hebrew word for 'tend' is עֲבַד (*abad* -to work, serve). The Hebrew word for 'keep' is שָׁמַר (*shamar* – keep watch, protect, preserve). Okay, I get the 'work, serve' part, but why 'protect, preserve?' Protect from what? Keep that word in mind as we continue through this series – *shamar* – because it is at the heart of our training.

Moving on. Not only did God plant the tree of the 'knowledge of good and evil,' He told Adam that if he ate from that tree he would 'die.' Die! What? Wait a minute. God created Adam in Eden, built a Garden next door where Adam would live, created lots of trees with great food to eat, then said there was one fruit that would kill him if he ate it? Why would God do that?

Chapter Four

Genesis 1 and Revelation 22 tell us that God created humans to 'rule and reign' the earth.

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. Genesis 1:27-28

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They

shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. Revelation 22:1-5

However, as we saw in the last part of our study, humans do not have 'dominion' (rule) over every living thing that moves on the earth. Humans are not eating from the 'tree of life.' The nations are not 'healed.' Our world is under a 'curse.' We do not 'see the face' of God. We do need the sun. Humans are not currently 'reigning forever and ever.' Why not? Good question.

The Garden

It's important that we understand the purpose of the Garden of Eden. God created Adam in Eden, the dwelling place of God on the Earth He had created. God planted a 'garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed' (Genesis 2:8). God created many 'creatures' on the Earth, but none like human beings. He made them in His 'image and likeness' and told them to be 'fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.'

The fact that God placed Adam in the Garden 'eastward in Eden' demonstrated His desire to dwell with humans in a special relationship. This relationship was to be on earth. God had already created supernatural beings who dwelled with Him in Heaven. His relationship with angelic beings would be somewhat different than the relationship He would have with humans.

We need to closely look at what happened in the Garden to understand what we face today in our lives on earth. The great promise of the Garden is not being fulfilled, has not been fulfilled, and will not be fulfilled until the events of Revelation 22 when a 'pure river of water of life, clear as crystal,' will proceed from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Jesus Christ). In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, will be 'the tree of life;' most likely the same Tree of Life we see in the original Garden of Eden. The tree will bear 'twelve fruits,' and the leaves of the tree will be for 'the healing of the nations.'

Some people think of Revelation 22 as the Garden of Eden 'restored.' I think of it as the Garden of Eden 'expanded.' God will create 'a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away' (Revelation 21:1). The Apostle John, who received this vision from Christ, wrote that the 'tabernacle of God' will be with men, 'and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God' (Revelation 21:3).

This fits quite well with what the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4. Some Christians in ancient Thessalonica were concerned about believers who died before Jesus Christ returned from Heaven to ‘seize, catch up’ (rapture) His children. Paul comforted them with these words –

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18

The key words I want you to notice are the last ones – “And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” God wants to be with us. He wants to ‘dwell’ with us. So why isn’t that happening now?

Evil

Remember the ‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil’ from Genesis 2? God told Adam that he could eat the fruit of any tree in the Garden of Eden ‘except’ for the fruit from the ‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil.’ Why? ‘... for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’

Question: what’s evil? The Hebrew word is רָע (*ra*). It means ‘adversity, malignant, bad, bringing misery, giving pain, wrong, injurious, wicked.’ Some might say it’s the opposite of ‘good,’ which is טוֹב (*towb*) in the Hebrew. It means ‘pleasant, agreeable, desirable, kind, beautiful, useful, suitable, honest, virtuous.’

It’s interesting to note that when God creates the ‘new heaven and new earth,’ that ‘there shall be more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, no more pain’ (Revelation 21:4). God added that nothing that ‘defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie’ would be allowed into the New Jerusalem – part of the new heaven

and new earth (Revelation 21:7). Evil will be gone – only that which is good will remain.

So, if God is going to rid the universe of evil one day why did He ever let evil exist in the first place? Why plant a ‘tree’ in the Garden of Eden that would introduce ‘evil’ to Adam? What was God up to in the Garden?

Chapter Five

We ended our last study with these questions –

- So, if God is going to rid the universe of evil one day why did He ever let evil exist in the first place?
- Why plant a ‘tree’ in the Garden of Eden that would introduce ‘evil’ to Adam?
- What was God up to in the Garden?

We will find many of the answers to our tough questions in God’s revealed Word – the Bible – but not everything. Here’s why I say that.

Except for a few instances that we know about (e.g. God’s finger writing His Law on tablets of stone, God’s finger writing a warning on the plaster of the wall’s palace in Babylon), God spoke through ‘prophets’ and ‘His Son’ (Hebrews 1:1-2). Moses, one of God’s prophets, wrote Genesis under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God (e.g. 2 Timothy 3:16; 2

Peter 1:21). However, that doesn't mean that God revealed 'everything' to His prophets. Here's what Moses wrote in the Book of Deuteronomy –

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

Deuteronomy 29:29

I will do everything I can do answer your questions, but it's important to know that there are some 'secret things' God has not revealed. Fortunately for us, most of what we need to know for the purpose of this study has been revealed.

Evil and the Serpent

I'm going to jump ahead a little bit and address two of our primary questions:

- Why is there evil in the world?
- Why did God create the devil?

Evil could not and would not exist if God had not allowed it, so there's a reason for it. The same is true about the devil. The devil could not and would not exist if God had not allowed it, so there's a reason for it.

These are two of the toughest questions people ask Christians. I get it. Wouldn't life be great if evil and the devil didn't exist? I'm afraid that thinking is too small when considering what God has done, is doing, and will do to the heaven and earth He created.

God created humans to 'reign' with Him. That sounds good on the surface, but how will humans know how to reign with God? What does it mean to 'reign' with God. God's ways and thoughts are so much higher than our ways and thoughts (Isaiah 55:9). So, how do we gain that kind of knowledge? How do we attain to those types of 'ruling' abilities? That's what this series will address.

Subdue It

God designed a 'training plan' for humans to be able to 'reign' with Him. There are so many things humans need to learn about God and how to rule 'in sync' with Him. That's where 'evil and the devil' come in.

Let me say at the outset that I am not going to make light of evil or the devil. Jesus said that the devil 'does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it' (John 8:44). Jesus also called the devil 'the great dragon,' 'that old serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world' (Revelation 12:9). I also won't make light of 'evil' because it has caused untold misery in this world. However, there is a reason for both of them existing.

Look at Genesis 1:28 again – this time with a focus on what humans would need to do before they had ‘dominion’ (rule) –

Then God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

Did you notice the word ‘subdue it’ just prior to ‘have dominion over’ it? The Hebrew word for ‘subdue’ is **כָּבַשׁ** (*kabash*) and means ‘to bring under subjection, force into bondage.’ Why would God say that humans would need ‘to bring things under subjection, and force into bondage’ before He said they would ‘rule’ (have dominion) ‘over every living thing that moves on the earth?’

I believe that learning how to 'subdue' is part of learning how to 'rule.' Why, if humanity was going to exist in a perfect world where they would 'rule and reign' with the God who created the heavens and the earth, would they need to learn how to 'subdue' anything or anyone? Why would bringing things 'under subjection' and 'forcing into bondage' precede 'having dominion' in a 'perfect world?'

Chapter Six

Words are important. Writers, good writers, use words in a particular order to present their ‘story’ so it’s ‘clear and easy to understand.’ The Holy Spirit, the true Author of the Bible, is the best ‘writer’ in the universe. He chose human authors to inspire to communicate God’s Word so that can understand what God is doing.

That’s why I pointed out in the last part of this study that God made humans in His image and likeness and said – *Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth*’ (Genesis 1:28). The Hebrew word *כָּבַשׁ* (*kabash* – subdue) preceded the word *רָדָה* (*radah* – dominion, rule). The question I raised was why would God say that humans would need ‘to bring things under subjection, and force into bondage’ before He said they would ‘rule’ (have dominion) ‘over every living thing that moves on the earth?’

I believe that learning how to 'subdue' is part of learning how to 'rule.' Why, if humanity was going to exist in a perfect world where they would 'rule and reign' with the God who created the heavens and the earth, would they need to learn how to 'subdue' anything or anyone? Why would bringing things 'under subjection' and 'forcing into bondage' precede 'having dominion' in a 'perfect world?' The answer to that question is, I believe, is because the world Adam and his family would live in would NOT be a perfect world.

That leads to the next question: why not? Why didn't God create a perfect world where humans ruled and reigned and had a great life?

Why?

I think the answer is direct and straightforward, but I know many people won't like it. The reason why God didn't create a perfect world where humans ruled, reigned, and had a great life is because that wasn't His Eternal Plan. That may not be the answer you were hoping to hear, but it's the best one I have. Here's why?

We know several things about God before He created the heavens and the earth – before time began –

1. God the Father LOVED God the Son – “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.” (John 17:24)
2. God the Father LOVED the world of humans He was going to create so much that He ‘willed’ that the Son He loved would die for the world – “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever

believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

3. God the Father LOVED the world of humans He was going to create so much that He 'willed' that the Son He loved would die by shedding His 'blood for them – "knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you." (1 Peter 1:18-20)
4. God the Father LOVED the world of humans He was going to create so much that He 'purposed' 'before time began' that some of humans would be saved – "who has saved us and called *us* with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, *who* has abolished death and

brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”
(2 Timothy 1:9-10)

5. God the Father LOVED the world of humans He was going to create so much that ‘promised’ eternal life to some humans ‘before time began.’ (Titus 1:2)
6. God the Father LOVED the world of humans He was going to create so much that He ‘chose’ some ‘before the foundation of the world’ to “be holy and without blame before Him in love.” (Ephesians 1:4)

The fact that God the Father explained in great detail how He planned ‘before time began’ that God the Son would die for our salvation tells me that what the Garden of Eden was never going to be the ‘perfect’ place for Adam and his family to live out a perfect life. Something had to happen to push ‘perfection’ out of the way and make room for ‘imperfection,’ even if for just a brief time. I say ‘brief’ remembering the words of the Apostle Peter – “But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” (2 Peter 3:8) God exists

outside of time and space, thus He sees things much differently than do we.

How?

Now that we know the ‘why,’ the next question is ‘how.’ How would God cause ‘perfection’ to become ‘imperfection?’ Easy. Plant a tree in the Garden with the ‘knowledge of good and evil’ and tell humans that was the one tree from which they could eat no fruit. If they did, they would die.

Okay, next question. What if Adam and his family obeyed God and never ate from that ‘knowledge’ tree? I guess that’s possible, though we’ll never know. Why? Because God created a creature that was unlike the humans who had a different agenda. Genesis 3 calls the creature ‘the serpent.’ Revelation 12 calls him – ‘the great dragon, that serpent of old, the Devil and Satan.’

Here's what happened in the Garden after God warned Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, took one of his ribs, closed up the flesh in its place, used the rib to make 'a woman,' then brought her to 'the man.' Adam woke up, looked at her and said – “This *is* now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:23-24)

Everyone is now in position to answer the question, HOW. Enter the 'serpent' –

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will

not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. 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.

Genesis 3:1-7

The events that followed included God catching all of them in their disobedience and a series of curses that would lead to a dark and difficult existence for all involved. God did offer a ray of hope as He cursed the serpent and we'll get to that a bit later in our series.

God's Eternal Plan did not include human beings remaining in that 'cursed' position forever. If they were to eat from the 'tree of life,' they would 'live forever' in that cursed state. So, God removed Adam and his wife from the Garden of Eden 'and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.' (Genesis 3:24)

Chapter Seven

Given what we read in Genesis 1:27-28 and in Genesis 3, it would seem that God's purpose and plan for humanity had had a great 'fall.' That's probably why many Christians call what happened in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3 – 'the great fall' or 'fall into sin.'

The 'deceptive' conversation between the serpent and Adam's wife took about **30 seconds**. Use a stop watch to time just the actual words spoken. What happened next is a bit more difficult to time with a stop watch, but it probably took only a few minutes –

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. 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. Genesis 3:6-7

The same is true with what happened next. We're not told the length of time between Adam and his wife covering themselves and hearing the 'sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day' (Genesis 3:8). My guess is that it happened within minutes of the serpent's deception.

If we use a stop watch to time the conversation God had with Adam and his wife, and the words He spoke to the serpent, we come up with about **90 seconds**. How long it took God to make tunics of skin and clothe them, then remove Adam and his wife from the Garden, is anyone's guess. I'm thinking an hour or two, but it may be have been longer or shorter.

My point is that from the moment the serpent began his deception of Eve to the moment God 'drove out the man,' and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden with a flaming sword to 'guard the way to the tree of life' would probably occurred in a matter of a few hours – certainly during the same day.

East of the Garden

So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Genesis 3:24

Think about direction for just a minute. God created Adam in Eden, then placed him in ‘a garden eastward in Eden’ (Genesis 2:8). After the serpent’s deception and humanity’s ‘fall,’ God placed an angelic guard ‘at the east of the garden of Eden’ so that Adam and his family could never get back in to eat from the ‘tree of life and live forever’ (Genesis 3:22). God moved humanity further from Him in an easterly direction.

We find Adam and Eve living ‘east’ of the Garden of Eden with Adam working the land and Eve raising children. Cain was their first child. Eve thought he might be the promised ‘Seed’ who would fulfill God’s promise from Genesis 3:15. He wasn’t. Cain grew up to become a ‘murderer.’ The Apostle John explained what happened –

For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. 1 John 3:11-12

Notice that Cain 'was of the wicked one.' Those words, 'the wicked one,' generally refer to the devil.

God knew what Cain planned to do and warned him –

So the Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it. Genesis 4:6-7

Cain did not listen to God and did murder his brother. Interestingly, Genesis 4:7 is the first time the word 'sin' is used in the Bible. The Hebrew word is חַטָּא (chatta'ah). God told

Cain that 'sin' had a 'desire' for him. The word 'desire' is the Hebrew word תְּשׁוּקָה (*teshuqah*) and means 'a longing.' Then God told Cain that he should 'rule over it.' The Hebrew is מָשַׁל (*masha*) and means 'reign, rule, have dominion.' The training has begun.

Cain could have chosen to take a deep breath, listen to God, count to a hundred, cool down, and 'rule' over the sinful feelings he had toward his brother. However, Cain didn't do that. He talked with his brother, went out into a field, rose up against Abel and killed him. When God confronted Cain about what he had done, Cain lied and said he didn't do it – "I do not know. *Am I my brother's keeper?*" God's response to Cain's lie?

What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth. Genesis 4:10-12

Train to Rule Insights

We know that the devil (serpent, Satan, dragon, etc) was involved in ‘deceiving’ Cain because of what the Apostle John wrote in his first letter. We know that the devil was involved in ‘deceiving’ Eve because of what we read in Genesis 3 and 1 Timothy 2. God created Adam, Eve, and Cain – the first humans on earth – to ‘subdue’ and ‘have dominion.’ They all failed to do that. None of them ‘subdued’ anything. None of them ‘ruled’ over anything. Keep in mind that Adam and his wife were created without a ‘sinful nature.’ Some theologians call that early period of Genesis 1 and 2 as the Age of Innocence. However, Cain was born with a sinful nature.

So, we have two examples to compare: humans without a sinful nature and humans with a sinful nature. Neither was able to ‘subdue’ (*kabash* – bring into bondage, bring into subjection, force into subjection) or ‘have dominion’ (*radah* – rule, reign over) in their particular challenges.

Humans have a lot to learn about subduing and ruling. It's like someone who walks into a dojo and says, 'I want to learn martial arts.' Do they know martial arts at that point if they had never studied martial arts before? No, they don't. They have to go through a long process that will include sacrifice and pain. They will have to develop patience, humility, bravery, trust, reliance on their training, etc.

The same is true for us. If we are going to learn how to do what God has planned for us to do, we will also need to learn similar lessons. The Bible, God's Word to humanity, will be our primary training manual. History, humanity's response to God's Word, will be another part of our training.

Chapter Eight

Training to do anything takes time. If you want to do something *very* well, training takes even longer. Given that there is no 'time' in eternity (e.g. called 'before time began' by the Apostle Paul), we cannot measure 'how long' God considered creating the universe, everything in it, and giving humans a position of reigning with Him. What we do know is that He did consider it, decided to do it, and put everything in motion to make it happen.

The Training Program

We covered Genesis chapters 1 – 4 in previous parts of our study, so please review those for background on this next phase of our series.

Adam, Eve, and their first child, Cain, demonstrated that humans would need to go through a serious training program to be able to *subdue* and *have dominion* “over every living thing that moves on the earth.”(Genesis 1:28). The ‘serpent’ (e.g. the devil, Satan, deceiver, liar from the beginning) demonstrated that he would be involved in this training program. We also know from Genesis 3:15 that the ‘seed’ of the serpent would be destroyed at some future date, which fits perfectly with what the Apostle John wrote in 1 John 3:8 –

He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

Jesus, as we know, is the 'Seed' of the woman who God mentioned in Genesis 3:15. Jesus Christ, the Seed, would come from Heaven to earth, 'that He might destroy the works of the devil.' How would Jesus destroy the works of the devil? His sacrificial dying on the Cross, miraculous rising from the dead, and ascending from earth to Heaven was certainly part of that process, but don't forget the part that humans play in the devil's destruction.

The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6 that Christians would 'judge the world and angels' in the future. The devil is an angel and according to Paul in 2 Corinthians 4 is 'the god of this age.' If Christians are going to judge the 'world' and 'angels,' then they will certainly participate in the eventual judgment of the devil.

Please don't misunderstand what I'm saying here. Jesus Christ came from Heaven to earth to 'destroy the works of the devil.' He literally did the 'heavy lifting.' Jesus died and rose from the dead. He is the Eternal Son of God. There is no one else like Him in the universe. His Name is above all names. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Only faith in the atoning

death of Christ can save. Only Jesus Christ has the 'power' to destroy the works of the devil.

However, the Lord Jesus will use humans and other angels to bring the devil's chaotic reign to an end (e.g. Revelation 20). From what I've read in the Bible, the angels who sided with God are well trained to do their part and have been for thousands of years (possibly longer). The challenge is to train up humans so they are able to do their part when the time comes. That's the purpose of this series.

Two Sides

Cain failed to obey God and killed his brother, Abel, then lied to God about what he did. God told Cain that he would be a 'fugitive and a vagabond' on the earth. Cain told the Lord that his 'punishment' was greater than he could bear. Cain knew he would be 'hidden' from God's face and was afraid that anyone who found him would kill him. God 'set a mark on Cain' and said – "whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold" (Genesis 4:15).

Cain left his father and mother and traveled further east to a place that Moses called 'the land of Nod.' Cain built a city and named it after his son, Enoch. Genesis 4:16-24 gives us the names of some of Cain's descendants. One of them, named Lamech, had two wives and an 'attitude' when it came to what Cain's family thought about God.

Then Lamech said to his wives: 'Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; Wives of Lamech, listen to my speech! For I have killed a man for wounding me, Even a young man for hurting me. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold. Genesis 4:23-24

That was a direct mocking of God. God promised that if anyone killed Cain, He would take vengeance on them 'sevenfold.' Enoch mocked God by saying that if Cain would be avenged sevenfold, then Lamech would be avenged 'Seventy-sevenfold.' The family of Cain hated God.

So, **side-one humans** (Cain's family) mocked God. What about **side-two humans**? How could there be a side two with Abel dead? God took care of that –

And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, 'For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.' And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the Lord. Genesis 4:25-26

Side-two humans who came from Seth ‘began to call on the name of the Lord.’ The Hebrew word for ‘to call’ is קָרָא (*qara*) means ‘to proclaim.’ Seth and his son Enosh led a revival of worship and proclamation of God’s Word.

[Spoiler Alert - Jesus Christ, the Seed of the woman who will defeat the seed of the serpent - came from the lineage of Seth]

Chapter Nine

I began using the terms ‘side-1 humans’ and ‘side-2 humans’ in the last part of our study for a couple of reasons. First, it is a demarcation for the descendants of Cain (first child of Adam and Eve) and the descendants of Seth (born to Adam and Eve after Cain killed his brother Abel). We’ll go deeper into that in this part of our study.

The second reason I used the terms is that using them will give us an indication throughout the Bible about the lineage of the promised ‘Seed’ of the woman who would destroy the ‘seed’ of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. I’ll explain more how that will work in the next chapter of our study.

When Sides Line Up

We read about Cain's side of Adam's family (Side 1) in Genesis 4:16-24 where five generations are mentioned from Cain. We read about Seth's side of Adam's family (Side 2) in Genesis 4:25 – 5:32 where eight generations are mentioned from Seth. Genesis 5 opens with these words –

This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created. And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth Genesis 5:1-3

Interestingly, Cain and his family (Side 2) are not mentioned at all in Genesis 5. Also, we learn how the age of Adam when he became Seth's father and Adam's age when he died. Genesis 5 is specific about when each man 'begot' his son and how old he was when he died. That information is not available about Cain's side of the family.

Keep in mind that Seth and Cain are brothers, though estranged because of God sending Cain away for murdering Abel. That means Seth's children and Cain's children would be cousins. The fifth person mentioned in the lineage of Cain is Lamech, who 'mocked' God. The fifth person mentioned in the lineage of Seth is Enoch, who 'walked' with God. Remember that the line of Seth began 'to call on the name of the Lord' when his son Enoch was born. Jesus Christ, the 'Seed' of the woman, came through the line of Seth (Luke 3:38), not the line of Cain.

One the cousins of Lamech ‘the mocker’ was Enoch ‘the walker.’ He was from the lineage of Seth and Enosh, loved and pleased the Lord, and ‘walked with God.’ Enoch’s relationship with God was so special that he did not experience a physical death. God ‘took him’ –

Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah. After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him. Genesis 5:21-24

By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, ‘and was not found, because God had taken him’; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. Hebrews 11:5

Enoch's son was Methuselah, Methuselah's son was Lamech (a different Lamech than Cain's son), and Lamech had a son named Noah, saying – “This *one* will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord has cursed” (Genesis 5:29).

When Sides Collide

Genesis 6 introduces us to a world that was in utter chaos.

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them. Genesis 6:5-7

The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. Genesis 6:11-12

It's important to remember that God promised that the 'Seed' of the woman would destroy the 'seed' of the serpent. That had not happened yet, so how would God resolve this problem of a world where both sides of humanity (Side 1 and Side 2) were involved in violence, corruption, and wickedness?

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Genesis 6:8

God had a plan to start over with humanity. He decided to destroy every human on earth except for Noah and his family. Noah married a woman when he was 500 years old and they had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Notice that Shem is mentioned first. There's a reason for that and I'll explain in a few minutes. God told Noah to build an 'ark' that would save him and his family from the 'destruction' that was to come. You can read the details in Genesis 6.

In Genesis 7 God told Noah to get himself and his family inside the ark, 'because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation' (Genesis 7:1). God also told Noah to take seven each of every clean animal and two each of animals that are unclean – 'male and female.' That included birds as well. God said the reason was, 'to keep the species alive on the face of the earth.' God said that after seven more days He would cause it to rain on the earth forty days and nights, 'and I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made' (Genesis 7:4). Noah was 600 years old at the time and did exactly what God commanded him to do.

God was destroying everyone from Cain's lineage (Side 1) and almost everyone from Seth's lineage (Side 2), except for Noah, his wife, and sons. The collision of the two sides led to the destruction of the ancient world.

Oh, about Shem. Jesus Christ came through the lineage of Shem (Luke 3:36). God kept His promise. More about that as our series continues.

Chapter Ten

And God said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth.'

Genesis 6:13

God did destroy the world with a massive Flood. When the Flood waters finally subsided and Noah's Ark rested 'on the mountains of Ararat' (Genesis 8:4). The human race that started with Adam and Eve failed the test. They did not learn how to 'reign' with God. All of their efforts ended in violence, wickedness, and the destruction of all living things – except for one family and the animals that God had saved with them in an Ark.

Starting Over

God started again, even though He knew that ‘the imagination of man’s heart *is* evil from his youth’ (Genesis 8:21). God made a special covenant with Noah and his family and their future descendants –

Then the Lord said in His heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.’

God repeated some of the same words to Noah and his sons that He had said to Adam and Eve –

So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.’ Genesis 9:1

However, this time God added something else that pertained to humanity's training to reign with Him on the earth –

And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. 'Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man. And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; Bring forth abundantly in the earth And multiply in it. Genesis 8:2-7

You'll find the complete new 'covenant' (agreement) God made with humans in Genesis chapters 8 and 9. One of the best-known parts of the covenant are these words –

And God said: 'This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.' And God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth. Genesis 9:12-17

Train to Reign **Begins Again**

God's purpose for humanity would not be thwarted, so He began training people how to subdue and rule again. However, this time was a bit different because Noah and his family knew what the pre-Flood world was like. They knew about corruption, violence, wickedness, and death. Those things were foreign to Adam and Eve before they disobeyed God. Noah and his family had some insight into how badly the human race had responded to God in the past. That knowledge would become part of their training to reign with God, but how much would it help them succeed? Not much.

It was not long before Noah's sons led their families from the mountains of Ararat to a plain in the land of Shinar. We know the area as ancient Babylon (currently Iraq). One problem with all of humanity moving together was that they were not obeying God's command for them to be 'fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth' Another problem was that they wanted to establish themselves as their own gods – a type of 'self religion' –

Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.’ They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth. Genesis 11:1-4

Notice the last words here – “let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.” They wanted to make ‘a name’ for themselves. Why? ‘... lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.’ They did not like God’s plan for humanity and were determined to do everything they could to keep His plan from succeeding. Did it? No, it did not –

But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, 'Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.' So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. Genesis 11:5-9

God put a stop to humanity's disobedience by confusing the languages among families, then 'scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth.' They would not accept God's training, so He handled it another way. You can read Genesis 10 to learn more about the families that were scattered.

The Lineage of the ‘Seed’

It's important as we study the Bible and think about how God is training us to reign with Him to remember that He made a promise to Eve that the ‘Seed’ of the woman would destroy the ‘seed’ of the serpent. We know that Jesus Christ is the ‘Seed’ of the woman, and that He ‘was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil’ (1 John 3:8). So, how would God keep His promise to do that after confusing the languages and scattering families abroad over the face of all the earth?

God chose one of Noah's sons to be the physical conduit for the Son of God to come into the world to destroy the works of the devil. That son was Shem. Genesis 11:10-32 introduces us to Shem and several generations of his descendants. The last people mentioned in the list are Terah, his son Abram, his grandson Lot, and his daughter-in-law Sarai.

And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there. So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran.

Genesis 11:31-32

Chapter Eleven

God continued His training of humans to ‘rule’ with Him by selecting a man from the lineage of Shem. The man’s name was Abram (Abraham). He grew up in Ur of the Chaldeans, which many archaeologists believe was located in southern Iraq. Abram’s father moved much farther north to Haran, taking some of his family with him.

And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram’s wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there. So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran.
Genesis 11:31-32

We learn later in the Genesis account that some of Terah's family remained in Haran, but God had other plans for Abram and Sarai –

Now the Lord had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. Genesis 12:1-2

Out of all of the people living in the world at that time, God chose one man and his wife who carry forward the promised 'Seed' of the woman who would destroy the 'seed' of the serpent. In addition, they and their descendants would learn many valuable lessons about how to 'subdue and rule.'

Choosing, Training, Testing

Reading through the life of Abram and Sarai is part of an amazing 'manual' of how God 'chooses' people, then 'trains' them through a process of 'testing.' That process hasn't changed in thousands of years. It's how God 'trains to reign.' God told Abram and Sarai that 'kings shall come from you' (Genesis 17:6, 16). God said the same thing to their grandson Jacob (Israel) many years later (Genesis 35:11). Developing a lineage of 'ruling' was always part of God's plan. The 'Seed' of the woman (Jesus Christ) who would destroy the 'seed' of the serpent (the devil) is the 'King of kings' (Revelation 17:14). Jesus will rule forever with those who follow Him (e.g. Revelation 20:6; 22:5).

God chose Abram and Sarai to leave Haran and travel south to the land of Canaan. Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran. God promised to give 'this land' to Abram's descendants. Abram built an altar to the Lord, then moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel. Abram build another altar to the Lord 'with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east' and called on the name of the Lord. Abram then continued his journey going South. (Genesis 12:4-9). That was just the beginning of Abram's training.

Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land. And it came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance. Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you. Genesis 12:10-13

We learn some important things about Abram through this ‘testing’ process. Famines in ancient times often moved family groups to other countries to find food. It’s interesting that this particular famine was ‘severe’ and occurred soon after God called Abram to leave Haran and travel to the land of Canaan. This was a ‘test’ and part of Abram’s training. We learn that Abram was afraid of what might happen to him in Egypt. He had good reason to fear based on how ‘foreigners’ were often treated. What Abram did not do was ‘rely’ on God’s power to fulfill His promise to Abram. Abram did well when he obeyed God’s call to leave Haran for the land of Canaan, but he did poorly when he was tested in Egypt. However, and this is important to note, God blessed Abram and his family even when Abram failed the test –

Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South. Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journey from the South as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the

altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the Lord. Genesis 13:1-4

I don't believe God blessed Abram because he 'failed' a test, but because of God's plan for Abram. Remember that God called Abram to leave his father's house and go to 'a land that I will show you.' God's plan for Abram to 'make of you a great nation' (Genesis 12:1). God also promised Abram that He would make his name 'great,' would 'bless him,' and that all of the families of the earth 'shall be blessed' (Genesis 12:2-3).

That particular promise is known as an 'unconditional' covenant. God did not place any 'conditions' on Abram in order for God to keep His promise. Abram had a lot of things to learn about becoming the person through whom 'all of the families of the earth shall be blessed,' but God was going to protect Abram and Sarai.

The 'Seed' of the woman who would destroy the 'seed' of the serpent would come through the lineage of Abram and Sarai. Even though Abram lied to the Pharaoh of Egypt about Sarai, God 'plagued Pharaoh and his house because of Sarai, Abram's wife' (Genesis 12:17). Even though Abram lied about his relationship with Sarai and Pharaoh took Sarai to his palace to have sexual relations with her, God would not allow it. The plagues stopped Pharaoh before he could touch her sexually. That's a strong demonstration of God's protecting His plan and promises. It would become another powerful lesson for Abram in his training to reign.

Chapter Twelve

I remember standing in long lines of other young men boarding planes. We were going off to war. That war was almost ten thousand miles away from where we lived, but before any of us could go to war we had to travel less than a thousand miles by air to ‘train’ for our ‘mission’ in that war. It reminds me now of something King David wrote three thousand years ago –

Blessed be the Lord my Rock, Who trains my hands for war, And my fingers for battle— Psalm 144:1

Basic Training

Basic Military Training (BMT) is an important part of every branch of the military. No matter what ‘specialty’ we signed up to do in the military, we first had to go through ‘basic’ training. The same is true for God’s people. We all need to ‘train to reign.’

Some of the primary characters we’ve met so far in this series are Adam, Eve, Seth, Enoch, Noah and his family, Abram, and Sarai. Each of them were called by God to represent Him on earth – to ‘fill and subdue’ the earth and ‘have dominion’ (rule) according to God’s eternal design.

Even as I and hundreds of thousands of other young men went through BMT in the 1960s, the men and women who believed in and served God thousands of years ago also went through a period of training. There are many areas of ‘Basic Training’ that God has for His people, but I’ve chosen five as examples. This spiritual training, just like military training, is not a ‘cafeteria’ where you can pick-and-choose what you

want to learn. They are all necessary for the spiritual warfare that awaits everyone who follows God seriously.

1. Believe in the Only True God (Monotheism)
2. Fear God and Obey Him
3. Worship God and Serve Him
4. Listen to God and Trust Him
5. Love God and Devote Your Life to Him

As you read through the life of Abram you'll see how God leads him through this 'basic' training process. Abram came from a family of 'idol worshippers' before God called him (e.g. Joshua 24:14; Genesis 31:30-32; 35:2-4). Like most people of his time (late 3rd Millennium to early 2nd Millennium), people worshipped many gods (polytheism). Some of them were 'national' gods, while others were 'regional' gods. Many were known as 'household' gods. Humans made these 'gods' (idols) from wood, stone, and other earthly materials. These 'household gods' were very important to people, including Abram's close family members –

And Laban went into Jacob's tent, into Leah's tent, and into the two maids' tents, but he did not find them. Then he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's tent. Now Rachel had taken the household idols, put them in the camel's saddle, and sat on them. And Laban searched all about the tent but did not find them. And she said to her father, 'Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise before you, for the manner of women is with me.' And he searched but did not find the household idols. Genesis 31:33-35

People believed that household idols represented 'gods' that would bring blessings on their household. These human-made images had no power to bring blessings on anyone, which makes God's promises to Abram even more interesting given the context. The 'One True God' who created the heavens and earth called Abram to leave his father's house (filled with pagan idols) and go to a 'land' He would show him. God's promise was that He would make of Abram – 'a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.'

Receiving a blessing from ‘the gods’ was a serious desire of people living during Abram’s time. However, only the ‘One True God’ can actually bring blessings to a family, city, or nation. Even though Abram was 75 years old and spent his life worshipping idols, he ‘departed as the Lord had spoken to him.’ Abram left pagan idol worship and became a believer in the One True God. He began the process of looking to the God of Heaven for family blessings. Interestingly, God expanded the promise to say – ‘I will make you a great nation ... And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ The day Abram left Haran for Canaan was the day he began his ‘basic training’ as a follower of God.

What happens after ‘Basic Training?’ It is often a longer period of time in the military known as ‘Advanced Individual Training’ (AIT). That’s where military training became individualized depending on a person’s speciality (what role they would play in the military). The time spent in AIT could be weeks or even months. Once a trainee completes their BMT and AIT, they are usually sent to a post or base to begin participating in their assigned mission.

Chapter Thirteen

I'd like to conclude this first volume of our study by sharing a couple of early examples from the Bible that might help us see how God 'trains' His people to 'reign.'

Noah

God called Noah for a specific 'mission' – to build an Ark that would protect his family and many of the animal, reptile, and bird species from the Flood that God would use to destroy most life on earth. Genesis 6 tells us that 'Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations' and that he 'walked with God.' Noah 'found grace in the eyes of the Lord' and received his assignment from God.

Why would God destroy most of the people on earth?

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. Genesis 6:5

The 'wickedness of man' being great in the earth, and 'every intent of the thoughts of his heart' being evil 'continually,' didn't happen overnight. Read back through the end of Genesis 4 and into Genesis 5 and you'll meet the descendants of Adam and Eve through their sons Cain and Seth. Cain was wicked and so were his descendants. Seth was apparently not wicked because when his son Enosh was born *men* began to call (אָרָא – *qara* – proclaim) 'on the name of the Lord' (Genesis 4:26).

Even five generations from Seth we find that Enoch 'walked with God' (Genesis 5:24) and that God 'took him away' so that Enoch 'did not see death' (Hebrews 11:5). Five generations from Cain we find that Enoch's cousin Lamech killed a man and mocked God for how He had treated Cain. However, fast-forward just a few generations from Enoch and we find that the earth was filled with violence and 'corrupt before God' (Genesis 6:11).

How did that happen so fast? It's important to remember that God made a promise to Eve that the 'Seed' of the woman would destroy the 'seed' of the serpent. The 'Seed' is Jesus Christ, who 'was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil' (1 John 3:8). I think the devil was involved in bringing about the somewhat rapid decline of the human civilization to the point that the promised 'Seed' of the woman might be compromised or corrupted. That led to God making His next move. He would destroy the human race except for one man and his family. God would bring the 'Seed' through the lineage of Noah and his son Shem.

God said that His Spirit would 'not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years' (Genesis 6:3). At some point during that time God called Noah and assigned him to build the Ark. God told Noah exactly how to build the Ark. Noah believed, listened and obeyed. Noah may have gone through a period of 'basic training' before his mission, though we're not given specifics. What we know is this –

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. Hebrews 11:7

Notice that Noah was ‘divinely warned’ and ‘moved with godly fear.’ Those are important aspects of being trained for any mission God gives to us.

Based on the number of years mentioned in Noah’s life in Genesis 5 and 7, building the Ark may have taken about a hundred years. Noah was five hundred years old and became the father of three sons. He was six hundred years old ‘when the floodwaters were on the earth.’

The bottom line with Noah is that he was thrown into the primary ‘battle’ for which God had called him soon after choosing him. He may have had a period of 20 years to prepare before building the Ark ($120-20=100$), but we’re not told specifically.

Here's one other example.

Abram

Abram's father was named Terah. Terah was 70 years old when he became a father. He had three sons: Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Abram married Sarai, but they had no children because she was barren. Haran had a son named Lot, but 'Haran died before his father Terah in his native land, in Ur of the Chaldeans' (Genesis 11:28).

Noah had three sons prior to the Flood: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the Flood (Genesis 10:1). Genesis 10 gives quite a bit of detail about each of the sons of Noah and their descendants. However, because the 'Seed' would come through Shem's lineage (Luke 3:23-38), we'll focus our attention on Shem's descendants.

Shem had a son named Arphaxad, who had a son named Salah, who had a son named Eber, who had a son named Peleg, who had a son named Reu, who had a son named Serug, who had a son named Nahor, who had a son named Terah, who had a son named Abram – (from Genesis 11:10-26). That means that Abram was ten generations from Noah (nine from Shem).

Terah went out from ‘Ur of the Chaldeans go to the land of Canaan’ with his family, including Noah, Sarai and Lot. It may have been at some point after Haran died because Terah settled in a place called ‘Haran,’ located in the northern part of Mesopotamia. That was about 400 miles north of where God planned to send Abram. Terah died in Haran. Many members of his family remained there, but God called Abram to leave his father’s house and travel to ‘a land that I will show you.’

Abram was 75 years old when he ‘departed as the Lord had spoken to him’ (Genesis 12:4). That’s important to note because Abram had spent his entire life worshiping ‘other gods’ (idol worship). However, ‘gods of wood and stone’ don’t talk because people make them with their hands. Abram heard the voice of God, believed Him, feared Him, and obeyed Him. That was the beginning of Abram’s ‘basic training.’

Completing the Mission

Noah and Abram completed the missions that God trained them to do. Noah built the Ark and saved his family, including the son who would carry forward the future 'Seed.' Abram obeyed God even in the face of being asked to kill his son Isaac (Genesis 22). God provided a sacrifice in Isaac's place and the lineage of the 'Seed' continued moving toward the day when the Son of God would 'become flesh.'

Interestingly, the Son of God (called the Angel of the Lord in Genesis 22) provided the sacrifice in Isaac's place, even as He would become the 'sacrifice' one day on the Cross –

But the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' So he said, 'Here I am.' And He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.' Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So

Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place, The-Lord-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, 'In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided.' Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: 'By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son— blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice. Genesis 22:11-18

We know that Abraham made many mistakes during his earthly journey, but he followed his training and successfully completed the work God had given him to do. Both Abraham and Noah believed in the only true God, they feared and obeyed Him, they worshiped and served Him, they listened and trusted Him, and loved and devoted their lives to Him. They completed their training and 'reigned.'

Chapter Fourteen

Israel is a small country located in the Middle East. Its neighbors include Egypt to the southwest, Jordan to the east, Syria to the northeast, Lebanon to the north, and the Mediterranean Sea to the west. The 'State of Israel' was established in 1948, but it is much older than that.

Israel's Name

Abraham and Sarah (Sarai) had one son together. His name was Isaac. Isaac and Rebekah had two sons together. Their names were Jacob and Esau. Jacob, along with two wives and two maidservants, had 13 children – 12 boys and one girl.

God's intention is to move forward the promised 'Seed' of the woman who would destroy the 'seed' of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). He is also training chosen members of the human race to 'subdue and have dominion' over the earth (Genesis 1). He's training them to 'reign.' What we're about to see next is how God does that through 'Israel.'

Jacob went through an intense 'basic training' with God. Jacob often made bad choices in his life, but he was God's choice to carry forward 'the Seed.' God put Jacob through a training program and eventually came to this interesting point as Jacob returned from Haran to Canaan after spending many years in a type of 'exile' out of fear of retribution from his brother. Jacob was an old man by this time. He was 'greatly

afraid and distressed' as he returned to Canaan, so he divided his very large family into two groups or 'companies.' Jacob said, If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the other company which is left will escape' (Genesis 32:8).

You might remember the five 'basic training' principles I chose for this series:

1. Believe in the Only True God (Monotheism)
2. Fear God and Obey Him
3. Worship God and Serve Him
4. Listen to God and Trust Him
5. Love God and Devote Your Life to Him

Jacob's prayer to God as he returned to Canaan demonstrated some of what his basic training had taught him

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Then Jacob said, 'O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the Lord who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you': I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children. For You said, 'I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.' Genesis 32:9-12

Jacob believed in the God of his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac. Jacob feared God and obeyed him. The Lord told Jacob to return to his country and family with the promise, 'and I will deal well with you.' Jacob worshiped God and served Him. He listened to God and trusted Him. He asked God deliver him from the hand of his brother, even though he feared him. Jacob's statement to God about making his descendants 'as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude' is reminiscent of promises God made to Abraham and Isaac.

Jacob sent his two wives, two female servants, and his eleven sons (his daughter had not been born yet) 'over the ford of Jabbok,' along with herds and flocks. Jacob was alone when a 'Man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day' (Genesis 32:24). Jacob later learned that he had been wrestling with God. It was part of Jacob's training and the beginning of God's next great phase in His plan to move the 'Seed' forward.

God changed Jacob's name to 'Israel' – “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed” (Genesis 32:28). Whereas the name Jacob (*Yaaqob* – יַעֲקֹב) means ‘heel grabber, heel grasper, supplanter – which refers to Genesis 25:26. Israel (*Yisrael* – יִשְׂרָאֵל) means ‘God strives, God rules.’ It fits beautifully with God's eternal plan for humans to ‘subdue’ the earth and ‘have dominion’ (reign) ‘over every living thing that moves on the earth.’

Israel's Mission

God's mission for Israel did not change from the promise or unconditional covenants He made with Abraham –

I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. Genesis 12:2

I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. Genesis 17:6-8

It's important to remember that God's 'thoughts and ways' are not our thoughts and ways. He may do many things differently than we would. If we make the mistake of trying to 'judge' or 'second-guess' God's decisions, we will soon find ourselves lost in a wilderness of misunderstanding and doubt.

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:8-9

God had an eternal plan for Israel. He began by calling an idol worshipper (Abram) from a far-off land to become His representative of blessing on earth. That 'blessing' would come through the 'Seed' that God had promised to Eve. Israel would carry forward the 'Seed' and 'blessing,' but the journey would not be an easy one. It would also include many twists, turns, and tests.

Jacob (Israel) had 12 sons who would eventually become the 12 'tribes' of Israel. However, they would first go through a process of 'basic training' that would prepare them to rule and reign.

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: the sons of Leah were Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun; the sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin; the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant, were Dan and Naphtali; and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maidservant, were Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Padan Aram. Genesis 35:22-26

Based on that list of sons you might think the 'Seed' would progress through Jacob's firstborn son, Reuben. However, remember that Jacob was not the firstborn son, yet God chose him to become the one through whom God would carry forward His promised 'Seed.' The 'choice' of eternal blessing is always up to God, the Creator of all things.

Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. This is the history of Jacob. Genesis 37:1-2

Jacob and his family were back in the land of Canaan – the ‘promised’ land. Question: which son would carry forward the promised ‘Seed’ after Jacob’s death?

Chapter Fifteen

Israel has a history of thousands of years, but it is far more than just one of the many nations that have existed on the earth. God called a man named Abram about four thousand years ago and told him that God would bless ‘all the families of the earth’ through him. That promise would come through the ‘Seed’ God promised Eve in the Garden of Eden centuries before (Genesis 3:15).

Judah

Judah was one of Jacob's 12 sons. Even though Jacob preferred Rachel, God brought Judah into the world through Jacob's first wife Leah. Judah was her fourth son, then 'she stopped bearing' (Genesis 29:35). Jacob fathered many other sons and one daughter through two wives and their two maidservants – for a total of 12 sons and one daughter.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Genesis 37:3

Jospeh's brothers envied him because their father preferred him. As we saw with Cain, envy and jealousy often lead to murder.

Then they said to one another, 'Look, this dreamer is coming! Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.' We shall see what will become of his dreams! Genesis 37:19-20

Though some of Joseph's brothers wanted to murder him, Reuben talked his brothers out of killing Joseph. So, they threw Joseph into an empty pit. Judah, the fourth oldest brother ended up saving Joseph's life by suggesting they sell Joseph as a slave to a passing company of Ishmaelites. The brothers sold Joseph for twenty shekels of silver. The Ishmaelite traders laid Joseph in irons, hurt his feet with fetters, and took him to Egypt to sell him as a slave (Psalm 106:18).

The brothers had gotten rid of their brother, but what would they tell their father? Jacob was the one who had sent Joseph to check on his brothers (Genesis 37:13), so the brothers had to come up with a convincing story about what had happened to him. They decided to take Joseph's tunic, kill a kid of the goats, and drip the tunic in the blood. They showed the tunic to Jacob and told him that a wild beast had 'devoured him.'

It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces.' Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, 'For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning.' Thus his father wept for him. Genesis 37:33-35

Israel's Salvation

Even though the sons of Jacob thought they had solved their problem with Joseph, they didn't realize that God would use their treachery to prepare a people for His Name and move the 'Seed' forward toward blessing all the families of the world. God blessed Joseph in Egypt to the point that the young man became second in power only to the Pharaoh himself. The reason that happened was because God revealed to Joseph that He was going to bring a great famine on the land in seven years, giving the Egyptians seven years to prepare for it. Pharaoh placed Joseph in the position of running the government program to store the massive amounts of grain that God would give Egypt.

When the seven years of plenty ended and the seven years of famine began, people in Egypt and across the world came to Joseph for food.

*So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine was severe in all lands.
Genesis 41:57*

One of the families that came to Joseph for food was his own. Joseph eventually revealed his identity to his brothers and they were afraid that he would kill them because of what they had done to him. However, this is what Joseph revealed to them –

And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Genesis 45:7-8

Since five years of famine remained at the time, Joseph invited his brothers to return back to Canaan to bring Jacob and the rest of his family to Egypt. What did Pharaoh think of that plan?

Bring your father and your households and come to me; I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you will eat the fat of the land. Now you are commanded—do this: Take carts out of the land of Egypt for your little ones and your wives; bring your father and come. Also do not be concerned about your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.’ Genesis 45:18-20

God had prepared the way for Israel to begin a new life in Egypt. Jacob was so excited to hear that his son Joseph was alive – ‘Joseph my son *is* still alive. I will go and see him before I die’ (Genesis 45:28). Jacob lived in Egypt for several years, but he was old and the time of his death was coming closer. He called all of his sons to his sick bed so that he might bless them and prophesy over them.

What I'd like you to see is what Jacob (Israel) prophesied over Judah because God would use the lineage of Judah to bring forward the 'Seed' of the woman that would destroy the 'seed' of the serpent –

Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people. Binding his donkey to the vine, And his donkey's colt to the choice vine, He washed his garments in wine, And his clothes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, And his teeth whiter than milk. Genesis 49:8-12

Compare that prophecy to these words about Jesus Christ, the 'Seed' –

Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals. 'And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Revelation 5:5-6

Chapter Sixteen

Jacob (Israel) lived in Egypt for 17 years and died at the age of 147 (Genesis 47:28). Pharaoh gave Joseph and his family permission to take Jacob back to Canaan to be buried in the same cave as his father and grandfather. Joseph and his brothers returned to Egypt, which had become their new 'home.' However, it was not be their permanent home. In light of our series focus, we see Egypt as a place of 'training to reign.' The children of Israel still had much to learn so that they might 'subdue and have dominion.'

Israel in Egypt

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father spoke to them. And he blessed them; he blessed each one according to his own blessing. Genesis 49:28

This is the first place in the Bible that Israel is referred to as ‘twelve tribes.’ If you look at the context of Genesis 49, you’ll see that it refers to the ‘twelve sons’ of Jacob (Israel). Keep in mind that the promise and unconditional covenants God made with Abraham, and repeated to Isaac and Jacob, passed along to the sons of Jacob as well. That meant the ‘twelve tribes’ of Israel were still in ‘training to reign’ and be a blessing to ‘all the families of the earth’ (Genesis 12:3).

The ‘children of Israel,’ as they were also known, were alive and well living in Egypt because of Joseph. Yet, they were afraid of Joseph because his brothers had sold him into slavery many years earlier. Joseph was second-in-command to Pharaoh, so the brothers were afraid he would kill them as revenge for their evil cruelty toward him. However, they were about to learn an important lesson in how God works out His eternal plan to bless –

When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, ‘Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him.’ So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, ‘Before your father died he commanded, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to Joseph: ‘I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you.’ ’ Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.’ And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, ‘Behold, we are your servants.’ Joseph said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against

me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.’ And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. Genesis 50:15-21

Key in for a moment on verse 20 – “you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive.” Joseph, who had undergone extreme pain and suffering because of his brothers’ evil, understood that God’s plan ‘for good’ was far greater than just one person’s suffering. Joseph knew that everything that had happened to him had happened as part of an eternal purpose.

God trained Joseph to ‘reign,’ and reign he did as the chief governor in Pharaoh’s government. Joseph had learned these five ‘basic training’ principles –

1. Believe in the Only True God (Monotheism)
2. Fear God and Obey Him
3. Worship God and Serve Him
4. Listen to God and Trust Him
5. Love God and Devote Your Life to Him

That’s the lesson we all need to learn.

So, how did the ‘twelve tribes’ of Israel do? Did they learn these basic principles as well?

A Major Change for Israel

Joseph, his brothers, and his father's household continued to live in Egypt for many years. However, he and his brothers eventually went the way of all people. Joseph died at the age of 110 years old. Joseph made a prophecy just before his death that gives us some insight to God's eternal plan for Israel –

And Joseph said to his brethren, 'I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.' Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.' So Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt. Genesis 50:24-26

God's plan for Israel was not for them to remain in Egypt, but there were things for them to learn in Egypt before returning Joseph's remains to the land of Canaan.

Egypt's Pharaoh took good care of the families of Jacob (twelve tribes) because of Joseph. The children of Israel 'were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them' (Exodus 1:7). However, a new Pharaoh came to power in Egypt who 'did not know Joseph' (Exodus 1:8). He viewed the Israelites (children of Israel) as a potential threat to native Egyptians. The Pharaoh was afraid that 'in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land' (Exodus 1:10). The Pharaoh changed the children of Israel from being free people enjoying their lives in Egypt, to being slaves to the Egyptian government.

So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor. Exodus 1:13-14

Pharaoh went even further and commanded the midwives for the 'Hebrew women' to kill every male Israelite as they were born. (Abram was first called a 'Hebrew' in Genesis 14:13, עֵבֶרִי, one who has traveled, crossed over .. it became another name for an Israelite). However, 'the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive' (Exodus 1:17).

That angered Pharaoh. He asked the midwives why they were not killing the male children of Israel. The midwives made up a story about how the Hebrew women were not like the Egyptian women – 'for they are lively and give birth before the midwives come to them' (Exodus 1:19).

Therefore God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and grew very mighty. And so it was, because the midwives feared God, that He provided households for them. So Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, 'Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive.'

Exodus 1:20-22

Pharaoh commanded Egyptians to kill every baby boy by casting them into the river to drown. Only the Hebrew baby girls would be allowed to live. That would eventually destroy the Hebrew race within a couple of generations because there would be no males to continue the 'Hebrew race.' While that sounds like something the Israelites could not possibly overcome, it was part of God's eternal plan.

Chapter Seventeen

God was not going to let that happen because the ‘Seed’ of the woman who would destroy the ‘seed’ of the serpent would come through the Hebrew people – specifically the **Tribe of Judah**. God was also about to unveil His ‘salvation’ of Israel and teach them how to ‘reign.’

Moses

Meet Moses –

And a man of the house of Levi went and took as wife a daughter of Levi. So the woman conceived and bore a son. And when she saw that he was a beautiful child, she hid him three months. But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river’s bank. And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him. Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. And her

maidens walked along the riverside; and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it. And when she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. So she had compassion on him, and said, 'This is one of the Hebrews' children.' Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?' And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Go.' So the maiden went and called the child's mother. Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages.' So the woman took the child and nursed him. And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. So she called his name Moses, saying, 'Because I drew him out of the water.' Exodus 2:10

Moses was one of those Hebrew baby boys whose life was saved from drowning in the river. However, Moses wasn't just 'any' Hebrew boy. God was going to use Moses to save the Hebrew people from extinction.

Moses grew up in the household of Pharaoh, learning ‘all the wisdom of the Egyptians.’ He was ‘mighty in words and deeds’ (Acts 7:22). However, Moses did something that appeared to be a fatal error. He was 40 years old when he decided to ‘visit his brethren, the children of Israel’ (Acts 7:23). Moses saw the burdens they suffered in slavery. He also saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. Moses killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. What Moses didn’t know was that some Hebrews had seen what he did and told him. Moses became afraid when he realized what he had done was known. Pharaoh did hear about it and sought to kill Moses, but Moses fled to the land of Midian to escape. Depending on the route Moses took, and if he was on foot, it may have taken him weeks or even months to travel hundreds of miles to the east to escape Pharaoh and anyone he may have sent to search for Moses.

Moses arrived in Midian and sat down by a well. Seven daughters of the priest of Midian came to the well to water their father’s flock. Shepherds came to drive them away, but Moses stepped in and helped them water their flock. The daughters returned to their father and told him that ‘An Egyptian delivered us from the hand of the shepherds, and he

also drew enough water for us and watered the flock' (Exodus 2:16-20). Their father asked his daughters to find Moses and invite him to eat with them.

Then Moses was content to live with the man, and he gave Zipporah his daughter to Moses. And she bore him a son. He called his name Gershom, for he said, 'I have been a stranger in a foreign land.' Exodus 2:21-22

Keep in mind that Moses had no idea about the plan God had for his life. He spent the next 40 years in Midian living as a shepherd, husband, and father. Moses may have thought about his time in Egypt and what he had done by killing the Egyptian. He may have also thought about his people who were suffering as slaves. Whether he did or didn't, what Moses didn't know was what God was thinking about His people –

Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them.

Exodus 2:23-25

The time had come for the next part of God's eternal plan.

Training Moses to Reign

God saw the oppression of His people in Egypt. He heard their cry because of their cruel taskmasters. He knew their sorrows. It was time for God deliver His people 'out of the hand of the Egyptians' and bring them from Egypt 'to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey' (Exodus 3:7-8). God's plan was to send Moses to Pharaoh 'that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.

First step? God would introduce Himself to Moses in a most unusual way –

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does

not burn.’ So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.’ Moreover He said, ‘I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. Exodus 3:1-6

To say the least, Moses was hesitant (even resistant) to the idea of returning to Egypt and confronting Pharaoh about letting the children of Israel go free. God assured Moses by saying – ‘I will certainly be with you. And this *shall be* a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.’ Moses responded with a question –

Then Moses said to God, ‘Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?’ Exodus 3:13

God answered Moses by revealing His full identity and an important aspect of His eternal plan for Israel –

And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ Moreover God said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.’ Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, ‘The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, ‘I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt; and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and

the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.' Then they will heed your voice; and you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt; and you shall say to him, 'The Lord God of the Hebrews has met with us; and now, please, let us go three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.' But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be, when you go, that you shall not go empty-handed. But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians. Exodus 3:14-22

Chapter Eighteen

Moses and Polytheism

Remember Rule #1 in our Basic Training Manual?

1. Believe in the Only True God (Monotheism)

Monotheism was not a primary worldview in the time of Moses. People believed in ‘multiple gods’ – known as ‘polytheism.’ Moses grew up in the palace of the Pharaoh of Egypt. Egyptians believed in lots of different gods, so Moses would have been very familiar with them. He may have even ‘believed’ in them as did his adopted mother (Pharaoh’s daughter) and other Egyptians.

Moses married the daughter of 'the priest of Midian.' Midianites also believed in the existence of many 'gods,' even though they came from the lineage of Abraham through the son he had with his wife Keturah. He married her after the death of Sarah.

Abraham again took a wife, and her name was Keturah. And she bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. Jokshan begot Sheba and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. And the sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abidah, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east.

Moses, marrying into a Midianite priest's family, may have also 'believed' in some of their gods as well. That would not have unusual in ancient times. It's important to remember that Abraham (Abram) was a polytheist before God called him to leave his father's house and go to the land of Canaan. Abraham grew up in Ur of the Chaldeans before moving with his father and family to Haran. They believed in multiple 'gods.' Though God trained Abraham to believe in Him, the One True God, many in Abraham's family still believed in multiple gods – especially those who continued to live in Haran (e.g. Laban, Rachel, and others). Jacob, the son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham, had to tell his wife and family to –

Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments ... So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem. Genesis 35:2, 4

Polytheism would continue to be a stumbling block to Abraham's family for many generations to come.

Ancient polytheists, those who believed in many gods, had a variety of ideas about the origin of life. I spent years researching the history of polytheism for my book, *A History of Man's Quest for Immortality*, and found the belief in multiple gods went back as far in written history as I could find writings on stones, wall carvings, etc. Cave drawings from pre-historic times also indicates a belief in multiple 'gods' and 'supernatural' forces.

Christians know that the devil planted the idea for polytheism in the Garden of Eden when he deceived Eve –

For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. Genesis 3:5

The idea of being ‘like God, knowing good and evil’ opened the door for people to think of themselves as being ‘little gods,’ which turned into some people thinking of themselves as ‘bigger gods.’ It’s quite possible that Noah’s great-grandson Nimrod viewed himself as a ‘god’ as he built his ‘kingdom’ in Mesopotamia (Genesis 10:8-12). He may have even been part of the leadership that led Noah’s family from Mt. Ararat to ‘a plain in the land of Shinar’ to build a city and tower ‘whose top *is* in the heavens’ (Genesis 11). God saw that effort as evil and confused the language of humanity so that people couldn’t understand each other and scattered across the world – which was God’s earlier command for humanity to – ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth’ (Genesis 1:18).

Nimrod and his family remained in Babel to build a city, which is one reason I think he was the primary leader of the protest against God's plan for humanity – 'let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth' (Genesis 11). Nimrod expanded his kingdom from Babel to Erech, Accad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar, and Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah in the land of Assyria (Genesis 10). By the time Nimrod finished building his kingdom, he controlled most of ancient Mesopotamia (Sumeria).

In the famous passage about Israel's Messiah being born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), God referenced the Assyrian enemies of His people being from 'the land of Nimrod' (Micah 5:6). As we study the ancient city-states that Nimrod founded and his successors ruled over, we find them filled with multiple 'gods.' Nimrod or some semblance of him may have been a 'god' that people worshiped. Some historians believe that the Babylonian 'god' Marduk may have been based on the life of Nimrod. Others believe that the 'part god and part man' Gilgamesh was also based on the life of Nimrod. Legends

about kings grew from generation to generation, so some of these theories are difficult to accept with certainty.

This is the world that Moses was born and raised – a world filled with ‘gods’ and superstitions about how those ‘gods’ impacted their lives on earth and in the afterlife. That is why God revealed Himself to Moses as He did in a ‘burning bush’ that did not burn up. That is why God told Moses to take off his sandals because he was standing on ‘holy ground.’ That is why God told Moses, ‘I *am* the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ That is why Moses ‘hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God’ (Genesis 3). God had to begin at the beginning with Moses and train him to understand Rule #1 – to ‘Believe in the Only True God.’ Yes, there were many ‘gods’ made of wood and stone in ancient times, but there was only One True God, and Moses was speaking directly to Him.

Moses and Monotheism

The conversation between God and Moses was an important part of preparing Moses for the ‘mission’ God had for him – to free the children of Israel from slavery and lead them into the ‘promised land.’ In order for Moses to convince the elders of Israel to follow him out of Egypt, Moses had to first be convinced himself.

When Moses asked God what he would say when the elders of Israel asked him the ‘name’ of the ‘God of your fathers’ who had sent him to them, God answered – ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ‘The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This *is* My name forever, and this *is* My memorial to all generations’ (Exodus 3).

As I mentioned in a previous study, Moses was hesitant to do what God had told him to do. Moses still had to learn Rule #2 of 'Basic Training' as a child of God – 'Fear God and Obey Him.' Moses was definitely afraid of God, but he did not yet truly 'fear God.' The 'fear of God' is the 'beginning of knowledge' and the 'beginning of wisdom' (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). Moses wasn't there yet. So, how did God teach Moses about Rule #2? He demonstrated just a small amount of His 'power' – power that He would share with Moses for his upcoming 'mission' in Egypt –

So the Lord said to him, 'What is that in your hand?' He said, 'A rod.' And He said, 'Cast it on the ground.' So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Reach out your hand and take it by the tail' (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand), that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.' Furthermore the Lord said to him, 'Now put your hand in your bosom.' And he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it

out, behold, his hand was leprous, like snow. And He said, 'Put your hand in your bosom again.' So he put his hand in his bosom again, and drew it out of his bosom, and behold, it was restored like his other flesh. 'Then it will be, if they do not believe you, nor heed the message of the first sign, that they may believe the message of the latter sign. And it shall be, if they do not believe even these two signs, or listen to your voice, that you shall take water from the river and pour it on the dry land. The water which you take from the river will become blood on the dry land. Exodus 4:2-9

These were no parlor tricks that God was playing with Moses on the side of the mountain. God demonstrated that He had the ability to give Moses all the 'supernatural tools' necessary to free Israel from slavery to Egypt.

Moses returned to Jethro his father-in-law and asked permission to 'return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see whether they are still alive' (Exodus 4). Jethro gave his permission. God told Moses that all of the people in Egypt who had sought to kill him were dead. Moses left Midian for Egypt with his wife and sons, along with the 'rod of God' in his hand.

The Lord spoke to Moses' older brother Aaron, who still lived in Egypt, and told him to go into the wilderness to meet Moses. Moses told Aaron everything God had said to him, plus details about the signs God had shown him. Moses and Aaron gathered together the elders of Israel and Aaron told the people what God had told Moses. The people's response? 'So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped' (Exodus 4:31). That's Rule #3 – Worship God and Serve Him. The training of Israel had begun.

Chapter Nineteen

‘Basic Spiritual Training’ for any human being starts with Rule # 1 – **Believe in the Only True God** (Monotheism). That is true now and was true thousands of years ago when Moses and his brother Aaron confronted the Pharaoh of Egypt. God had heard the ‘cries’ of His people who were in slavery in Egypt, and called Moses to lead His people to freedom.

Moses is ready. Aaron is ready. The people of Israel are ready. The next step in God’s plan was to get Pharaoh ready. However, what God did to Pharaoh and the people of Egypt had a purpose that went well beyond just freeing Israel from slavery. God was about to ‘rock the world’ with one of the greatest displays of ‘supernatural power’ ever seen by humanity.

Please keep this in mind as read the following. The ‘gods’ of Egypt were made of wood and stone. Some were small, some were large. They didn’t talk. They didn’t walk. They didn’t breathe. They weren’t alive. However, Egyptians believed they were representative of ‘real gods’ that lived in the ‘heavens’ or the ‘underworld.’ They believed that their Pharaohs were ‘gods’ and needed to be embalmed and have special burial places (e.g. pyramids) filled with all of the necessities of the ‘afterlife.’ Egyptians depended on their Pharaoh making a successful journey through the underworld to ensure that the people would also make a successful journey after their death on earth. Many Israelites also shared similar beliefs about ‘idols’ and ‘false gods.’ The One True God was about to burst their spiritual balloons with a demonstration of the power of the ‘Living God.’

Moses Confronts Pharaoh

But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be, when you go, that you shall not go empty-handed. But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians.’ Exodus 3:19-22

Before Moses ever left Midian for Egypt, God had told him what was going to happen when Moses confronted the Pharaoh. Pharaoh would not let the people of Israel go free, so God was going to stretch out His hand and strike Egypt with all His wonders. After that, Pharaoh would let Israel go.

Some people may wonder why God decided to handle the situation that way. The answer is simple. God was going to teach Israel that He was the 'Only True God.' The Egyptians believed in many 'gods' (idol worship – polytheism) and had influenced the children of Israel to also have some of those beliefs. God would destroy that notion with a series of 'wonders.'

Moses and Aaron approached Pharaoh and said – 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.' Pharaoh said, 'Who *is* the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go.' Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites leave and told them to get back to work. Pharaoh even made slave labor harder for Israel by taking away the straw needed to make bricks. That led the children of Israel to become upset with Moses and Aaron, so Moses presented their concerns to God. Remember that Moses also has really believe in Rule #1.

So Moses returned to the Lord and said, “Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all. Exodus 5:22-23

God’s response to Moses?

Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For with a strong hand he will let them go, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.’ And God spoke to Moses and said to him: ‘I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name Lord I was not known to them. I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers. And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. Therefore say to the children of Israel: ‘I am the Lord; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their

bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am the Lord.’ So Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel; but they did not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage. Exodus 6:1-9

The children of Israel still didn't believe in the ultimate power of the One True God, so what's next? Here's how God explained His eternal plan to Moses –

So the Lord said to Moses: ‘See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you. And Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh to send the children of Israel out of his land. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not heed you,

so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them.’ Exodus 7:1-5

God was going to make Moses appear to Pharaoh as a ‘god.’ Pharaoh, who believed himself to be a ‘god,’ would relate to that. God was going to make Pharaoh’s heart ‘hard’ so that He could ‘multiply’ His ‘signs and wonders’ in the land of Egypt. God was going to judge Egypt, even as He had told Abraham many years earlier –

Then He said to Abram: ‘Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Genesis 15:13-14

That day of divine judgment had finally arrived. Here was God's process (using NKJV headings for explainers in Exodus chapters 7 – 12). Moses and Aaron asked Pharaoh to free the Israelites, but Pharaoh's heart became harder and more resistant with each of God 'signs and wonders' –

- **Aaron's Miraculous Rod** – Aaron threw down his rod and it became a snake. Pharaoh's magicians threw down their rods and they also became snakes. However, Aaron's rod swallowed up the rods of the Egyptian magicians.
- **The First Plague: Waters Become Blood** – Moses told Aaron to take his rod and stretch out his hand over the water of Egypt, including their streams, rivers, ponds, and pools. All of the water became 'blood throughout all the land of Egypt.' The fish died, the river stank, 'and the Egyptians could not drink the water of the river.' God's judgment on the water lasted seven days.
- **The Second Plague: Frogs** – Moses told Aaron to take his rod and stretch out his hand over the streams, rivers, and ponds, and 'cause frogs to come up on the land of

Egypt.’ The frogs were so many in number that they went into people’s houses, into their bedrooms, on their beds, into the houses of their servants, into their ovens, and into their kneading bowls. Pharaoh appeared to relent a bit by saying that he would let Israel go free ‘tomorrow’ if Moses would ‘take away the frogs from me and from my people.’ Moses prayed and God caused the frogs to die out of the houses, out of the courtyards, and out of the fields. However, when Pharaoh saw that he had received relief from the frogs, ‘he hardened his heart’ and would not give Israel its freedom.

- **The Third Plague: Lice** – Moses told Aaron to take his rod, stretch out his hand, and ‘strike the dust of the land, so that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt.’ All of the dust became lice that covered people and beasts. The Egyptian magicians told Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God.’ The magicians were beginning to believe in the power of Israel’s God. ‘But Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the Lord had said.’

- **The Fourth Plague: Flies** – Moses told Pharaoh that if he didn't let the Israelites go free, he would send swarms of flies on him and his servants, on his people and into their houses. Moses also said that these flies would not bother the Israelites living in the land of Goshen, in order that Pharaoh would know that the True God was in the 'midst of the land.' Just as Moses said, thick swarms of flies came into Pharaoh's house, into his servants houses, and into all the land of Egypt. Pharaoh relented again and told Moses and Aaron to take the people of Israel and 'sacrifice to your God in the land.' Moses prayed and God removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, his servants, and from the people of Egypt. What did Pharaoh do in return? Did he keep his word? Of course not – 'But Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also; neither would he let the people go.'
- **The Fifth Plague: Livestock Diseased** – Moses told Pharaoh that if he didn't let Israel go, 'that they may serve Me,' the hand of the Lord would bring a 'very severe pestilence' on the Egyptians cattle, horses, donkeys, camels, oxen, and sheep. At the same time,

God would not let anything bad happen to animals belonging to the children of Israel. God did just that the next day, ‘But the heart of Pharaoh became hard, and he did not let the people go.’

- **The Sixth Plague: Boils** – God told Moses and Aaron, ‘Take for yourselves handfuls of ashes from a furnace, and let Moses scatter it toward the heavens in the sight of Pharaoh. And it will become fine dust in all the land of Egypt, and it will cause boils that break out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt.’ Moses and Aaron did what God commanded and boils broke out in sores on people and beasts. The boils were also on Pharaoh’s magicians and on all the people of Egypt. ‘But the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh; and he did not heed them, just as the Lord had spoken to Moses.’
- **The Seventh Plague: Hail** – ‘Then the Lord said to Moses, “Rise early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh, and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord God of the Hebrews: ‘Let My people go, that they may serve Me, for at this time I will send all My plagues to your very heart, and on your servants and on your people, that you may

know that *there is* none like Me in all the earth. Now if I had stretched out My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, then you would have been cut off from the earth. But indeed for this *purpose* I have raised you up, that I may show My power *in* you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth. As yet you exalt yourself against My people in that you will not let them go. Behold, tomorrow about this time I will cause very heavy hail to rain down, such as has not been in Egypt since its founding until now. Therefore send now *and* gather your livestock and all that you have in the field, for the hail shall come down on every man and every animal which is found in the field and is not brought home; and they shall die.’ God did what He said He would do. Hail struck throughout the whole land of Egypt, but there was no hail in Goshen where the children of Israel lived. Pharaoh told Moses and Aaron that he had ‘sinned,’ the Lord was ‘righteous,’ and his people were ‘wicked.’ Pharaoh asked Moses to call on God to stop the hail. What happened when God stopped the hail? ‘And when Pharaoh saw that the rain, the hail, and the thunder

had ceased, he sinned yet more; and he hardened his heart, he and his servants. So the heart of Pharaoh was hard; neither would he let the children of Israel go, as the Lord had spoken by Moses.’ Notice God’s purpose for hardening Pharaoh’s heart – ‘that you may know that *there is* none like Me in all the earth ... that I may show My power *in* you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.’

- **The Eighth Plague: Locusts** – ‘Now the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son’s son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I *am* the Lord.’ Notice God’s reasons for what He was doing in Egypt. He wanted Israel to know that He was the Only True God and He wanted their children and children’s to know it. Moses told Pharaoh that if he didn’t let Israel leave Egypt God could bring locusts into the land of Egypt. They would eat anything left from the devastating hail storms.

The locusts would also eat every tree ‘which grows up for you out of the field.’ They would also ‘fill your houses, the houses of all your servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians.’ Pharaoh’s servants were so distraught by what God was doing that they begged the king to let the Israelites go, ‘that they may serve the Lord their God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?’ Pharaoh would not agree, so God sent the plague of locusts on Egypt. However, once Pharaoh saw the tremendous devastation of the locusts on Egypt, he called for Moses and Aaron in haste and said, ‘I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you. Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and entreat the Lord your God, that He may take away from me this death only.’ Moses prayed and God sent a very strong west wind that removed all of the locusts from the land of Egypt. ‘But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go.’

- **The Ninth Plague: Darkness** – God told Moses to stretch out his hand toward heaven so that there would be ‘darkness over the land of Egypt, darkness which may

even been felt.’ Moses stretched out his hand and ‘there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days.’ People could not see each other, ‘nor did anyone rise from his place for three days.’ What about the children of Israel? They had ‘light in their dwellings’ the entire time. God hardened Pharaoh’s heart again and he would not let the children of Israel go. Then Pharaoh said this to Moses – ‘Get away from me! Take heed to yourself and see my face no more! For in the day you see my face you shall die!’ So Moses said, ‘You have spoken well. I will never see your face again.’

Chapter Twenty

Death of the Firstborn

God has one more terrible plague to bring on Pharaoh and the people of Egypt. It will be the plague that finally frees Israel from slavery. While this plague will be great, what God will do afterward will stun Egypt and Israel. It will cement in history the ultimate power of the Only True God.

And the Lord said to Moses, 'I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out of here altogether.' Exodus 11:1

The tenth plague is often called the ‘death of the firstborn.’ The firstborn child (or animal) was seen as having the purest and strongest blood because they were the first to receive the many benefits of the mother’s womb. The firstborn son had a special place in his family. He grew up to have authority over his younger brothers and sisters. He was also entitled to the ‘Birthright,’ which was a double portion of the family property at the death of the father. The firstborn son also became the spiritual leader of the family at the father’s death. He would provide for his mother until she died, and also provide for his sisters until they married.

The final part of God’s plan in Pharaoh agreeing to give the children of Israel their freedom was the death of all firstborn children in Egypt. God would protect Israel through what is known as the ‘Lord’s Passover’ (Exodus 12:1-11) You can read the details of the Passover in Exodus 12:14-28. It was vital that every Israelite family followed God’s direction in order to live through what He was going to do to Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. Exodus 12:12-13

And it came to pass at midnight that the Lord struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead. Then he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, 'Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the Lord as you have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also.' And the Egyptians urged the people, that they

might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, 'We shall all be dead' ... Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. And the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. Exodus 12:29-33, 35-36

This is exactly what God had prophesied to Moses when He first talked with him from the burning bush in Midian –

But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians. Exodus 3:22

God spoke to Moses about consecrated all the firstborn to Him – ‘whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, *both* of man and beast; it is Mine’ (Exodus 13:1-2). Moses taught the people about how to remember this special occasion of God’s deliverance (Feast of Unleavened Bread), along with the law of the firstborn (Exodus 13:3-16).

After Pharaoh freed Israel from slavery, God led them around by way of the wilderness of Red Sea rather than by way of the land of the Philistines, which was closer. Why? ‘God said, ‘Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt’ (Exodus 13:17) Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, which was Joseph’s stated desire centuries earlier – ‘God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you’ (Exodus 13:19).

Moses led the Israelites from Succoth and camped in Etham at the edge of the wilderness. God went before Israel by day in a ‘pillar of cloud, and by night in a ‘pillar of fire’ to give them light.

Death of Pharaoh's Army

Pharaoh, though a defeated demigod, is not done yet. Neither is the One True God –

Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn and camp before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal Zephon; you shall camp before it by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, 'They are bewildered by the land; the wilderness has closed them in.' Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord.' And they did so. Exodus 14:1-14

Notice that God said He would ‘harden Pharaoh’s heart’ so he would pursue the Israelites. God said that by doing that, He would ‘gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord.’ Remember, that’s what this is all about! God was going to finish proving to Egypt that He was the Only True God by destroying Pharaoh’s army.

Here’s how it played out –

And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel; and the children of Israel went out with boldness. So the Egyptians pursued them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and overtook them camping by the sea beside Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon. And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord. Then they said to Moses, ‘Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? Is this

not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness. And Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace. And the Lord said to Moses, 'Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward. But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. Then the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained honor for Myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen. Exodus 14:8-18

‘Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.’ I love that divine statement. We don’t do anything, other than be still and know that God is the One True God. How did God ‘save’ Israel from Pharaoh’s armies?

1. The Angel of God moved the pillar of cloud from in front of Israel to stand behind Israel. That meant that God stood between the children of Israel and the soldiers of Pharaoh. The cloud and darkness of the pillar faced the soldiers’ camp at night, while the other side gave light to Israel at night. That meant the soldiers could not move forward to attack Israel.
2. Moses stretched out his hand over the Red Sea and God caused the waters to divide. That allowed the children of Israel to walk across the sea on ‘dry ground.’ The divided waters were a ‘wall’ on their left and right.
3. The Egyptians were finally allowed to pursue Israel. They went after them ‘into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horseman.’ However, God ‘looked down upon the army of the Egyptians’ and

‘troubled’ them. God took off their chariot wheels, making driving them difficult.

4. The Egyptian soldiers said, ‘Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians.’ However, by the time they realized that it was too late.
5. Moses stretched out his hand over the sea while the Egyptian army was trying to turn around and go back to their side of the land. The Red Sea returned to its full depth, drowning Pharaoh’s army. ‘Not as much as one of them remained.’
6. The children of Israel arrived on the other side of the Sea before the waters returned, so none of the Israelites were lost.

So the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the Lord had done in Egypt; so the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and His servant Moses.
Exodus 14:30-31

Chapter Twenty-One

One of the ways that Bible study has come to ‘life’ for me through the years is to imagine myself living in the shoes and sandals of the people in the Bible. I think about what events would look like, sound like, feel like, smell like, etc.

Rightly dividing the Word (correctly handling the text within context) comes first, but I also like to think about the audience as I read. That’s what I’ve done throughout this series. What was it like to live during the events we’ve studied together?

Devotion and Celebration

God heard the ‘cries’ of His people who were suffering in Egypt and chose Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt with great ‘signs and wonders.’ Imagine standing on the other side of the Red Sea and watch as the water returned to its place, drowning all of Pharaoh’s mighty army. Egypt was a destroyed nation because of God’s ‘Mighty Power.’ God demonstrated His ultimate Authority over every Egyptian ‘god.’ He didn’t just beat them – God destroyed them. Remember these words?

Then Pharaoh’s servants said to him, ‘How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed? Exodus 10:7

Egypt was destroyed and Israel was free. God was teaching His people that He was the Only True God. His victory led to what is known as 'The Song of Moses' –

*I will sing to the Lord, For He has triumphed gloriously!
The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!
The Lord is my strength and song, And He has become
my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him;
My father's God, and I will exalt Him. The Lord is a man
of war; The Lord is His name. Pharaoh's chariots and his
army He has cast into the sea; His chosen captains also
are drowned in the Red Sea. The depths have covered
them; They sank to the bottom like a stone. Your right
hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power; Your right
hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces. And in
the greatness of Your excellence You have overthrown
those who rose against You; You sent forth Your wrath;
It consumed them like stubble. And with the blast of Your
nostrils The waters were gathered together; The floods
stood upright like a heap; The depths congealed in the
heart of the sea. The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will
overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall be*

satisfied on them. I will draw my sword, My hand shall destroy them.’ You blew with Your wind, The sea covered them; They sank like lead in the mighty waters. Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders? You stretched out Your right hand; The earth swallowed them. You in Your mercy have led forth The people whom You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength To Your holy habitation. The people will hear and be afraid; Sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed; The mighty men of Moab, Trembling will take hold of them; All the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away. Fear and dread will fall on them; By the greatness of Your arm They will be as still as a stone, Till Your people pass over, O Lord, Till the people pass over Whom You have purchased. You will bring them in and plant them In the mountain of Your inheritance, In the place, O Lord, which You have made For Your own dwelling, The sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established. ‘The Lord shall reign forever and ever.’ For

the horses of Pharaoh went with his chariots and his horsemen into the sea, and the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them. But the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea. Exodus 15:1-19

Teaching Rule #1

Rule #1 is to 'Believe in the Only True God' (Monotheism). The Egyptians worshipped 'gods' made by hand from wood and stone. They physically had to move them, dress them, and pretend to feed them because their 'gods' were not alive. The God of Israel, on the other hand, was very much Alive. He is Self-Existent (I AM WHO I AM.). He is All-Powerful and Everywhere-Present. He is All-Knowing and Unchanging. He is the One True God among the many 'false' gods that people worshipped.

Notice how the 'Song of Moses' emphasized that point –

- The Lord *is* my strength and song, And He has become my salvation
- He *is* my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will exalt Him
- Your right hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces

- And in the greatness of Your excellence You have overthrown those who rose against You
- You sent forth Your wrath; It consumed them like stubble. And with the blast of Your nostrils The waters were gathered together
- Who *is* like You, O Lord, among the gods?
- Who *is* like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?
- The Lord shall reign forever and ever

The God of Israel was unlike any of the ‘gods’ of Egypt or any other nation. All nations would one day learn that lesson, but the first step to ‘reigning’ with God was for the children of Israel to believe their God was the Only True God.

Did they learn that lesson that day? That day that God destroyed the ‘gods’ and armies of Egypt?

Chapter Twenty-Two

Imagine. You've just witnessed the Supreme Power of Almighty God judge Egypt with mighty 'signs and wonders.' You watched as God drowned the entire Egyptian army in the Red Sea. You follow close behind the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who appears as a great 'pillar of cloud' by day and a 'pillar of fire' by night.

Now, imagine that six weeks after being freed from slavery in a foreign land that you, your family, and friends begin to complain against the two men God used to free you. Complain about what?

And they journeyed from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt. Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the children of Israel said to them, 'Oh,

that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.
Exodus 16:1-3

Seriously? That's their concern? Did they learn nothing from what God did for them? How would God respond to their complaining?

God Supplies

The human 'sin nature' is powerful. Remember what God said about people immediately following the Flood that covered the earth?

... although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.' Genesis 8:21

God was right. Even after proving that He is the Only True God by defeating every Egyptian 'god,' judging the nation of Egypt, and freeing the children of Israel from cruel slavery, how did they repay God? They complained about the food.

It was obvious that Israel had a lot to learn before they could 'reign' with Him. Remember the Rules for 'Basic Spiritual Training?'

1. Believe in the Only True God (Monotheism)
2. Fear God and Obey Him
3. Worship God and Serve Him

4. Listen to God and Trust Him
5. Love God and Devote Your Life to Him

How would God teach people whose imagination of their hearts were 'evil' from their youth?

Fortunately for all of us, God is loving, compassionate, and understanding. He knew the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10), so God was prepared to continue training His people. His response was supply them with 'bread from heaven.'

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily. Exodus 16:4-5

Did you see what God was doing? He was ‘testing them, whether they will walk’ in His Law or not. Testing is part of many types of training. If you want to join the military, be prepared to be tested. If you want to attend college, be prepared to be tested. If you want to become a Black Belt in martial arts, be prepared to be tested. The Hebrew word translated ‘test’ in Exodus 16:4 is *nasah* (נָסָה) and means ‘to examine, prove, try, put to the test). Part of Israel’s training to reign would include a series of ‘tests.’

As Moses and Aaron were telling the people how God would respond to their complaints, ‘behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in a cloud’ (Exodus 16:10). God told Moses to tell the people, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. And you shall know that I *am* the Lord your God.’ Notice that God is still working with the people to believe that He is the Only True God even as He testing them for obedience to His Word.

God supplied the people's nutritional needs morning and evening –

So it was that quail came up at evening and covered the camp, and in the morning the dew lay all around the camp. And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground. So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, 'This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat. This is the thing which the Lord has commanded: 'Let every man gather it according to each one's need, one omer for each person, according to the number of persons; let every man take for those who are in his tent.' Exodus 16:13-16

There is more to the story, so feel free to read the rest of Exodus 16 on your own. Also, take a look at the first seven verses of Exodus 17. That details how God responded to the people's complaints about drinking water. As you read through the 'wilderness' story of the people of Israel, you'll find that they often 'complained' about one thing or another. How God responded to their many complaints gives us insight into both His Character and how He trained Israel to reign.

Chapter Twenty-Three

When God created humans in His image, in His likeness, He said –

Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

Genesis 1:28

As we saw in previous parts of this series, God wanted humans to ‘fill’ the earth, ‘subdue’ the earth, and ‘have dominion’ over every living thing that moves on the earth. The Hebrew word for ‘subdue’ is *kabash* (כַּבַּשׁ) and means ‘to bring into subjection,’ with force if necessary. The Hebrew word for ‘have dominion’ is *radah* (רָדָה) and means ‘reign, rule, dominate.’

How will God train the children of Israel to do that?

God's Armies

Before I move forward, let me share something from several studies ago. It comes from Exodus 6:26 –

These are the same Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said, 'Bring out the children of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their armies.'

The context was God renewing His promise to Israel after Moses and Aaron's first meeting with Pharaoh. What stuck out to me was that God referred to His people as 'children' and 'armies.' The Hebrew word for 'armies' in that verse is *tsaba* (צָבָא) and means 'warfare, war, army.' God used the two descriptors for Israel again in Exodus 7:4 and Numbers 33:1 –

But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments.

These are the journeys of the children of Israel, who went out of the land of Egypt by their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron.

God used the term ‘armies’ to describe the ‘children’ of Israel many times after He freed them from slavery in Egypt. It’s obvious from God’s use of the words that He saw Israel as warriors.

We find their first taste of battle training in the wilderness in Exodus 17 –

Now Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said to Joshua, ‘Choose us some men and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand.’ So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses’ hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it.

And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.' And Moses built an altar and called its name, The-Lord-Is-My-Banner; for he said, 'Because the Lord has sworn: the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation. Exodus 17:8-16

The army of Amalek attacked Israel 'in Rephidim' in what appears to be an 'unprovoked' attack. Why? The people of Amalek were descendants of Isaac's son Esau. The people of Israel were descendants of Isaac's son Jacob. They probably knew the story of how Jacob 'stole' the lineage blessing and birthright from Esau, which probably fueled their hatred for the descendants of Jacob. Even though Israel did not start the fight with Amalek, they ended it. God said that he would 'utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.'

Another interesting aspect to this story is that the Amalekites fought 'dirty.' Here's how we know that –

Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God. Therefore it shall be, when the Lord your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget.
Deuteronomy 25:17-19

The Amalekites are mentioned almost 50 times in the Old Testament as enemies of Israel. The last we read of them is when they suffered devastating defeats at the hands of Judge Samuel and Israel's kings Saul and David (e.g. 1 Samuel chapters 15, 27, and 30; 2 Samuel 1; 1 Chronicles 4).

There are no extrabiblical references to them, and the nature of the physical remains of their existence is hotly debated. Archaeology Study Bible, p 113

A Few More Thoughts

A few other things I'd like to mention about Israel's defeat of the army of Amalek. We meet 'Joshua' for the first time in Exodus 17 – 'And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose us some men and go out, fight with Amalek.' It's as if Joshua came out of nowhere to hold the position of a fighter and leader of Israel's army. We learn later that Joshua was from the Tribe of Ephraim and would eventually become successor to Moses, and physically lead Israel into the 'promised land.' More about Joshua in future studies.

Another person we meet for the first time is 'Hur' – 'So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.' According to Exodus 31:2, Hur was from the Tribe of Judah. He also seemed to come out of nowhere to be one of two men who would help Moses hold up his arms during battle. We'll learn more about Hur in future studies.

The third thing I'd like to point out was the importance of 'the rod of God' that Moses held in his hand. Israel 'prevailed' in battle as long as Moses held up the rod of God. However, when Moses tired and lowered the rod of God, Amalek prevailed. That's a clear demonstration that the 'battle' truly does belong to the Lord. God was teaching Israel that He would win their battles for them, and that without Him Israel would lose. With the help of Aaron and Hur supporting Moses' hands, Moses was able to keep the rod up and steady 'until the going down of the sun. So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.'

One last thing. I'm almost as old now as Moses was during the battle against the Amalekites. I've always marveled at his physical stamina, but now that I'm inching toward 80 I am even 'more' impressed. However, even Moses needed some help to hold up the 'rod of God' during the battle. Speaking as an older man, I appreciate the younger Christians who are stepping up to hold up the hands of some of their older brethren who've been in the fight for decades. We're getting tired, but our God is great and will keep us fighting the good

fight until He's ready for us to 'come home.' My thanks to all Christians who are 'in the fight.'

Chapter Twenty-Four

Information in the ancient world did not travel as fast as modern communications, but travel it did. It might have taken weeks or even months, but caravans, couriers, and other types of travelers carried information by foot, donkey, and camel from city to city, nation to nation.

It didn't take long for word about God's defeat of Egypt and Amalek to find its way to the people and leaders of many city dwellers and nomadic tribes. They heard of Egypt's devastation, freedom of the slave nation of Israel, and the defeat of Amalekites by the 'armies' of Israel. How could a nation of slaves do all of that? People heard that it was because of the power of the 'God of Israel.'

All of these ancient people knew about the ‘gods.’ They made images to their ‘gods’ from wood, stone, and precious metals (e.g. gold, silver). They believed their ‘gods’ were greater than other nations’ ‘gods,’ and would often go to war to demonstrate the power of their ‘gods.’ So, you can imagine the fear they felt when they heard that the ‘God of Israel’ had defeated all of the ‘god’s of Egypt and Amalek. What would God do to their ‘gods?’

Jethro Visits

And Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people—that the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt. Exodus 18:1

Remember Jethro? He was Moses' father-in-law and lived many miles to the east of Egypt and the wilderness area where the Israelites were camped. He heard about all that the One True God had done for Moses and Israel. Moses had left his Midian family many months earlier to obey God's call to confront Pharaoh about freeing Israel from slavery. He had asked Jethro to allow him to go to Egypt. Jethro told Moses to 'Go in peace.' Moses traveled with his wife and sons for a short distance, but then sent them back to stay with Jethro (Exodus 4).

What we see in Exodus 18 is Jethro traveling to visit Moses in the wilderness where he was encamped 'at the mountain of God.' Jethro brought Moses' wife, Zipporah, and his sons, Gershom and Eliezer, with him. They reunited and went into Moses' tent to catch up on all that had occurred since Moses left Midian.

And Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had come upon them on the way, and how the Lord had delivered them. Then Jethro rejoiced for all the good which the Lord had done for Israel, whom He had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians. And Jethro said, 'Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh, and who has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which they behaved proudly, He was above them.' Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and other sacrifices to offer to God. And

Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God. Exodus 18:8-12

Jethro was a 'priest of Midian,' which meant he was a spiritual leader of the Midianites. He was most likely a worshipper of 'other gods.' [Some researchers think Jethro may have become a monotheist because of Moses.] That's why his statement about the God of Israel is so important to notice – 'Now I know that the Lord *is* greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which they behaved proudly, *He was* above them.' God's defeat of the 'gods' of Egypt was proof to Jethro that 'the Lord' was 'greater than all the gods.'

Even though Jethro was kind to Moses and the Israelites, that would not always be the case for the Midianites. The leaders of Midian came to fear Israel (Numbers 22) and schemed with the Moabites against God's people. That eventually led to some Israelites worshipping false 'gods' (Number 25). God would not allow that, so He told Moses to 'Harass the Midianites, and attack them; for they harassed you with their schemes' (Numbers 25:16-18). God later told Moses to 'Take vengeance on the Midianites for the children of Israel'

(Numbers 31:1). Moses sent an army of thousands of men (1,000 from each tribe) to fight the Midianites. The Israelites won.

The pagan nation of Midian would continue to be a hindrance to Israel for many years. You can read more about their paganism and hatred for Israel in Judges chapters six, seven, eight, and nine.

Jethro Advises

Back to our current story from Exodus 18. Jethro had the opportunity to see Moses in action the next day. He saw that ‘Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening.’ Jethro did not think that was a good use of Moses’ time or method of judging the people of Israel. He realized that Moses would wear himself out judging the people from morning until evening. So, Jethro gave his son-in-law some good advice –

Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Then

it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace.’ So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people: rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. So they judged the people at all times; the hard cases they brought to Moses, but they judged every small case themselves. Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went his way to his own land. Exodus 18:19-27

Notice that Jethro's advice included the phrase, 'If you do this thing, and God so commands you.' Any advice we receive from men must always be compared to God's commands. He is our final Authority. Moses believed Jethro's advice was good, so he implemented the new 'system of justice.' The 'rulers' of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, judged the every-day types of cases that people would bring before them – the 'small' ones. That allowed Moses to deal with the 'hard cases.'

After giving his advice, Jethro returned to Midian. As for Moses' wife and sons, we know little about what happened to his wife. However, we do read about his sons later in 1 Chronicles 23. They 'were reckoned to the tribe of Levi.' That makes sense since Moses was from the 'tribe of Levi.' His sons would therefore be descendants of Levi through Moses.

Chapter Twenty-Five

And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel. Exodus 19:3-6

The children of Israel are now ready for the next step in their training to reign with God. If they obey His voice and keep His covenant, they will be to God ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’

Obeying God

Obeying God is the second of five ‘absolutes’ we are using to share how God ‘Trains to Reign.’ The first absolute is to believe in One True God (Monotheism). The second absolute is to Fear God and Obey Him. God had proven Himself worthy of believing to be the One True God. Now it was time for Israel to fear Him and obey Him. How would God do it?

God prepared the people of Israel to meet Him in a far more ‘personal’ way. God had spoken to Moses, who had spoken to the people. The time had come for God to move His Presence closer to His people. He would ‘descend’ on Mount Sinai in view of the people. Preparation included the following –

- Moses was to consecrate the people
- The people were to wash their clothes
- The men were not to ‘come near’ their wives (sexually) during the three days of preparation

- God would 'come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight all the people'
- Moses was to set bounds for the people and their animals so no one would touch the mountain and die
- When the people heard 'the trumpet sounds long,' they would come near the mountain

Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice. Then the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on

the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. Exodus 19:16-20

Imagine being an Israelite on that great day. The God of Creation came down upon Mount Sinai in your view. The whole mountain quaked and smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace. You are standing at the foot of the mountain, taking in the greatness of your God. Why was God doing this?

Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, ‘You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.’ And Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.’ So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God *was*. Exodus 20:18-21

The answer is simple: God was training His people to reign with Him on earth – ‘for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.’ The people were afraid, but Moses drew back to the thick darkness where God was.

God made two primary points in His first speech to the children of Israel –

1. God alone is the One True God – ‘You shall have no other gods before Me.’
2. The people were to treat each other with honor and respect – ‘Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.’

This reminds me of how Jesus answered the scribe's question about, 'Which is the first commandment of all?'

Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these. Mark 12:29-31

Ten Commandments?

Your Bible may have a heading for Exodus 20 that reads ‘The Ten Commandments.’ I remember going to the theatre with my father when I was a young child to watch a new movie with Charlton Heston titled ‘The Ten Commandments.’ The 1956 classic played a role in leading many people to think of God’s commands to Israel as numbering ‘Ten.’ While I agree that the *Ten Commandments* certainly encapsulates the ‘spirit’ of God’s Law, there are far more than ‘Ten Commandments’ in the Mosaic Law. The real number is in the ‘hundreds.’

The next several chapters of Exodus and Leviticus include many of those Laws. Here’s a quick look at some of the legal categories where you’ll find the specifics of the Laws (using the headings from the New King James Version). Keep in mind that this is just a list of some of the ‘categories’ of God’s Law. The specific Laws in each category make the number of ‘Commandments’ much higher in number –

- The Law of the Altar
- The Law Concerning Servants
- The Law Concerning Violence
- Animal Control Laws
- Responsibility for Property (Property Laws)
- Moral and Ceremonial Principles
- Justice for All
- The Law of Sabbaths
- Three Annual Feasts
- Offerings for the Sanctuary
- The Ark of the Testimony
- The Table for the Showbread
- The Gold Lampstand
- The Tabernacle
- The Altar of Burnt Offering
- The Court of the Tabernacle
- The Care of the Lampstand

- Garments for the Priesthood
- The Ephod
- The Breastplate
- Other Priestly Garments
- Aaron and His Sons Consecrated
- The Daily Offerings
- The Altar of Incense
- The Ransom Money
- The Bronze Laver
- The Holy Anointing Oil
- The Incense
- The Burnt Offering
- The Grain Offering
- The Peace Offering
- The Sin Offering
- The Trespass Offering
- Offerings with Restitution

- Foods Permitted and Forbidden
- The Ritual After Childbirth
- The Law Concerning Leprosy
- The Law Concerning Leprous Garments
- The Law Concerning Leprous Houses
- The Law Concerning Bodily Discharges
- Laws of Sexual Morality
- Moral and Ceremonial Laws
- Penalties for Breaking the Law

I'll stop there because of how long this article is becoming. Imagine again that you are an Israelite and you hear Moses describe God's Laws in lengthy detail. How are you supposed to even remember them all – less obey them all? Imagine what the Israelites thought when they heard Jesus Christ say this centuries later –

Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:17-20

Jesus Christ is the only Israelite who actually kept every Law of God. Keeping hundreds of Laws was a seemingly physical impossibility, yet Jesus kept them all. How? He was God in Flesh. Only God could keep His own Laws.

So, what was the purpose of the Law if no one but God could keep them? The answer is right in front of us –

What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one ... Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. Galatians 3:19-20, 24-25

God used His Law to train Israel to understand that their ability to ‘subdue’ the earth and ‘reign’ with Him was not in their power, but in His promise of ‘the Seed’ to whom ‘the promise was made.

Chapter Twenty-Six

And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel. Genesis 3:15

Remember God's promise to one day destroy the seed of the serpent through the 'Seed' of the woman? We know who the Seed is because of 1 John 3:8 (among many other New Testament Scriptures) –

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

We know that the 'Seed' would come from Eve, but which of her children would carry the 'Seed' forward? We've seen that it was through her son Seth, his son Enosh, and their lineage to Noah. Noah's son Shem would carry forward the promised 'Seed' through his descendants to Abram. Abram would carry forward the promised 'Seed' through Isaac (the son of promise) and his son Jacob. We next learned from Jacob's

prophecies concerning his twelve sons that the Seed would carry forward through Judah –

Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people. Binding his donkey to the vine, And his donkey's colt to the choice vine, He washed his garments in wine, And his clothes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, And his teeth whiter than milk. Genesis 49:8-12

Jesus Christ is the 'Lion of the Tribe of Judah' (Revelation 5:5), which is proof that the Jacob's prophecy was accurate – 'The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him *shall be* the obedience of the people.'

However, given all that we've seen happen so far in God leading the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage and giving them His Law at Mount Sinai, have you seen any of the descendants of Judah mentioned by name? We know they must have made it because King David was from the Tribe of Judah, and of course Jesus Christ is the 'Lion of the Tribe of Judah,' but where do we find the lineage of Judah pushing the 'Seed' forward in the wilderness?

Judah in the Wilderness

The family of Judah is not mentioned by name until Exodus 31. That's when God commanded Moses concerning the artisans who would build the tabernacle –

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 'See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship. Exodus 31:1-5

You might notice that Bezalel, the artisan, was the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. Remember Hur? He was one of the two men who held Moses' hand up as he held the 'rod of God' during the war with Amalek (Exodus 17). The tribe of Judah continued to be invaluable to Israel's success as it carried the 'Seed' of the woman who would destroy the 'seed' of the serpent.

God called Bezalel and filled him with 'the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all *manner of* workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all *manner of* workmanship.' Bezalel from the Tribe of Judah was involved in all aspects of building the Tabernacle, including teaching others how to do the necessary work –

And He has put in his heart the ability to teach, in him and Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. He has filled them with skill to do all manner of work of the engraver and the designer and the tapestry maker, in blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine linen, and of the weaver—those who do every work and those who design artistic works. Exodus 35:34-35

The Tabernacle was a ‘portable’ Temple or worship center for God (*mishkan*, מִשְׁכָּן – ‘to dwell, dwelling place’) was a complex structure, as you can read in Exodus 36. The entire structure was surrounded by a ‘fence’ and had only one ‘entrance.’ The people of Israel would regularly bring their offerings to the priests in what was called the ‘Courtyard’ or ‘Outer Court.’ The Courtyard had a bronze altar where the priests would perform the sacrifices and wash their hands. That’s as far as the people (non-priests) could go. The priests would then enter into the ‘Tent’ that contained two rooms, separated by a large veil. The first room, known as the ‘Holy Place,’ contained an altar of incense where the priests were to burn a special incense to God each morning and evening as a reminder of God’s Presence there, a golden lampstand that

was to be kept burning continually, and a table of showbread ('shewbread' – 'bread of the presence'). The priests baked fresh bread every week and they were the only ones who could eat it. The second room was known as the 'Holy of Holies' or 'Most Holy Place.' It contained the 'Ark of the Covenant' with its 'Mercy Seat,' which was where God 'dwelled' with His people. Only the High Priest was allowed to enter the 'Holy of Holies' once a year on the 'Day of Atonement' to sprinkle blood on the 'Ark of the Covenant' to atone for the sins of the people, including his own.

Jesus Christ told His followers that He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life, which corresponds to His being the Entrance to God's Presence, the Offering for Sin, the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, and God Himself. The portable Tabernacle and Solomon's permanent Temple pointed to the coming of Jesus Christ, God in Flesh, who would dwell with His people.

You can read how Bezalel of the Tribe of Judah made and oversaw the making of the following –

- the Ark of the Covenant
- the Table for the Showbread
- the Golden Lampstand
- the Altar of Incense
- the Holy Anointing Oil and the Pure Incense of Sweet Spices, ‘according to the work of the perfumer’
- the Altar of Burnt Offering
- the Bronze Laver
- the Court of the Tabernacle (Exodus 37 and 38).

Again, complicated and intricate, but empowered by the filling of the Holy Spirit .. led by a member of the Tribe of Judah and the Tribe of Dan. The work they did was of such quality that we find it still in use centuries later –

Now the bronze altar that Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made, he put before the tabernacle of the Lord; Solomon and the assembly sought Him there. And Solomon went up there to the bronze altar before the Lord, which was at the tabernacle of meeting, and offered a thousand burnt offerings on it. 2 Chronicles 1:5-6

Judah in the Census

Now the Lord spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: 'Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, from twenty years old and above —all who are able to go to war in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies. And with you there shall be a man from every tribe, each one the head of his father's house. Numbers 1:1-4

We also find the family of Judah mentioned in the census that Moses took on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of Egypt. The name of the man who would represent the Tribe of Judah and stand with Moses was 'Nahshon the son of Amminadab' –

From the children of Judah, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who were able to go to war: those who were numbered of the tribe of Judah were seventy-four thousand six hundred.

Numbers 1:26-27

You can find Nahshon listed in the lineage of Jesus Christ in Matthew 1 and Luke 3.

That census demonstrated the strength of each tribe by the number of its people. Judah had the most people at the time and would grow in population through the years. You will find the Tribe of Judah mentioned many times in Numbers, which is part of the Torah. It is an official record that is recognized by God and Israel. You will also find the Tribe of Judah mentioned as being active during the leadership of Joshua, and in the Book of Judges. We also see Judah's family mentioned in the Book of Ruth, and the writings of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. You can follow the 'Seed' to the family of Jesse, the father of David who would become the king of Israel (Jesse and David are also included in the lineage of

Jesus in Matthew 1 and Luke 3). You can follow the 'Seed' through Solomon and all the kings of Judah until the children of Israel were taken into Babylonian captivity. You can follow the Seed after that time as well, but we'll save that for a future part of our study.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

God's training of Israel to 'reign' with Him was not a straight line. It had a lot of 'bumps' along the way; many 'ups and downs,' 'twists and turns.' One of the biggest problems Israel had during their training experience was 'Training Principle #1'

—

- God is the One True God (Monotheism)

Remember the first of the Ten Commandments God gave to Moses?

And God spoke all these words, saying: 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 'You shall have no other gods before Me. Exodus 20:1-3

That seems pretty clear, but read on –

You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.
Exodus 20:4-5

That also seems clear. God is the One True God. The other ‘gods’ that Israel had experienced in Egypt and would in the future as they entered Canaan were ‘carved’ (made by hand). Keep in mind that God gave Israel these commandments just a couple of months after He destroyed all of the Egyptian ‘gods’ and led them miraculously from slavery to freedom.

Israel and Idols

The people of Israel were afraid of God, so they ‘stood afar off’ while Moses ‘drew near the thick darkness where God was’ (Exodus 20:21). That’s where God gave Moses the ‘Ten Commandments,’ many other commandments, and instructions about how the children of Israel would serve and worship Him. What do you think the ‘children of Israel’ did while Moses was receiving the commandments from God?

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, ‘Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ And Aaron said to them, ‘Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.’ So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand, and he

fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' Exodus 32:1-4

What were they thinking? They fashioned an idol of gold and said, 'This is your God, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!?' Crazy, right? But notice who led the people in making the 'carved idol?' Aaron! Moses' brother! The man God would choose to become Israel's High Priest! (Exodus 28:1) I find it remarkable that Aaron would do such a thing, but he did. The people went to Aaron to ask him to 'make us gods that shall go before us.' Aaron told them to gather gold earrings and bring it to them. Aaron took the gold 'from their hand and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf.' The people of Israel were thrilled with what Aaron did for them –

So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord.' Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and

the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

Exodus 32:5-6

Did see that? After building the 'gold calf' idol (false god), Aaron proclaimed that the next day would be a feast day 'to the Lord' where the people would offer burnt offerings and peace offerings. What was wrong with Aaron? Was he afraid of the people? Did he agree with them that something had gone wrong with Moses' meeting with God? Was Aaron a 'closest' worshipper of false gods? Remember that Aaron would have had a lot of experience with false gods in Egypt. The fact that he so was able to so quickly make the 'gold calf' may be because he was experienced at making false gods in Egypt. I'm not saying he did, just asking questions at this point.

God Reacts

The One True God 'knows' everything (Omniscience), so how did he react to what He knew Israel was doing?

And the Lord said to Moses, 'Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' And the Lord said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation. Exodus 32:7-10

Moses ‘pleaded with the Lord his God’ not to kill the people –

Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’ So the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people. Exodus 32:12-14

God often expressed Himself in the Old Testament in ways that are similar to ‘human’ responses – like expressing anger verbally and threatening to kill His people. That’s part of ‘training to reign.’ How we respond to a higher-ranking officer (God in this case) demonstrates our character, in addition to how well we’ve been trained. I think that may have been the case here.

Moses Reacts

Just because Moses pleaded with God not to kill the children of Israel didn't mean that what the people had done didn't bother him. He was trying to save the nation from divine destruction, but Moses was ready to take action against those responsible –

So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing. So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. Then he took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder; and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it. And Moses said to Aaron, 'What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?' So Aaron said, 'Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. For they said to me, 'Make us gods that shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do

not know what has become of him.’ And I said to them, ‘Whoever has any gold, let them break it off.’ So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out.’ Now when Moses saw that the people were unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to their shame among their enemies), then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, ‘Whoever is on the Lord’s side—come to me! And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. And he said to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.’ So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day. Then Moses said, ‘Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother. Exodus 32:19-29

This is just my personal take based on many years of managing people. I think Aaron threw the children of Israel ‘under the bus’ to take the heat off himself – ‘Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they *are set* on evil.’ He may have been afraid of what Moses would do to him, not knowing what God had just told Moses on the mountain about how Aaron and his sons would be priests to God.

What Moses did next might seem ‘sharp’ or even ‘heavy-handed,’ but it was the right way for him to deal with the problem. Having served in the military during a time of war, I understand what’s at stake when training fighters. God said He was ready to kill everyone, but Moses asked God to let him handle the situation. The way Moses dealt with it was more ‘targeted.’ Yes, three-thousand people died, but the nation was saved.

Moses told the people that they had committed a ‘great sin.’ He said he would ‘go up to the Lord’ to see if he could ‘make atonement’ for their sin. Here’s how God responded to Moses

—

And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. Now therefore, go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin.’ So the Lord plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made. Exodus 32:33-35

I suggest you read Exodus chapters 33 – 40 to see what God did next, how He renewed His ‘covenant’ with Israel, and how the people responded to their ‘training’ to that point.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Leviticus is one of the more difficult Books of the Pentateuch for many people because of all the ‘legal’ language in it. However, there are some important lessons for anyone who wants to ‘train to reign’ with God.

Many people, Christians and non-Christians, have told me that Leviticus is the hardest Book in the Bible for them to understand, with the Book of Numbers being #2 on that list. Leviticus is an important part of the Pentateuch for several reasons – one being that it is a primary ‘training manual’ for Israel. Christians and non-Christians can also learn much from it as well.

Training in Leviticus

When God first spoke with Moses from the burning bush, He said that Moses would lead the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt into a ‘good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites’ (Exodus 3:8). What we read in Leviticus concerns how God ‘trained’ His people to ‘subdue’ and ‘reign’ in those enemy territories.

We see God giving the ‘Laws and Commandments’ for Israel in Exodus. The Book of Exodus ends with the Israelite artisans finishing the work of building the ‘tabernacle of the tent of meeting,’ along with all its furnishings, and the ‘garments of ministry’ that Aaron and his sons would wear in their positions as ‘priests.’ (Exodus 39 & 40)

Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of

the Lord filled the tabernacle. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys. Exodus 40:34-38

Imagine seeing the sight of the Tabernacle every morning when you walk outside your tent. God told Moses how to arrange the twelve tribes of Israel so that the Tabernacle was the center of their lives. That's a good training lesson for all of us – God's 'presence' should always be at the center of a believer's life.

What we see in Leviticus is God explaining to Moses (who would then tell the people of Israel) how each 'offering' was to be made to Him. That included the following offerings (explained in the first seven chapters) –

- Burnt Offering
- Grain Offering
- Peace Offering
- Sin Offering
- Trespass Offering
- Restitution Offerings

Chapters eight – ten deal with the ‘priestly’ ministry. Chapter 11 deals with foods that are permitted and forbidden – also known as ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ foods. That was important for the Israelites because they would be going into nations where the people had many health issues that came from bad nutrition. What God trained Israel to do with foods (including methods of preparation and cooking) would help keep them healthy as they entered into the land of the Canaanites and other ‘ites.’

It’s interesting to see how ‘modern science’ has confirmed the wisdom of ‘clean and unclean’ foods found in Leviticus, along with details of preparing and cooking foods and the importance of cleaning utensils used in that process.

Leviticus also has many chapters dedicated to various illnesses and ‘uncleanness’ that would help the Israelites remain healthy as they entered areas filled with people who had those illnesses and were physically ‘unclean.’ Again, ‘modern science’ has confirmed much of what we find in Leviticus.

Training in Numbers

The Book of Numbers (also part of the Pentateuch) is also important as a ‘training’ manual to ‘reign’ with God on earth. It begins with God speaking with Moses about taking a ‘census of all the congregation of the children of Israel.’ This took place on the first day of the second month, in the second year after God led Israel out of Egypt. You might remember from a past study that we learned from the census that the tribe of Judah had the largest population of all the tribes. The tribe of Manasseh had the smallest population of all the tribes with men of the age to ‘go to war’ –

Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers’ houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, from twenty years old and above—all who are able to go to war in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies. Numbers 1:2-3

God used the terms ‘congregation, children, families, and armies’ when referring to Israel. The census was about the names of every male from the age of twenty years old and above – ‘all who are able to go to war in Israel.’ This wording should leave no doubt in anyone’s mind about what God planned for Israel to do when they entered in the ‘promised land.’ They would go to ‘war’ with the nations that inhabited the areas that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel).

Numbers reminds me in some ways of a ‘military manual.’ Each tribe had a ‘standard’ (דָגָל – *degel*, banner) beside the tribal ‘emblem’ (אֹת – *oth*, sign). The tribes (armies) would set up camp surrounding the ‘tabernacle.’ Each tribe had a specific area they would ‘encamp’ every time they moved to a new location –

And the tabernacle of meeting shall move out with the camp of the Levites in the middle of the camps; as they camp, so they shall move out, everyone in his place, by their standards. Numbers 2:17

The movements were very much in a ‘military’ system –

Thus the children of Israel did according to all that the Lord commanded Moses; so they camped by their standards and so they broke camp, each one by his family, according to their fathers’ houses. Numbers 2:34

Numbers also includes a census of all the ‘Levites’ from a month old and above. They numbered twenty-two thousand’ (Numbers 3:39). Moses and Aaron were Levites. Aaron and his sons served as ‘priests’ in Israel. The job of the Levites in the ‘military’ movement was to oversee the ‘tabernacle of the Testimony.’ That included overseeing all of its furnishings, taking down the tabernacle, carrying the tabernacle and all its furnishings, and setting it up again when God stopped for the Israelites to make camp.

The movements of all the tribes were orderly and done with military precision. The tribes of Israel were God’s ‘armies’ on earth. He was training them to reign with Him.

One of the ways Israel trained was through the use of ‘silver trumpets’ –

When you go to war in your land against the enemy who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, and you will be remembered before the Lord your God, and you will be saved from your enemies. Also in the day of your gladness, in your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be a memorial for you before your God: I am the Lord your God. Numbers 10:9-10

Trumpets have been used for thousands of years in military actions. Each sound of the trumpet communicated a different aspect of battle, call to quarters, etc. I and thousands of other military trainees learned the importance of responding correctly and promptly to various trumpet calls. The sound of a trumpet carries a long distance, which made it so useful with a large army – whether in camp or on the battlefield.

Much of the ‘basic training’ was completed by the ‘twentieth *day* of the second month, in the second year,’ so the cloud was ‘taken up from above the tabernacle of the Testimony’ (Numbers 10:11). God was on the move with His ‘armies’ behind Him –

And the children of Israel set out from the Wilderness of Sinai on their journeys; then the cloud settled down in the Wilderness of Paran. So they started out for the first time according to the command of the Lord by the hand of Moses. Numbers 10:12-13

Chapter Twenty-Nine

After spending about a year training in the wilderness, the 'armies' of Israel are on the move. However, things didn't go as Moses had hoped. Israel made several 'fatal' errors. More training would be necessary.

Israel's Fatal Errors

Now when the people complained, it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp. Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the Lord, the fire was quenched. So he called the name of the place Taberah, because the fire of the Lord had burned among them. Numbers 11:1-3

God called the children of Israel 'stiff-necked people' (Exodus 32:9). Even after seeing the power of the Almighty God, even after receiving God's Laws, even after all of their training in the wilderness, 'the people complained.' This was just the first of several 'fatal errors' that Israel would make in the days and weeks after they left Sinai and headed for the 'promised land.'

Error #1

Their first fatal error was to complain about the food God had given them to eat. They should have trusted God to take care of them, even as He had promised, but they didn't. They reverted to their old ways of thinking –

Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: 'Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes! Numbers 11:4-6

God and Moses were angry with the people. You can read the details of their response in Numbers 11, but here's the fatal result. –

Now a wind went out from the Lord, and it brought quail from the sea and left them fluttering near the camp, about a day's journey on this side and about a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the ground. And the people stayed up all that day, all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers); and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp. But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was aroused against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very great plague. So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving. Numbers 11:31-34

After burying the dead, Israel followed God and Moses from Kibroth Hattaavah to Hazeroth, ‘and camped at Hazeroth’ (Numbers 11:35).

Error #2

The next error came from an unlikely source – Moses’ brother and sister. They ‘spoke against Moses’ because he married a woman from Ethiopia. It’s possible that Moses’ first wife (a Midianite) died and that Moses married a second wife. Based on the Law God had given directly to Moses, I seriously doubt that Moses would have committed adultery. Here’s what happened next –

Suddenly the Lord said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, ‘Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!’ So the three came out. Then the Lord came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. Numbers 12:4-5

God spoke clearly to Aaron and Miriam that Moses was His chosen prophet, unlike any other prophet –

I speak with him face to face, Even plainly, and not in dark sayings; And he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant Moses? Numbers 12:8

God's anger 'was aroused against them, and He departed.' When the cloud departed from the tabernacle, Miriam suddenly became leprous, 'as white as snow.' Aaron begged Moses to ask God to heal her. Moses cried out to the Lord and asked Him to heal his sister. God did heal Miriam, but not before she faced the shame of being a leper. Miriam was shut out of the camp for seven days, and Israel waited until her week was complete. Then, the people moved from Hazeroth and camped in the Wilderness of Paran.

Error #3

God told Moses to select a man from each of the twelve tribes of Israel ‘ to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel’ (Numbers 13:1). Moses selected men from each tribe and sent them out –

Then Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, ‘Go up this way into the South, and go up to the mountains, and see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many; whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds; whether the land is rich or poor; and whether there are forests there or not. Be of good courage. And bring some of the fruit of the land.’ Now the time was the season of the first ripe grapes. Numbers 13:17-20

The men returned to Kadesh in the Wilderness of Paran, but the message of ten of the twelve men was not encouraging. They reported that though the land flowed with milk and honey, the people who lived there were very strong and lived in large, fortified cities. The people they saw included the Amalekites, the Hittites, the Jebusites, and Amorites, the Canaanites, and the descendants of Anak. They were apparently tall, powerful people, because the ten spies said, 'we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight' (Numbers 13:33). Bottom line, ten of the spies didn't trust God to fight and win their battles.

What about the other two spies, Joshua and Caleb? Their perspective was different than the others –

Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, 'Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.' Numbers 13:30

Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes and spoke to the children of Israel –

The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, 'a land which flows with milk and honey.' Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them. Numbers 14:7-9

Notice that Joshua and Caleb viewed the people's refusal to enter the 'promised land' as 'rebellion' against God. That's another important 'training' principle to learn.

How did the people react to what Joshua and Caleb said? They said 'to stone them with stones' (Numbers 14:10). However, the 'glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel.'

Then the Lord said to Moses: 'How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they. Numbers 14:11-12

Notice that God views 'rebellion' as 'rejection.' He was read to strike down the people and disinherit them. However, Moses once again interceded for Israel –

Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now. Numbers 14:19

God did pardon the people, but said that because Israel had put Him to the test 'now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice,' He would not allow them to 'see the land of which I swore to their fathers' (Numbers 14:22). God did say that He would allow Caleb to enter the land. We also know that Joshua was also allowed to enter the land because he actually led Israel in the 'promised land.'

God told Moses to lead Israel ‘out into the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea.’ What was God’s plan? First, the ten spies who brought Israel a bad report about going into the ‘promised land’ died of a plague. Second, Israel would wander through the wilderness until all of the people who had complained against Him were dead –

But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness. According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection. I the Lord have spoken this. I will surely do so to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.’ Numbers 14:32-35

Believe it or not, the people of Israel continued to make fatal errors as they rebelled against God. More training would be necessary before Israel was ready to enter the 'promised land.' You can read the details from Numbers 17 – 36.

Chapter Thirty

As I've mentioned before, many Christians don't read the Pentateuch (Genesis – Deuteronomy). Some say it's too hard to understand. Others say it's dull and they don't see how something that happened thousands of years ago has any impact on us today.

What they forget is that Jesus and His disciples quoted from the Pentateuch – often. The history of Israel is especially important as we see how God trained His people to 'reign' with Him. When people push back on the idea of reading Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, I invite them to at least read the Book of Deuteronomy. That's the last Book of the Pentateuch. It's also the final words of Moses to Israel prior to his death.

Moses also made a major error that would keep him from entering the 'promised land.' He lost his temper with Israel and disobeyed a direct command from God because of that anger. Because of that sin against God, Moses was not allowed to enter the 'promised land' with the children of Israel. I know that may seem unfair on the surface, but an important part of 'training to reign' is obedience.

And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, 'Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?' Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them. Numbers 20:10-12

Moses disobeyed God soon after his sister Miriam died in Kadesh. Maybe he overreacted to Israel's continued rebellious spirit because of grief over his sister's death. We're not told, but for some reason Moses disobeyed what God told him to do and was punished for it.

After burying Miriam, the children of Israel journeyed from Kadesh to Mount Hor. God spoke to Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor and told them that Aaron was about to die and reminded him that he would not enter the promised land, 'because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah' (Numbers 20:24). God told Moses to take Aaron's priestly garments and put them on his son Eleazar. Moses did as he was told, placed Aaron's garments on Eleazar, then Aaron died. The congregation of Israel saw that Aaron was dead and all the people mourned for him for thirty days.

God had more for Moses to do before his death, including taking vengeance on the Midianites for the children of Israel. God told Moses that he would be gather to his people after that. You can read the details in Numbers 31. God was getting Israel ready to go to war and reclaim the land He had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob –

Now the Lord spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places; you shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell in it, for I have given you the land to possess. And you shall divide the land by lot as an inheritance among your families; to the larger you shall give a larger inheritance, and to the smaller you shall give a smaller inheritance; there everyone’s inheritance shall be whatever falls to him by lot. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers. But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the

land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell. Moreover it shall be that I will do to you as I thought to do to them.’ Numbers 33:50-56

Deuteronomy

The Book of Deuteronomy is a record of what Moses said to Israel ‘in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first *day* of the month’ (Deuteronomy 1:3). The word ‘Deuteronomy’ comes from the Greek word Δευτερονόμιον used in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible and the Latin word *Deuteronomium* used in the Vulgate. It basically means ‘a repetition of the Law,’ sometimes called the ‘Second Law’ because Moses was repeating it for the benefit of Israel.

Keep in mind that the people Moses was talking to were the children of the Israelites who left Egyptian slavery 40 years earlier. God caused those Israelite to wander through the wilderness for forty years because of their rebellion against God and refusal to enter the promised land. The two exceptions would be Joshua and Caleb because they believed that God could defeat His enemies. Moses explained what happened this way –

And the Lord heard the sound of your words, and was angry, and took an oath, saying, 'Surely not one of these men of this evil generation shall see that good land of which I swore to give to your fathers, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him and his children I am giving the land on which he walked, because he wholly followed the Lord.' The Lord was also angry with me for your sakes, saying, 'Even you shall not go in there. Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall go in there. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it. Deuteronomy 1:34-38

In addition to being a wonderful summary of Israel's escape from slavery in Egypt through their many times of disobedience and eventual punishment of wandering the wilderness, we learn much about what's important as followers of God. The well-known 'Shema' prayer is found in Deuteronomy 6. It reiterates Training Rules #1 and #5 for reigning with God –

'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Christians should certainly recognize this from how Jesus answered a question from a Jewish lawyer –

But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.' Matthew 22:34-40

Moses also reminded the children of Israel about not forgetting God once they settled into their new home –

So it shall be, when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant—when you have eaten and are full— then beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you (for the Lord your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the Lord your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth. You shall not tempt the Lord your God as you tempted Him in Massah. You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, His testimonies, and His statutes which He has commanded you. And you shall do what is right and good

in the sight of the Lord, that it may be well with you, and that you may go in and possess the good land of which the Lord swore to your fathers, to cast out all your enemies from before you, as the Lord has spoken.
Deuteronomy 6:10-19

This is the basic tenor of Deuteronomy – Moses repeating and reminding the children of Israel of their special place in God’s eternal plan. The day came when Moses handed the leadership over to Joshua. He said this on his birthday –

I am one hundred and twenty years old today. I can no longer go out and come in ... Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, ‘Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it. And the Lord, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed.’ Deuteronomy 31:2, 7-8

Moses sang a song to Israel (Deuteronomy 32), gave them his final blessing (Deuteronomy 33), then went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is across from Jericho. God showed Moses all the land of Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the South, and the Plain of the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Noah. This was the land that God swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – ‘saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’

What happened next was extraordinary in human history – God buried a man –

So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day. Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished. And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. So the days of

weeping and mourning for Moses ended. Deuteronomy 34:5-8

Finally, we have this amazing epitaph –

But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land, and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel. Deuteronomy 34:10-12

Chapter Thirty-One

The Promised Land

The time had come for Joshua to lead Israel into the ‘promised land’ to ‘subdue and have dominion.’ The children (armies) of Israel were trained to reign, but how well would they do under the intense pressures that awaited them?

And the Lord said: ‘I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come now, therefore, and I will send you to

Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt. Exodus 3:7-10

It's important for us to keep sight of God's eternal plan for His people. He told Moses from the 'burning bush' that He had 'seen the oppression' of His people in Egypt. He had 'heard their cry' because of their taskmasters. He 'knew' their sorrows. God's Plan? To 'deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey.'

God was ready to 'lead' Israel into the 'promised land' about a year after He led them out of Egypt. They had completed enough training by that time, including receiving God's Law, building the Tabernacle, etc. However, the people believed the fears of ten spies over God's promise so they had to wander in the desert for 40 years. That was one year for each day that the men 'spied out the land.' God called them an 'evil congregation who are gathered together against Me' (Numbers 14:35).

Once the 40 years were up and almost all of the people who had left Egypt had died in the wilderness, God was ready once again to lead Israel into the ‘promised land.’

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, saying: ‘Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded

you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:1-9

With that ‘Divine Mandate,’ Joshua commanded the officers of the people to prepare provisions for the journey to cross over the River Jordan, ‘to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess’ (Joshua 1:11). The response of the people was different this time –

So they answered Joshua, saying, 'All that you command us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we heeded Moses in all things, so we will heed you. Only the Lord your God be with you, as He was with Moses. Whoever rebels against your command and does not heed your words, in all that you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and of good courage. Joshua 1:16-18

Israel Takes the Promised Land

The Book of Joshua is a detailed account of how Joshua led the Israelites across the River Jordan to take the land God had promised to give them. Some of the accounts are miraculous – the work of the Almighty God. Some of the accounts are demonstrations of Israel’s training to reign with God. I invite you to read the Book of Joshua and see for yourself the power of God and how He gave victory after victory to Israel.

One of my favorite parts is when Joshua met the ‘Commander of the Lord’s army’ –

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, ‘Are You for us or for our adversaries?’ So He said, ‘No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.’ And Joshua fell on his face to the earth

and worshiped, and said to Him, ‘What does my Lord say to His servant?’ Then the Commander of the Lord’s army said to Joshua, ‘Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.’ And Joshua did so.
Joshua 5:13-15

In some ways this reminds me of when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, except that God appeared to Joshua as ‘a Man.’ The fact that the ‘Man’ accepted Joshua’s worship and told Joshua to take off his sandals because he was standing on ‘holy’ ground, demonstrates what is called a ‘Theophany’ – sometimes also called a ‘Christophany.’ Abraham experienced the same thing in Genesis 18 when, ‘the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground.’ Joshua had a similar sighting of the Lord, but this time He appeared as a ‘Warrior,’ holding His sword drawn in His hand. When the sword is out of the sheath, it’s time for ‘war.’

The Lord On Our Side

One of the ‘train-to-reign’ lessons we can take away from our study of Israel’s battle for the ‘promised land’ is that the Lord is on our side. He trains us to fight, leads the fight, and wins the fight. Just as Israel did not fight and win on its own, so we don’t fight and win on our own. I often think of the Lord Jesus as the ‘Commander of the Lord’s army’ with sword drawn for battle. He fought for us when He died on the Cross, and won for us when He walked out of the grave alive. The Crucifixion and Resurrection are our strength for battle. Trying to fight life’s battles in our own strength is a futile attempt. Christ is our strength!

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:37-39

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. 2 Corinthians 10:3-6

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Ephesians 6:10-13

Chapter Thirty-Two

Joshua (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ – Yehoshua – ‘the LORD is salvation’) followed the ‘Commander of the Lord’s armies’ (Joshua 5) into battle as Israel entered the ‘promised land.’ What Israel accomplished militarily in a short period of time is an amazing feat, but knowing that the Lord went before them to win the battles against many cities and nations helps us understand how an army of the children of slaves could do it.

Joshua's Victory

I recommend you read the entire Book of Joshua to see for yourself how the children of Israel defeated the pagan nations that had caused their parents great fear only 40 years earlier (Numbers 13). They trusted God, followed Joshua, and were victorious. Joshua chapter 12 lists all of the kings that Israel conquered under Moses and Joshua.

Joshua grew up in Egypt and had seen the power of God in liberating Israel from slavery. Joshua served Moses and God during 40 years in the wilderness. He led Israel into the promised land after the death of Moses. Joshua won many battles, but finally came to the end of his time on earth.

And the Lord said to him: 'You are old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed.' Joshua 13:1

Joshua divided up the conquered land among the tribes according to God's direction (Joshua chapters 13 – 21) and also set up special 'cities of refuge' (Joshua chapter 20).

So the Lord gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. The Lord gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass. Joshua 21:43-45

Joshua's Summary and Warning

Joshua chapters 23 and 24 are what I call 'summary/warning' chapters. Joshua addressed the tribes of Israel prior to his death. He reminded them of how God called a pagan family that included Abraham and his father Terah from 'the other side of the River.' God called Abraham to Canaan and multiplied his descendants, including Isaac and Jacob.

Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. Also I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to what I did among them. Afterward I brought you out. Joshua 24:4-5

Joshua summarized the great things God had done for Israel and warned them against turning to 'other gods.'

Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, and lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you. You shall not make mention of the name of their

gods, nor cause anyone to swear by them; you shall not serve them nor bow down to them, but you shall hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day. Joshua 23:6-8

Joshua also spoke these words, which are familiar to many Christians:

Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.’ Joshua 24:14-15

Joshua died at the age of 110. The children of Israel buried him 'within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Serah, which is in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash' (Joshua 24:30). The children of Israel buried the bones of Joseph which they had brought from Egypt. They buried him at Schechem in the plot of ground that Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor many centuries earlier (Joshua 24:32). Israel also buried Eleazar the son of Aaron.

Judges' – Summary and Warning

As we saw earlier, God told Joshua 'there remains very much land yet to be possessed.' We learn about what Israel did about that after Joshua died in the Book of Judges. Judges begins with both a summary and a warning. The children of Israel asked God who would be first to fight the Canaanites. God answered – 'Judah shall go up. Indeed I have delivered the land into his hand' (Judges 1:2). Remember that the Seed of the woman that God promised Eve in the Garden of Eden would come through the Tribe of Judah, so it's important to see that God chose Judah to be first to fight the Canaanites and promised them victory.

The leaders of the Tribe of Judah approached the leaders of the Tribe of Simeon and asked for their help in fighting the Canaanites. Judah promised Simeon that they would 'likewise go with you to your allotted territory' (Judges 1:3). Simeon agreed and both tribes were successful in their battles.

Then Judah went up, and the Lord delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand; and they killed ten thousand men at Bezek ... And Judah went with his brother Simeon, and they attacked the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. So the name of the city was called Hormah. Also Judah took Gaza with its territory, Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory.'

Judges 1:4, 17-18

Unfortunately, those are the highlights. Other tribes of Israel failed to complete the conquest of the land as God had told them. They included Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan. The tribes did place some of the Canaanite people 'under tribute to them,' but they did not finish the work God had sent them to do. How did the Lord respond to their disobedience?

Then the Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: 'I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you. And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.' So it was, when the Angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept. Judges 2:1-4

Israel's Thorns and Snares

The story of Israel's life in the 'promised land' is not a happy one. The children of Israel 'did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger' (Judges 2:11-12). The anger of God was 'hot against Israel, so He delivered them into the hands of plunderers 'who despoiled them.' God 'sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for calamity, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed' (Judges 2:14-15).

God raised up ‘judges’ who would deliver Israel out of the hands of the pagans who plundered them. However, Israel ‘played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them.’ When the people groaned and cried out to God, the Lord would raise up a judge who would deliver them. However, when the judge died the children of Israel ‘behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.’

Chapter Thirty-Three

The Book of Judges tells a sad story about Israel in the 'promised land.' Because the children of Israel did evil in God's sight by following and worshipping 'other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them,' God delivered the Israelites into the hands of 'plunders who despoiled them.' The people were greatly distressed and cried out to the Lord. God raised up 'judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them.' However, when a judge would die, the people reverted to their sin of following after other gods.

Though God's anger 'was hot against Israel,' He continued to love and test them –

Then the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel; and He said, 'Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he

died, so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the Lord, to walk in them as their fathers kept them, or not.’ Therefore the Lord left those nations, without driving them out immediately; nor did He deliver them into the hand of Joshua. Judges

2:20-23

Ruth and Hannah

Most of the judges came from tribes other than Judah, but the Seed of the woman (Jesus Christ) who would destroy the seed of the serpent (Genesis 3:15) would come through Judah (Matthew 1 & Luke 3). Two women who played an important role in God's plan to bring our Savior into the world were Ruth and Hannah.

Both women lived during the time of the Judges. I'll explain Ruth first (from the Book of Ruth). It started when a family of the tribe of Judah living in Bethlehem moved to the country of Moab because of a famine. The husband's name was Elimelech. His wife was Naomi. Unfortunately, Naomi's husband died. Her sons married two Moabite women, Oprah and Ruth, but they also died. Naomi heard that God had visited His people by giving them bread, so she decided to return to the land of Judah. Naomi told her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab and remarry. However, Ruth would not leave Naomi and made the journey back to Bethlehem.

Ruth went to work in the fields to find food. That's where she met Boaz, who was a relative of Elimelech. Boaz was 'a man of great wealth' and treated Ruth kindly because of her kindness to Naomi. A relationship developed between them and Boaz 'redeemed' her and they became husband and wife. Ruth gave birth to Obed. Obed became the father of Jesse, who was the father of David – who became King of Israel. God's eternal plan for Israel to 'reign' was working even during the sad times of the Judges. A famine sent Naomi and her family to Moab, where Ruth became a daughter-in-law. When they returned to Judah, they became ancestors of Israel's greatest king.

The second woman was named Hannah. She also lived during the time of the Judges, but we find her story in 1 Samuel. She was married to a man from the tribe of Ephraim named Elkanah. He had two wives – Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah did not. The family would go up to Shiloh every year to worship and sacrifice to the Lord. One year Eli the priest saw Hannah crying and praying, though he thought she was drunk at first because he saw her lips move but heard no sound. Hannah made a vow to God

that if He would give her a son, she would give him back to the Lord. When Eli talked with Hannah and realized she was praying, he said – ‘Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him’ (1 Samuel 1:17).

God blessed Hannah and Elkanah with a son. She named the boy Samuel, saying ‘Because I have asked for him from the Lord.’ After Hannah weaned Samuel, she took the boy to Shiloh and presented him to Eli the priest. 1 Samuel 2 contains the wonderful prophetic prayer of Hannah about a king who God would use to ‘reign’ over Israel. Samuel remained with Eli in Shiloh, but Hannah visited her son once year when she came up to Shiloh with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. The Lord blessed Hannah with three more sons and two daughters. ‘Meanwhile the child Samuel grew before the Lord.’

Samuel – Prophet, Judge, Kingmaker

1 Samuel 3 tells us that the Word of the Lord was ‘rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation.’ However, that was about to change. God began speaking to Samuel when he was a boy. The first prophecy that God gave Samuel concerned the upcoming punishment upon the house of Eli. That prophecy was fulfilled to the letter.

So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord. Then the Lord appeared again in Shiloh. For the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord. 1 Samuel 3:19-21

In addition to being God's prophet, Samuel became Israel's judge. He told the children of Israel to return to the Lord with all their hearts, and put away the foreign gods and Ashtoreths from among them. Samuel said that if they did and served God only, the Lord would deliver Israel 'from the hand of the Philistines.' The Israelites did as Samuel told them and God confused the Philistines so that the Israelites were able to drive them away.

So the Philistines were subdued, and they did not come anymore into the territory of Israel. And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. Then the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath; and Israel recovered its territory from the hands of the Philistines. Also there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. 1 Samuel 7:13-14

Samuel became old and the people of Israel did not want his sons judging them. They demanded a king like the other nations had. Samuel warned them how life would be for them under the control of a king, but the people continued to demand a king.

Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, 'No, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.' And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he repeated them in the hearing of the Lord. So the Lord said to Samuel, 'Heed their voice, and make them a king.' 1 Samuel 8:19-22

We read in 1 Samuel 9 that God told Samuel to anoint Saul from the tribe of Benjamin as king. This was part of training Israel to reign in the promised land. Their desire to have a king rule over them came from their 'flesh,' so God gave them a king who would rule from his 'flesh. 1 Samuel 12 contains the details of Samuel's warning to Israel about obeying the Word of the Lord. Samuel told them that 'if you

still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.’ 1 Samuel 13 contains the details of King Saul’s disobedience and what would happen to the king and his family –

And Samuel said to Saul, ‘You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you. For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.’ 1 Samuel 13:13-14

God sent Samuel to the home of Jesse, a member of the tribe of Judah, to choose another king for Israel.

Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. 1 Samuel 16:13

David became King of Israel many years later following the death of Saul and his son Jonathan (1 Samuel 31). Samuel truly was Israel's great prophet, judge, and kingmaker.

Chapter Thirty-Four

Now the Lord said to Samuel, ‘How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons.’ 1 Samuel 16:1

God sent Samuel to the home of Jesse, a member of the tribe of Judah living in Bethlehem. Samuel learned an important lesson that day. He expected God to choose one of Jesse’s older sons based on their appearance, but that was not God’s plan.

But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’ 1 Samuel 16:7

After Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, the prophet said – ‘The Lord has not chosen these.’ Did Jesse have any more sons. Yes, his youngest who was ‘keeping the sheep.’ Samuel asked Jesse to bring the youngest son to him. When David arrived the Lord told Samuel – ‘Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!’ Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed David, ‘and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward’ (1 Samuel 16:13).

Lesson for training to reign? The Lord does not see as man does. Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

Training David to Reign

David did not immediately begin to reign over Israel, even though God chose him and Samuel anointed him. David had much to learn about being the kind of king God wanted to reign over His people.

How did God train David to reign? He began by removing His Spirit from King Saul and sending a 'distressing spirit' to trouble him. That led Saul's servants to find someone who was a 'skillful player on the harp' to help the king feel better. Guess who they chose? That's right – David. David began his training by serving the man he would one day replace as king. Humbling, yes, but humility is an important lesson in training to reign. Compassion is another. David played his harp, God's Spirit would rest on Saul, Saul would be refreshed, and the distressing spirit would depart from him.

The next step in David's training was in trusting God when others have doubts. 1 Samuel 17 is the wonderful story so many know about David – David the giant killer – David and Goliath.

Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.' Moreover David said, 'The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.' 1 Samuel 17:36-37

David believed in God's power and trusted Him to defeat the giant without the use of 'sword and shield.' All David needed was a sling shot, a stone, and faith in God. Goliath dropped dead at his feet and the armies of Israel routed the Philistines. David went on to become one of Israel's greatest warriors and generals. While that might make many kings pleased to have such a great general working for him, Saul became jealous of David's popularity with the people because of his prowess on the battlefield –

So the women sang as they danced, and said: ‘Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands.’ Then Saul was very angry, and the saying displeased him; and he said, ‘They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed only thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?’ So Saul eyed David from that day forward. 1 Samuel 18:7-9

The next lesson in David’s training was how to deal with hatred, jealousy, and persecution from someone you serve, while continuing to be faithful to God’s will. King Saul often attempted to kill David because of his jealousy. David had the opportunity to kill Saul, but would not do it. Why?

And he said to his men, ‘The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord’s anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.’ 1 Samuel 24:6

King Saul was eventually killed in a battle, which opened the way for David to become the king God intended for him to be when He told Samuel to anoint him. However, there were still more lessons to learn – many lessons.

David's Reign

We see something of David's character in 2 Samuel 1. Even though Saul tried to kill him multiple times, David did not gloat about Saul's death. Instead, David called on the daughters of Israel to 'weep over Saul.' David also did not rush in to take over Saul's place as king. He first inquired of the Lord –

'Shall I go up to any of the cities of Judah?' And the Lord said to him, 'Go up.' David said, 'Where shall I go up?' And He said, 'To Hebron.' 2 Samuel 2:1

David went up to Hebron with his family and 'the men who were with him' and their families. That's where the men of Judah anointed David 'king over the house of Judah.' The commander of Saul's army took Saul's son Ishbosheth and made him king over Israel. This meant that the 'tribes of Israel' became divided after Saul's death. 'Only the house of Judah followed David.' David had more training before he would become king over a unified nation of tribes.

What followed next was war between Judah and Israel. The battles and ensuing intrigue are strong examples of the character God was building into David (2 Samuel chapter 2 – 4). After ruling over Judah for seven years and six months, the tribes of Israel made David their king as well.

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and spoke, saying, “Indeed we are your bone and your flesh. Also, in time past, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and brought them in; and the Lord said to you, ‘You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over Israel.’ ‘Therefore all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord. And they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years over all Israel and Judah. 2 Samuel 5:1-5

The City of David

King David chose Jerusalem to be the capital of his kingdom. It was located near Bethlehem within the area God had promised to the tribe of Judah. Saul had ruled from Gibeah which was within the area God had given to the tribe of Benjamin. David, a member of the tribe of Judah, wanted his new capital to be located in Judah.

Jerusalem was a stronghold of the Jebusites, so David directed his army to take the city.

Then David dwelt in the stronghold, and called it the City of David. And David built all around from the Millo and inward. So David went on and became great, and the Lord God of hosts was with him. 2 Samuel 5:9-10

King David unified the twelve tribes of Israel and became a conquering king. He defeated the Philistines by first enquiring of the Lord as to whether he should go up against them. David asked, 'Will You deliver them into my hand?' God's answer was clear and direct – 'Go up, for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into your hand' (2 Samuel 5:19).

In addition to winning wars against Israel's enemies, David brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6). David wanted to build a Temple to house the Ark, but God would not allow him to do it. Nathan the prophet brought God's message to David along with a special covenant concerning David and his descendants – including the Seed who would come from David and establish an 'everlasting' Kingdom.

When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.’ 2 Samuel 7:12-15

David continued to win wars and rule his kingdom well. However, life did not end well for David because of his sinful actions involving Bathsheba and her husband Uriah. David committed adultery and murder. God allowed David to live after his confession, but the king’s actions caused great trouble within his family his reign as king. 2 Samuel chapters 11 – 24 detail what happened.

Chapter Thirty-Five

When the prophet Samuel told King Saul that he had ‘done foolishly’ by not keeping God’s command, he said – “The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you” (1 Samuel 13:14). That man after God’s own heart was David.

Yes, David made mistakes – some very serious – during his time of training to reign over God’s people. However, David remained a man ‘after God’s own heart.’ David loved God deeply. He believed that He was the Only True God. He trusted God. He obeyed God – most of the time. David was not a perfect man, but he was faithful to God in many ways.

We can all learn from David’s life. None of us are perfect, but God uses imperfect people who have a ‘broken and contrite heart’ (Psalm 51:17).

The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the Lord delivers him out of them all. Psalm

34:17-19

Lessons from David

King David left a wonderful legacy of lessons he learned during his lifetime. 2 Samuel includes many of those lessons, but do do the Psalms that David wrote. 19th century pastor Charles Spurgeon wrote a wonderful commentary on the Psalms titled The Treasury of David. Here are a few words from the Preface –

The delightful study of the Psalms has yielded me boundless profit and ever-growing pleasure; common gratitude constrains me to communicate to others a portion of the benefit, with the prayer that it may induce them to search further for themselves.

I agree with Spurgeon and invite you to search the Psalms deeply for the great insight King David and other writers of the ‘songs’ of Israel. I also recommend Spurgeon’s three-volume commentary to you as well. You can purchase the books [individually](#) or [as a set](#). You can also [read them online](#).

David's writings are an open and honest view into his thinking before and after he became Israel's king. David had great skill as a warrior, musician, poet, and song writer. It's important to remember that the Spirit of God came upon David when Samuel anointed him king, 'from that day forward' (1 Samuel 16:13). David's writings carry a deep insight into the character of God because the Spirit of God was upon David as he wrote. God also spoke directly to David, as well as through visions and prophets. David was in a unique position to know God intimately and accurately. We benefit from being able to read what he wrote.

There are many areas of 'Basic Training' that God has for His people, but I've chosen five as examples for this series. This spiritual training, just like military training, is not a 'cafeteria' where you can pick-and-choose what you want to learn. They are all necessary for the spiritual warfare that awaits everyone who follows God seriously. King David understood that and exemplified it in his life and in his writings:

1. Believe in the Only True God (Monotheism)
2. Fear God and Obey Him
3. Worship God and Serve Him
4. Listen to God and Trust Him
5. Love God and Devote Your Life to Him

You will find 150 Psalms in the Book of Psalms; half of them are attributed to King David. Many Bible translations include a note about the Psalms David wrote. One of my personal favorites is Psalm 1 because it establishes David's deep understanding about God and differences between the godly and ungodly:

Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper. The

ungodly are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish. Psalm 1

Other Psalms of David that have helped me during my growth as a Christian include –

- Psalm 2
- Psalm 5
- Psalm 8
- Psalm 11
- Psalm 14
- Psalm 15
- Psalm 16
- Psalm 18
- Psalm 19
- Psalm 22

- Psalm 23
- Psalm 24
- Psalm 25
- Psalm 27
- Psalm 29
- Psalm 30
- Psalm 31
- Psalm 32
- Psalm 34
- Psalm 36
- Psalm 37
- Psalm 40
- Psalm 41
- Psalm 51
- Psalm 53
- Psalm 59
- Psalm 61

- Psalm 62
- Psalm 63
- Psalm 68
- Psalm 69
- Psalm 86
- Psalm 95
- Psalm 101
- Psalm 103
- Psalm 110
- Psalm 122
- Psalm 133
- Psalm 138
- Psalm 139
- Psalm 141
- Psalm 143
- Psalm 144
- Psalm 145

May we learn the great lessons that David learned and be able to say with him:

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer. Psalm 19:14

Chapter Thirty-Six

Now the days of David drew near that he should die, and he charged Solomon his son, saying: 'I go the way of all the earth; be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man. And keep the charge of the Lord your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn; that the Lord may fulfill His word which He spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul,' He said, 'you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.' 1 Kings 2:1-4

King Solomon

King David chose one of his younger sons to follow him as King of Israel. Solomon's mother was Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:24). You can read about Solomon's 40-year reign in 1 Kings chapters 2 – 11. Two of the most important are chapters 3 and 11. Chapter 3 tells us that God appeared to Solomon in a dream and asked the young king – “Ask! What shall I give you?” Solomon responded – “Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” Here's how God responded to Solomon –

The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. Then God said to him: 'Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, 'behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days. So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days. 1 Kings 3:10-14

Solomon was a wise king, but he had a weakness that led him away from God in his later years –

But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites— from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, ‘You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.’ Solomon clung to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. 1 Kings 11:1-4

Solomon lacked wisdom toward the end of his life, even though God had given him wisdom beyond all other people (1 Kings 4:29-34).

So the Lord became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the Lord had commanded. Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, 'Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen. 1 Kings 11:9-13

The one 'tribe' that God gave to Solomon's descendants was Judah. The reason for that was the covenant God had made with King David many years earlier (2 Samuel 7). The lineage of King David would lead to an everlasting Kingdom. Even though God's promise spoke about the 'seed' that would come from David to follow him as king (Solomon), the covenant about the 'everlasting kingdom' pointed to the eternal reign of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Lessons from Solomon

Even though Solomon turned away from the Lord in his later years, we can learn many things about how to reign with Christ. Solomon, like his father, was a prolific writer. Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs and wrote one thousand and five songs (1 Kings 4:32). I highly recommend reading Solomon's proverbs in the Book of Proverbs and some of his songs in the Book of Psalms. Solomon's wisdom and love for God as a younger man come through these writings in a powerful way. They are a great training tool for Christians.

One of my favorite writings of Solomon is Proverbs 3:5-6 – “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.” The fact that Solomon did not heed his own wise advice as an older man is important to note. ‘Training to reign’ with Christ means obeying God now and forever. We must endure. As the Apostle Paul wrote at the end of his life – “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up

for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

Solomon also wrote The Song of Solomon, which is about his love for his wife as a young man. It is an excellent book for newly married couples about the special gift God has given them. Solomon wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes toward the end of his life. It is about Solomon’s journey through life as a king and the futility he experienced during that journey. The way Solomon ends Ecclesiastes is important for every Christian to read –

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: ‘Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Christians have God's promise of forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. However, that does not mean we can follow Solomon's example and turn away from God to follow after 'other gods.' We cannot and should not abuse God's grace. As Paul wrote in Romans 6 – "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" We should heed the words of Solomon and Paul. We should fear God. We should not continue in sin.

Solomon's Legacy

Solomon was the last king over a unified Israel (all 12 tribes). His legacy ended in a major split that led to two kingdoms – Northern and Southern. The Southern Kingdom included the tribe of Judah and a small portion of Benjamin. Jerusalem was its capital and continued the Davidic Dynasty. The Northern Kingdom included the other ten tribes, along with a portion of Benjamin. Samaria eventually became the capital.

All of the kings of the Southern Kingdom were blood relatives of David and Solomon. None of the kings of the Northern Kingdom were blood relatives of David and Solomon. That will be important to watch as we see how God moves to reveal the 'Seed of the woman' that will destroy the 'seed of the serpent.'

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Rehoboam, King Solomon's son, was unwise from the beginning of his reign over Israel. He listened to his 'young' advisors rather than the 'elders' who had advised his father.

Then the young men who had grown up with him spoke to him, saying, 'Thus you should speak to this people who have spoken to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you make it lighter on us'—thus you shall say to them: 'My little finger shall be thicker than my father's waist! And now, whereas my father put a heavy yoke on you, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!' 1 Kings 12:10-11

Rehoboam's lack of wisdom led to a major revolt within the kingdom that divided the nation of Israel –

Now when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying: 'What share have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Now, see to your own house, O David!' So Israel departed to their tents. But Rehoboam reigned over the children of Israel who dwelt in the cities of Judah. 1 Kings 12:16-17

The Training of Kings

Rehoboam became King of Judah (Southern Kingdom) and Jeroboam became King of Israel (Northern Kingdom). Both of them set bad precedents within their separate kingdoms. Jeroboam, who was not a descendant of David, was afraid that his kingdom would 'return to the house of David' when his people went to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to God. So, Jeroboam made two calves of gold and told his people to worship them in Bethel or Dan. Jeroboam made 'shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not the sons of Levi.'

Jeroboam also 'ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar.' He made offerings and sacrifices to the golden calves he had made. Jeroboam led the Israelites back into pagan worship of 'other gods.' That led the One True God to send 'a man of God' from Judah to Bethel with a message concerning a future king of Judah named Josiah who would 'sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn

incense on you, and men's bones shall be burned on you' (1 Kings 13:2). Jeroboam stretched out his hand commanding that the prophet be arrested. However, his hand withered and the altar was split apart with the ashes pouring out from the altar. Jeroboam asked the prophet to ask God to restore the use of his hand. The prophet asked and God restored Jeroboam's hand. However, that did not keep Jeroboam from continuing his worship of idols and leading Israel away from God. Jeroboam's life ended badly, as you can read in 1 Kings 14.

Rehoboam was also a bad king for Judah. Though he was King David's grandson, he followed in the ways of his father Solomon who worshipped idols in his later years because of his many foreign wives. Rehoboam led Judah into apostasy –

Now Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord, and they provoked Him to jealousy with their sins which they committed, more than all that their fathers had done. For they also built for themselves high places, sacred pillars, and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree. And there were also perverted persons in the

land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. 1 Kings 14:22-24

A majority of the kings of Judah followed in Rehoboam's evil ways. All of the kings of Israel followed in Jeroboam's evil footsteps. God sent prophets to Judah and Israel for centuries to train the kings how to reign for Him, but most wanted nothing to do with the One True God. They preferred the sinful pleasures of worshipping false gods and doing what pleased them.

Some of the 'training' God did through His prophets included severe punishments, but also a demonstration of His grace and mercy. God wanted His people to love only Him, obey only Him, and worship only Him. Because Israel and Judah were His people, God was long-suffering with them. He gave the kings of both 'kingdoms' ample opportunity to know right from wrong, good from evil. However, most did not heed God's Word through His prophets.

God's Wrath Revealed

God is long-suffering, but He will do what He says He will do. God told many of His prophets to let the kings of both kingdoms know that He would use the kings of pagan nations to destroy Israel and Judah. The prophets were often very specific in how the destruction would occur. That way, when it happened, everyone would know that God in the Only True God. God will do what He will do. No one on earth or in the heavens can stop God from being God. No one can deter God from accomplishing His will for His people or for the other nations of the world.

God began warning the children of Israel through His prophet Moses –

Gather to me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth to witness against them. For I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt, and turn aside from the way which I have

commanded you. And evil will befall you in the latter days, because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands.

Deuteronomy 31:28-29

After centuries of warnings, the Northern Kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrian army of King Shalmaneser in 722 BC. The king carried all of the Israelites into captivity in Assyria and brought non-Israelites from Babylon, Cathay, Ava, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, 'and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; 'and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities' (2 Kings 17:24). That was the end of the Northern Kingdom started by Jeroboam.

Judah fell to the Babylonians a little more than a century later when God used King Nebuchadnezzar to take the king and people of Judah captive. Nebuchadnezzar's final move militarily was to destroy Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple. However, Nebuchadnezzar did not move any foreigners into Judah. The land had 70 years of 'Sabbath rest' (2 Chronicles 36:21). That period of time became known as the time of 'exile' for Jews living in Babylon. God used prophets like

Daniel and Ezekiel who had also been taken captive to encourage His people that they would one day return to Judah. God led a different nation (Persia) and king (Cyrus) to conquer Babylon and give the Jews the freedom to return to Judah and rebuild Jerusalem and its Temple.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, 'Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up! 2 Chronicles 36:22-23

That command from Cyrus opened the door for several groups of Jews to return to Judah over a period of many years. They were led by people like Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods; and Cyrus king of Persia brought them out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. This is the number of them: thirty gold platters, one thousand silver platters, twenty-nine knives, thirty gold basins, four hundred and ten silver basins of a similar kind, and one thousand other articles. All the articles of gold and silver were five thousand four hundred. All these Sheshbazzar took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem. Ezra 1:7-11

Our 'Training' Lesson

God is the Only True God. Israel's and Judah's attempts to worship 'other gods' ended in defeat and destruction. God is long-suffering, but He will not 'suffer' His wrath to fall on the ungodly forever. God will be obeyed by all flesh one day. If we understand that now, we are well ahead of most people living on this planet. Even people who call themselves 'Christians' can be fooled into worshiping the 'false gods' of this world through the deception of false preachers and teachers, and through the delusion of pleasing themselves through sin.

Israel and Judah stand as powerful lessons for all people who will read, consider, and learn. There is no way to be successful in this life, or the one that follows, unless we worship and obey the One True God. I highly recommend that all Christians spend time reading 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles, to learn these lessons through the lives of real people. Some of them learned; most did not. May we follow the ways of learning and obeying.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

King Zedekiah was the last king of Judah – the last king from the lineage of David and Solomon. Zedekiah’s reign ended in 586 BC. God had promised David that He would establish his and Solomon’s kingdom ‘forever,’ so what did that mean for the future of Judah and Israel?

The Messiah King

God knew from ‘before time began’ that Israel and Judah would fail to reign – even with all the training they had received from the Lord for hundreds of years. That’s why God promised the ‘Seed’ of the woman who would destroy the ‘seed’ of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). That Seed is also known in the Old Testament as the ‘Messiah’ (מָשִׁיחַ – mashiach). The word means ‘anointed.’ Even as David was anointed to be Israel’s king, so the Messiah will rule Israel and the world forever – just as God promised David (2 Samuel 7).

Many of the prophets spoke and wrote about the coming of the Messiah, the Anointed One. Isaiah addressed the specifics of the coming of Messiah more than the other prophets, so I recommend every Christian read Isaiah carefully to see what God said would happen with His Anointed One. Other prophets to read include Micah, Zechariah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Malachi, and Jeremiah.

Behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord, 'That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. Jeremiah 23:5

'Behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord, 'that I will perform that good thing which I have promised to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah: 'In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David A Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In those days Judah will be saved, And Jerusalem will dwell safely. And this is the name by which she will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.' Jeremiah 33:14-16

Many other prophets referred to the Messiah as 'a Branch,' but Jeremiah's statement is particularly important because he prophesied during the reign of the last king in the Davidic lineage, King Zedekiah (Mattaniah). Jeremiah's prophecy was about something God was going to do in the 'future,' but Judah and Israel have not had a king from Davidic lineage since Zedekiah (597-586 BC). Even though Rome appointed

Herod to rule Judea from 37-4 BC, Herod was not from the Davidic lineage. His father (Antipater) was an Edomite who converted to Judaism. That means Jeremiah's prophecy that God would 'raise to David a Branch of righteousness' is still future.

Christians know from both the Old and New Testaments that Jesus Christ that 'Branch of Righteousness' and that He will one day sit on the throne of David. The Old Testament has hundreds of prophecies concerning the Messiah that Jesus fulfilled with His First Coming (1st century AD). He will fulfill the remaining prophecies with His Second Coming (in the near future).

Post-Exile Prophets and Leaders

Judah's exile in Babylon lasted for 70 years ('Sabbath rest' (2 Chronicles 36:21). God delivered Babylon into the hands of the Persians at the end of that time and put it on heart of the king (Cyrus) to allow Jews to return to Judah to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and its Temple (Ezra 1:1-11).

Sheshbazzar was the first 'prince of Judah' to return with thousands of Jews to Judah (Ezra chapter 1). Ezra also mentioned Zerubbabel as another Jewish leader to return with a large group of Jews from Babylon to Judah (Ezra chapter 2). They may have traveled together or Zerubbabel may have followed Sheshbazzar months later. They restored the worship of the Only True God in Judah and began rebuilding the foundation for the Temple (Ezra chapter 3). They faced opposition from non-Jews living in the area which eventually stopped the building process (Ezra chapter 4).

Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them. Ezra 5:1-2

With the help of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, Zerubbabel and Jeshua continued building the 'house of God' in Jerusalem years later. Those people who opposed the building sent a letter to King Darius asking him to search the king's treasure house in Babylon to see if King Cyrus actually gave his permission to the Jews for rebuilding the Temple. King Darius issued a decree that a search be made of the royal archives. The search led to the discovery of King Cyrus' original decree. King Darius wrote a decree commanding the opponents of the Jews to stay away and allow the Jews to build the 'house of God.' Darius also supported the effort with the cost being paid at the king's expense, and commanded that whatever the Jews needed

for the Temple to ‘be given them day by day without fail’ (Ezra 6:6-12). The building of the Temple was finished and dedicated. The people offered sacrifices to God and celebrated Passover together.

Many years later King Artaxerxes of Persia approved of Ezra returning to Judah from Babylon.

And I, even I, Artaxerxes the king, issue a decree to all the treasurers who are in the region beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, may require of you, let it be done diligently. Ezra 7:21

However, what Ezra found in Judah upon his arrival was a great disappointment –

When these things were done, the leaders came to me, saying, ‘The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the

Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass.’ So when I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished. Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. Ezra 9:1-4

It did not take long for the Jews to return to their sinful ways of mixing with pagans. The people, including some of the priests and Levites, had actually intermarried with pagan women – which was forbidden by God. Ezra rebuked them for their sin and they responded correctly –

And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, 'We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this. Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it. Ezra 10:2-4

Nehemiah followed Ezra years later from Babylon. He was the 'cupbearer' for King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah expressed his strong desire to return to Judah to help rebuild the city of Jerusalem. Nehemiah faced much opposition as he guided the rebuilding of the wall around the city, but he was able to accomplish it with God's help. Nehemiah joined Ezra and other Jewish leaders in calling God's people to obey the Mosaic Law. The people confessed their sins and made a covenant with God. Nehemiah the governor joined other

leaders in placing ‘their seal on the document’ (Nehemiah chapters 9 and 10). They all made many promises to God, including to ‘not neglect the house of our God.’ I recommend you read the rest of Nehemiah to learn about the many promises Judah made to God. I also recommend you read the writings of the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, to learn more about the return of the exiles to Judah as well as the promise of the Messiah who would rule and reign as King.

The Future King

As you read these passages of Scripture from the last prophets, remember that they prophesied after the last king from David's lineage sat on the throne in Jerusalem. Since no other Davidic king has been on Israel's throne since Zedekiah in the early part of the 6th century BC, these prophecies about God coming to His people to rule over them is 'future.'

Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,' says the Lord. 'Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you. And the Lord will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem. Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord, for He is aroused from His holy habitation! Zechariah 2:10-13

‘Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, You and your companions who sit before you, For they are a wondrous sign; For behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH. For behold, the stone That I have laid before Joshua: Upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription,’ Says the Lord of hosts, ‘And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘Everyone will invite his neighbor Under his vine and under his fig tree.’

Zechariah 3:8-10

‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, saying: ‘Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, And He shall build the temple of the Lord; Yes, He shall build the temple of the Lord. He shall bear the glory, And shall sit and rule on His throne; So He shall be a priest on His throne, And the counsel of peace shall be between them both. ’

Zechariah 6:12-13

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim And the horse from Jerusalem; The battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be 'from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth.' Zechariah 9:9-10

And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the Lord strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do

not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. In that day 'HOLINESS TO THE LORD' shall be engraved on the bells of the horses. The pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yes, every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holiness to the Lord of hosts. Everyone who sacrifices shall come and take them and cook in them. In that day there shall no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts. Zechariah 14:16-21

Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,' Says the Lord of hosts. Malachi 3:1

In Summary

Humans are haunted by a deception and a decision made thousands of years ago in a beautiful garden location somewhere in the ancient world. The God who created the heavens and the earth and all living things, is a perfect God. As we've seen throughout this series, God has revealed Himself to be Self-Existent, Almighty, All-Knowing, Everywhere Present at the same time, Unchangeable, Loving, Kind, Compassionate, Caring, Honest, Truthful, Righteous, and Just. However, there is a being who has opposed God throughout the ages.

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. Genesis 3:1a

This 'cunning' serpent approached the woman God had created and questioned her about what God had said.

And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'? ' Genesis 3:1b

When the woman responded that God had said that, the serpent contradicted God and deceived the woman into believing him rather than God.

Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' Genesis 3:4-5

The woman disobeyed God and led her husband into disobedience as well. Nothing has been the same since. People believe lies and are easily deceived. We've seen that throughout this series. Remember that God's purpose in creating humans, male and female, was to 'reign' with Him over the world. That reign would include being fruitful and multiplying, filling the earth and subduing it, and having dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth (Genesis 1).

However, the disobedience of the first humans led to a severe curse that every human would endure from that day until now and into the future. God cursed the serpent, the man, and the woman, but He did not give up on humanity. We find God continually guiding and training humans, even as He judged them with righteousness. What we see in the Old Testament is that humans preferred worshipping false gods rather than the Only True God.

God knew that humans could not do anything to ‘save’ themselves, so He promised them a Savior, the Messiah, the Branch of Righteousness who would come from the lineage of King David. However, as the Old Testament drew to a close with its final prophet (spokesman for God), the Messiah had not yet appeared. Israel, the chosen people of God, were still waiting.

Chapter Forty

God did not speak to Israel for 400 years between the time of the prophet Malachi and the prophet John the Baptist. What happened to Judah and the lineage of the promised Seed during that time? Did the Seed ever appear? If so, when and how? What happened when the Seed appeared? When will a king from the lineage of David sit again on the throne of David?

Those are some of the questions we'll address in the next several parts of our series.

Silence

Malachi prophesied during the 5th century BC, possibly after the time that Ezra and Nehemiah were leaders in Israel. We know from what we read in Ezra 10 that the Jews responded to God's Word and put away their pagan wives. We know from what we read in Nehemiah 13 that Nehemiah instituted many godly reforms in Judah. However, what God told Malachi to prophesy to Israel was not positive, though it was hopeful.

God called the offerings the people made to Him 'defiled,' 'profaned,' and 'blemished.' That sounds nothing like what we read at the end of Ezra and Nehemiah's ministries in Judah. According to Malachi's prophecy the priests had become corrupt because of the worship of 'a foreign god.'

Judah has dealt treacherously, And an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, For Judah has profaned The Lord's holy institution which He loves: He has married the daughter of a foreign god. May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob The man who does this, being awake and aware, Yet who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts! Malachi 2:11-12

The 'hopeful' part of Malachi's prophecy comes in chapter 3

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Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,' Says the Lord of hosts. Malachi 3:1

A ‘messenger’ would precede the ‘Messenger of the covenant’ to prepare the way before God. However, as hopeful as that sounds, the coming of the ‘Messenger’ would not be easy for Israel –

But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire And like launderers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the Lord An offering in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem Will be pleasant to the Lord, As in the days of old, As in former years. And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against adulterers, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien – Because they do not fear Me,” Says the Lord of hosts. Malachi 3:2-5

The 'hope' is that God would send His 'Messenger,' but His coming would not be easy for Israel. Imagine being a member of Israel from the end of the 5th century BC and these are the last words you read from a true prophet of God. This is the last thing your God tells you before He goes 'silent' for hundreds of years –

For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,' Says the Lord of hosts, 'That will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do this,' Says the Lord of hosts. 'Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the

children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.’ Malachi 4:1-6

This is where the Old Testament prophecies end. There is a promise of ‘The Sun of Righteousness’ who would ‘arise With healing in His wings,’ but when would that happen? When would God ‘save’ Israel?

Israel During God's Silence

God did not talk to His people for more than 400 years, but that doesn't mean the people of Israel stopped living. We know something about how Israel lived because of the Apocryphal writings. One of the most important to understanding Jewish history during that period is 1 Maccabees. Several times in the book we read that the people were going about their lives waiting for a prophet of God to come along and show them what to do. The prophet never came. These are the only verses in 1 Maccabees that mention a prophet.

They thought it best to pull it down, lest it should be a reproach to them, because the heathen had defiled it: wherefore they pulled it down, And laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place, until there should come a prophet to shew what should be done with them. 1 Maccabees 4:45-46

So was there a great affliction in Israel, the like whereof was not since the time that a prophet was not seen among them. 1 Maccabees 9:27

Also that the Jews and priests were well pleased that Simon should be their governor and high priest for ever, until there should arise a faithful prophet. 1 Maccabees 14:41

Also, the name of God is used only a few times in 1 Maccabees and never in relation to His speaking to anyone. This is important. God spoke hundreds of times in the Old Testament and usually through prophets. Where are the prophets in 1 Maccabees? Where is God guiding His people by Voice? He was silent and 1 Maccabees is proof of that.

The reason I mention this is that many scholars believe 1 Maccabees is the most important historical writing in the Apocrypha. It details the Jewish revolt against the Seleucid Empire, which was established by one of the leading army officers who served under Alexander the Great (Seleucus I Nicator) during the 4th century BC. At its height, the Seleucid Empire included much of Mesopotamia, Persia, Central Asia, Asia Minor, and the Middle East. However, by the early to middle part of the 2nd century BC, the Seleucid “empire” had lost much of the eastern part of the empire to the Parthians. The Seleucids did continue to control parts of its western areas, including Syria and Judea, but the empire was unstable. That instability gave a small army of Jews the opportunity to take control of Judea.

Three religious groups formed during this time in Israel’s history: Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. The Sadducees came from the wealthy and priestly families and supported the Hasmoneans. The Hasidim were opposed to the Sadducees. The Pharisees and Essenes came from the Hasidim. The Pharisees believed in strict adherence to the Mosaic Law, but continued to live within Jewish society. The

Essenes were so opposed to the Hasmoneans that they lived apart from society in desert communities. The Sadducees and Pharisees were the primary religious groups that Jesus Christ dealt with during the early part of the 1st century AD.

As for 2 Maccabees – 2 Maccabees deals with a short period of time in the history of Jewish revolt against the Seleucids, specifically 180 – 161 BC. The name of the author of 2 Maccabees is not known, though the writer states it is based on the five volumes written by Jason of Cyrene (2 Maccabees 2:23). Jason's larger document has not been discovered, so there is no way to compare 2 Maccabees to what Jason of Cyrene may have written. There is also no way to confirm that Jason of Cyrene was a prophet through whom God spoke His Word. Jesus and His Apostles did not mention Jason nor quote from his writings. They also did not mention nor quote from 2 Maccabees in the New Testament.

God did not speak to Israel during the Silent Period (also know as the Intertestamental Period) because He had already spoken clearly to Israel for centuries. The people of Israel needed to obey the prophets God had already sent to them. They had the words of the prophets in their Bible. All they had to do was read Malachi to see what God expected and promised. They had Isaiah, and Micah, and Zechariah, and Ezekiel, and Daniel, and Zephaniah, etc. The people had all the Words of God they needed. They just had to do what God told them to do – they needed to be obedient to His revealed Word.

Chapter Forty-One

The Christian Bible is divided into two major parts: Old Testament and New Testament. The Greek word for ‘testament’ is διαθήκη (diathéké) and means ‘a covenant, a will.’ The idea of the word is of a covenant or agreement between two parties.

The 'Old' Testament ends with Malachi 4:6 - "And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

Turn the page and you'll read this –

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.

Do these two verses connect in some way? If so, how and what does it mean in our ‘training to reign?’

The Connection

The connection for Christians is simple – Jesus Christ is the ‘Seed’ who God promised Abraham almost four thousand years ago. The genealogy shows that the physical lineage of Jesus is through the tribe of Judah, through King David, through King Solomon, through all the kings of Judah, through Zerubbabel (the son of Shealtiel) who brought the children of Israel out of captivity in Babylon back to Judah to rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem, through ancestors living during the Silent Years, to “Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.” The genealogy of Matthew 1 is important because it clearly shows Jesus’ lineage from Abraham to Joseph. It is a royal lineage that would be expected of someone who would become Israel’s King.

Another important lineage for Jesus Christ is found in Luke 3. Remember that God's promise of the 'Seed' of the woman who would destroy the 'seed' of the serpent was made to Eve, the wife of Adam – “the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God” (Luke 3:28). It is a human lineage that would be expected of someone who would be the 'Seed' of the woman.

Matthew 1 and Luke 3 are evidence that Jesus of Nazareth, born to a virgin, will be both Israel's next King and the Seed who will destroy the serpent's seed.

Then the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 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 1:30-33

The Preparation

Malachi prophesied about an event centuries before it occurred. He wrote –

Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,' Says the Lord of hosts. Malachi 3:1

Malachi said that God would send His ‘messenger’ (מַלְאָךְ – malak) to prepare the way before God – not a man. God spoke and said that His messenger would prepare the way before “Me.” The ‘Me’ in that context points back to the source of the prophecy – God.

Here's more evidence. The 'Lord, whom you seek,' would suddenly come to His temple. It's important that we note the 'messenger' would prepare the way before the Lord (יְהוָה – adon – masculine noun singular). The term 'Lord' is another word for God and it is consistent within the context of Malachi 3:1.

We also need to look at a prophecy of Isaiah written many years before Malachi prophesied –

The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Isaiah 40:3-5

Jewish people have been waiting for thousands of years for these prophecies to be fulfilled, but Christians believe they've already been fulfilled. Here's why –

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!' For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.' Matthew 3:1-3

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.' 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.'

Mark 1:1-3

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias

tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight
And the rough ways smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' Luke 3:1-16

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world ... Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, 'I am

not the Christ.’ And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the Prophet?’ And he answered, ‘No.’ Then they said to him, ‘Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?’ He said: ‘I am ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ ‘as the prophet Isaiah said.’ Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees. And they asked him, saying, ‘Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?’ John answered them, saying, ‘I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.’ These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.’ John 1:6-9, 19-30

John the Baptist was older than Jesus of Nazareth by several months, but he said that Jesus ‘was before me.’ That’s because Jesus of Nazareth is the Eternal Son of God. He was ‘born’ miraculously to a virgin –

And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.’

Luke 1:35-37

Elizabeth was the mother of John the Baptist. The angel Gabriel announced the birth of John to Elizabeth's husband Zecharias the priest –

But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.' Luke 1:13-17

It is for these reasons that Christians believe John the Baptist was the ‘messenger’ who God sent to ‘prepare the way’ for Him (God) to appear in the Flesh as the ‘Messenger of the covenant.’ Jesus Christ is that Messenger and He brought with Him a ‘new covenant,’ which is why the New Testament is called ‘New.’

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.’ And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. John 1:14-18

Chapter Forty-Two

Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ (Anointed One), the Eternal Son of God who rules over the universe. He is also the promised future King of Israel who will sit on the throne of David. There has never been, nor will ever there ever be anyone in a better position to ‘train to reign.’ The angel who told Mary she would give birth to Jesus said this –

Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 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 1:30-33

Wise men from the East came to Jerusalem searching for 'He who has been born King of the Jews' (Matthew 2:2). They knew some of the ancient prophecies concerning Messiah and had seen 'His star in the East' and had 'come to worship Him.'

Herod, who was a Roman proxy king in Israel, heard what the wise men were saying and took action to kill the Christ Child before He could become King. He ordered that all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from the age of two years old and under, were to be killed. However, an angel warned the wise men to return home on a different route, and also warned Joseph to flee to Egypt with Mary and Jesus. They remained in Egypt until the death of Herod, 'that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, 'Out of Egypt I called My Son' (Matthew 2:15). After Herod died, an angel told Joseph to return to Israel. Joseph heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, so Joseph did not return to Bethlehem. An angel warned him and he took his family 'into the region of Galilee.' They lived in Nazareth, 'that

it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene' (Matthew 2:23).

Jesus' Training as a Child

Everything you read about Jesus as a child contains some insights into His training to reign. Let's remind ourselves about the five 'basic training' principles I chose for this series:

1. Believe in the Only True God (Monotheism)
2. Fear God and Obey Him
3. Worship God and Serve Him
4. Listen to God and Trust Him
5. Love God and Devote Your Life to Him

We've seen that Joseph and Mary's responses to angelic messages demonstrate their commitment to these basic principles. We also see how others responded to the birth of Jesus –

So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.' And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. Luke 2:15-17

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom

of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: 'Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel.' Luke 2:25-32

Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. Luke 2:36-38

The next time we see Jesus is when He was twelve years old. He visited Jerusalem with his parents every year at the Feast of the Passover. However, this time was different. Instead of going home with them, He went to the Temple to converse with the 'teachers.' These learned men were 'astonished at His understanding and answers.' Jesus' parents went looking for Him and found Him in the Temple. Mary asked Jesus 'why have You done this to us?' Jesus answered, 'Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?' Jesus knew that He had work to do in the Temple and elsewhere in Israel to accomplish the work God had sent Him to do. Jesus went home with his parents and 'was subject to them.' Jesus 'increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men' (Luke 2:52).

Jesus' Training as a Man

We know that Jesus worked with His earthly 'step-father' as a carpenter (Mark 6:3). Jesus built things with His hands. He would later build His 'Church.' Lessons learned as a young person who is committed to the five 'basic training principles' are important for future ministry. Jesus demonstrated His obedience to God and to His parents, both important for Christian children and young people.

God sent His Son from Heaven to earth on a special 'Mission.' Jesus was determined to glorify His Father and finish the work He had sent Him to do (John 17:4). That's what we find Jesus doing as He approached John the Baptist. Jesus was Israel's rightful King, yet He demonstrated humility and obedience as He began His public ministry –

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?' But Jesus answered and said to him, 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' Matthew 3:13-17

John tried to prevent Jesus from being baptized because John's baptism symbolized 'repentance,' (Matthew 3:8) – something John did not believe Jesus needed to do (repent). John was correct that Jesus did not need to repent because He was sinless (spotless Lamb of God, John 1:29). However, Jesus said He wanted John to baptize Him 'to fulfill all righteousness.' Jesus 'identified' Himself with the sinners He would save by bearing their sins on the Cross. People would become 'righteous' through Christ Jesus.

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Corinthians 5:21

Jesus humbled Himself in every way we might imagine. He was born to a poor family. He grew up in a small and poor village. Though He was the Eternal Son of God, the rightful King of Israel, and the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world, Jesus humbled Himself to be baptized. Jesus set aside His position for the sake of saving lost people. He was obedient to the will of His Heavenly Father.

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Philippians 2:5-8

We know that God was pleased with Jesus because of what happened immediately following His baptism – ‘and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’

Jesus' Training in the Wilderness

Keep in mind that Jesus did not need to be 'trained to reign.' He is God. However, what Jesus did as a Man demonstrates many of the aspects of what we need to know to reign with Him. The Spirit of God immediately led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted (tested) by the devil. Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights. That is an amazing physical feat in itself, but what followed was even more difficult. The 'tempter' (devil) came to Jesus and began to tempt Him.

We are given three specific temptations in Matthew 4. Here are the temptations and the Lord's responses to those temptations. Keep in mind as you read this that Jesus had not eaten anything for forty days and forty nights –

Temptation #1

Tempter – ‘If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’

Jesus – ‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’

Temptation #2

Tempter – ‘Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’

Jesus – ‘It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’

Temptation #3

Tempter – ‘Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.’

Jesus – ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’

The devil left Jesus and angels came and ministered to the Lord. Luke 4:13 reads, ‘Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.’ The devil was not finished with Jesus and would return later to cause more trouble.

What do we learn from this amazing scene of a physically weak Jesus facing the devil's temptations? We are not God, so what do we learn that might help us 'train to reign?' Notice that Jesus relied on God's Word for His responses to the devil's temptations. We see that than angelic host was waiting nearby to minister to Jesus' needs. Jesus could have easily called on them to attack the devil, but He didn't. He relied on, trusted in, God's Word in His response to the devil's temptations. That's important for us to learn as we 'train to reign.'

Our strength to reign with Christ will not come from our power, but from our reliance on and obedience to the Word of God.

Chapter Forty-Three

John the Baptist was the ‘voice crying in the wilderness’ and the ‘messenger’ who would prepare the way for the Lord (Isaiah 40; Malachi 3). Jews living in Israel in the early part of the 1st century AD had never seen a real prophet of God. They read about the prophets in their Bible who had lived centuries before, but it had been more than 400 years since one had walked in Judah (Malachi).

- It was John the Baptist who preached ‘repentance’ and called the people of Israel to return to their God.
- It was John the Baptist who called the religious leaders of Israel a ‘brood of vipers’ and called on them to ‘bear fruits worthy of repentance’ (Matthew 3).
- It was John the Baptist who told them that ‘He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry.’
- It was John the Baptist who said that, ‘He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’ It was John the Baptist

who said that the One to come would have ‘His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.’

- It was John the Baptist who saw Jesus of Nazareth and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me’ (John 1).
- It was John the Baptist who baptized Jesus and testified that he ‘saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.’

It was also John the Baptist who later sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask – ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’ (Matthew 11:2) Why would John do that? He knew that Jesus was the Messiah, the Lamb of God when he baptized Him, so why would he ask such a question of Jesus?

Answering John

John was in jail when he sent two of his disciples to question Jesus. John had rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his relationship with his brother's wife, 'and for all the evils which Herod had done' (Luke 3:18-20). For that reason Herod had John the Baptist thrown into jail.

John's ministry was in a similar vein to the prophetic ministries of the Old Testament prophets. He was preparing the way for the Lord to come to Israel, rule it, and judge it. While John was still baptizing in the Jordan he had prophesied that every tree that did not bear good fruit would be cut down and thrown into the fire. John told the Pharisees and Sadducees that the One coming after him would be mightier than him. John said that He (Jesus Christ) would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. 'His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire' (Matthew 3:10-12).

John saw what many Jews saw when they read the prophetic writings in the Hebrew Bible. God would send the Messiah, the ‘Messenger of the covenant,’ suddenly come to His temple.

‘Behold, He is coming,’ Says the Lord of hosts. ‘But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire And like launderers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the Lord An offering in righteousness. Malachi 3:1-3

What John was hearing from his disciples about Jesus’ ministry would not have sounded like Malachi’s prophecy. Jesus was not at the Temple in Jerusalem at the time. In fact, He was in Galilee which was far north of Jerusalem. Jesus was not judging or ruling as King of Israel. Instead, He was healing and teaching far from Jerusalem. John may have wondered if he had misunderstood or missed something in his own prophetic preaching, so he sent two of his disciples

to ask Jesus – ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’ Here’s how Jesus answered the question –

Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.’ Matthew 11:4-6

John would have recognized that from Isaiah and other prophets as also being part of Messiah’s ministry. Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61 at His home synagogue in Nazareth –

And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed;

To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. Luke
4:17-19

Complimenting John

John's question did not offend Jesus. In fact, Jesus complimented John the Baptist to the people following Him –

As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.' Matthew 11:7-10

Jesus supported John the Baptist and reminded people that he was the promised 'messenger' who God had sent to prepare the way of the Lord. Of course, Jesus is the Lord. Jesus is also King, which means there is a 'Kingdom.' Interestingly, Jesus said that 'he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.' What did Jesus mean by that?

Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear! Matthew 11:11-14

John was a 'greater' prophet because he 'prepared the way' for the Lord to come from Heaven to earth, met the King in person, and participated in the beginning of the King's earthly ministry. However, those who were the 'least' in the Kingdom of Heaven would be greater than John? Why? Because of what Jesus would do for those who would enter the Kingdom. He was going to demonstrate His superior power and glory through healing, preaching, teaching, dying, and rising.

Notice that Jesus said that – 'from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.' Luke wrote this –

The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it. Luke 16:16

The Jews who heard John the Baptist preach and later heard Jesus were 'pressing' (βιάζομαι, laying hold of with positive aggressiveness, forcing one's way in) 'into it.' There was a sense of desperation on the part of 1st century Jews to see the promised Kingdom of God to come to Israel. The people were suffering greatly under Roman occupation and they were looking to the day when God would send salvation through the promised Messiah King. Many believed Jesus was the Messiah and wanted to use force to make Him King

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Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, 'This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone. John 6:14-15

Jesus did not allow this to happen because it was not how He was going to begin His earthly reign. He knew the ‘eternal plan’ and His Father’s will. The ‘plan’ was for Jesus to die on the Cross, rise from the dead, and return to Heaven to await the ‘appointed time.’ Jesus would not become King any other way.

Jesus referred to John the Baptist as – ‘if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.’ This would be reminiscent to Jews of the last words God spoke to Malachi the prophet –

Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse. Malachi 4:4-6

Jews knew that Elijah was the great prophet who went to Heaven without dying. Some believed Malachi's prophecy would be fulfilled by Elijah returning from Heaven to earth. We do see Elijah conferring with Jesus and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9). We also see the possibility of Elijah and Moses returning in the future during the Tribulation (Revelation 11). Elijah played a significant role in Jewish thinking during the 1st century AD.

Jesus was fully supporting the divinely appointed ministry of John the Baptist. John was the 'messenger' who Malachi said would prepare the way for 'the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight' (Malachi 3:1). As Jesus pointed out – 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear!'

Jesus didn't stop there because He wanted to make an important point to the Jews who were 'pressing' themselves upon Him as well as the religious leaders who opposed both John and Jesus –

But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying: 'We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not lament.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children."

Matthew 11:16-19

Jesus addressed the thinking of the generation of Jews and their leaders as 'childish' – 'like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions.' It was a powerful rebuke to the Pharisees and Sadducees. They had accused John the Baptist of having a demon. They accused Jesus (The Son of Man) of being a glutton and drunk, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. True wisdom would be known through the true children of wisdom – those who came to the King and His Kingdom. They would know that John was a true and righteous prophet of God. They would know that Jesus as not a glutton and drunk. They would know why

Jesus ministered to the spiritual needs of tax collectors and sinners. Wisdom triumphs over the evil and unwise beliefs of those who opposed John and Christ. Their training to reign would overcome the world.

Chapter Forty-Four

Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords and has called us to 'reign' with Him. What do Christians need to know to 'reign' with Christ?

The King and His Kingdom

From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

Matthew 4:17

Jesus began His preaching ministry after John baptized Him and the devil tempted Him. His message was clear –

- Repent – μετανοέω, metanoëó, to change one's mind or purpose (think differently after being with)
- Kingdom – βασιλεία, basileia, royal power and authority, sovereignty (the realm in which a king reigns)
- Heaven – οὐρανός, ouranos, visible or spiritual heavens
- At Hand – ἐγγίζω, eggizó, come near, come close, extremely close

Jesus came from Heaven to earth to change hearts and minds, to change the way people thought about spiritual things. He was King of His Kingdom. He was Sovereign and had royal authority. His Kingdom was a spiritual Kingdom, though it would one day expand to become the earthly Kingdom prophesied in Scripture. His Kingdom was extremely close, possibly because He was on earth as King or because God views time differently than we do. A thousand years is as a day to the Lord (e.g. 2 Peter 3:8; Psalm 90:4).

People are often confused about the Kingdom of the King. The Jews who Jesus preached to in the early 1st century had their difficulties understanding it. So did the Roman prefect (governor) of Judea –

Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?' Pilate answered, 'Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.' Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?' Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.' John 18:33-37

Jesus was King, but His Kingdom was 'not from here.' The Lord's Kingdom is from Heaven. That's the location of His Kingship. He was born (to the virgin Mary) to 'bear witness to the truth.' People would have no idea about what kind of Kingdom the Lord was King of except that He came from Heaven to earth to tell them the truth about it.

Changing Minds

The ministry of King Jesus on earth was to ‘change minds.’ The people’s thinking about God’s Word was wrong. Jesus came to change their thinking. The people’s thinking about salvation was wrong. Jesus came to change their thinking. The people’s thinking about their spiritual position was wrong. Jesus came to change their thinking.

The need for ‘repentance’ is as true today as it was two thousand years ago. The fact that many church leaders no longer preach a message of repentance goes to show how bad things have become within Christianity. Without the message of repentance – what message do you have? People cannot be saved without a change of mind, a change of thinking. People cannot think of salvation as ‘adding’ something to what they already believe. Salvation is based on repentance and we are commanded by our Lord to preach it!

Then He said to them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Luke 24:46-48

The Lord's apostles preached repentance before conversion (salvation), so why has much of the modern 'church' stopped preaching it? I ask that to our shame –

Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. Acts 2:38-39

But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

Acts 3:18-21

Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead. Acts 17:29-31

You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 20:18-21

Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. Acts 26:19-20

And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? Romans 2:3-4

For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. 2 Corinthians 7:10

Until pastors and teachers return to the preaching of repentance, we will not see God's great blessings upon His people. We cannot preach a 'partial' message that makes people feel good about themselves and expect God's Spirit to move powerfully among us. Jesus and His apostles have made it abundantly clear that preaching a message of 'repentance' toward God is foundational to His moving among us.

Obeying to Reign

‘Training to reign’ with Christ begins with obedience to His commands.

If you love Me, keep My commandments. John 14:15

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen. Matthew 28:18-20

Chapter Forty-Five

Jesus of Nazareth was known as a ‘Rabbi,’ even though He had no formal training in a rabbinical school. His disciples called Him ‘Rabbi’ (e.g. Mark 9:5; John 1:49; 4:31; 9:2; 11:8). Even a Pharisee and member of the ruling Sanhedrin called Jesus ‘Rabbi’ (John 3:2).

Rabbi Jesus

The word ‘Rabbi’ means ‘my teacher, my master.’ They had special training in the Mosaic Law and how to be a Jewish religious leader. Several religious groups developed during the years after Malachi prophesied (e.g. Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes). That would have been during the years of the Babylonian exile and afterward. The Pharisees and Sadducees developed as different ‘sects’ within the religious and political life of Jews. The Sadducees were made up of Jewish priests. The Pharisees divided into two groups (sometimes called schools, factions, or houses): Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel. Saul of Tarsus, for example, trained

in the House of Hillel ‘at the feet of Gamaliel’ (Acts 22:3). Gamaliel was the grandson of Rabbi Hillel and cautioned the Sanhedrin to be careful in how it treated the Lord’s apostles saying, ‘for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God’ (Acts 5:38-39).

Jesus was not a Pharisee of either ‘house,’ even though some Pharisees (like Nicodemus) thought He might be the promised Messiah. After Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to Heaven some Pharisees believed in Him (e.g. Acts 15:5). Even though the Book of Hebrews teaches that Jesus Christ is the ‘great High Priest who has passed through the heavens’ (Hebrews 4:14), Jesus was not a member of the Sadducees either.

Jesus was a One-of-a-Kind 'Rabbi.' He proved Himself through miracles and healings that He was who He said He was –

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.' John 3:1-2

Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!' Nathanael said to Him, 'How do You know me?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.' Nathanael answered and said to Him, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these.' And He said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels

of God ascending and descending upon the Son of
Man.' John 1:47-51

The Rabbi's Disciples

A disciple (μαθητής, mathétés) was a 'learner, a pupil' of a Rabbi. Some disciples would choose to learn from one Rabbi, while others learned from multiple Rabbis. Religious disciples had a desire to learn God's Word and live a more righteous life. They turned to Rabbis who were seen as being authoritative in both. Disciples would ask permission to learn from a Rabbi with the understanding that they would submit to the authority of the Rabbi's authority in interpreting Scripture.

Rabbis met with his disciples regularly to discuss various questions about life and how various interpretations of Scripture might affect it. Disciples would debate the various interpretations, sometimes over a period of weeks since Rabbis were in no particular hurry to resolve the questions. When the Rabbi did make an interpretation and declare his authority, the disciples would follow the decision from that point forward.

Jesus broke the mold of being a 1st century Rabbi in so many ways. Rabbis didn't work miracles. Jesus did. Rabbi's didn't heal people. Jesus did. Rabbis didn't live with their disciples. Jesus did. Rabbis didn't claim to be Messiah. Jesus did. Rabbis didn't claim to be 'Son of Man.' Jesus did. Rabbis didn't claim to be God. Jesus did. The Rabbis did not have authority over demons. Jesus did.

Jesus was not the type of Rabbi that Jewish people were used to seeing. Because of that, many people followed Jesus in ways they would not follow the Rabbis of their time.

Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths. And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority. Luke 4:31-32

And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Matthew 7:28-29

The Rabbi's Followers

Jesus chose the men who would become His closest disciples. Some had been disciples of the Apostle John. Jesus chose them to 'follow Him' and become those He would 'send out' (ἀπόστολος, apostolos) to carry on His work. As part of their 'training to reign' with Christ, He gave them power over demons and sickness –

And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. Matthew 10:1-4

I recommend you read all of Matthew 10 because it outlines what following Jesus would mean for the twelve apostles, as well as other followers of Jesus Christ. Here's one example –

Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. Matthew 10:16-20

‘Following’ Jesus Christ was not easy in the past, is not easy now, and will not be easy in the future. In order for us to learn how to ‘reign’ with Christ, we must go through a period of training. The apostles did and so must we. When the apostles were brought before the ‘council’ and ‘high priest, they were commanded not to teach in the name of Jesus. How did the apostles respond?

‘But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’ The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.’ Acts 5:29-32

Obedience is an important key to ‘training to reign’ with Christ. Obedience is not easy because what the Lord requires of us is often in opposition to what the world believes or wants. Their reaction may sometimes even lead to violence –

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. Matthew 10:34-39

I realize that is not a ‘seeker friendly’ type of message these days, but it is what Jesus said. Either you believe it or you don’t. Jesus also said, ‘Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves’ (Matthew 10:16). Here we are in the

'midst of wolves' in this life. We need to be wise and harmless. How do we learn to do that? By following Jesus – being His faithful disciples – training to reign.

Chapter Forty-Six

When the Eternal Son of God left Heaven, made Himself of no reputation, took the form of a bondservant, and came in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:7), He had a reason for doing that. As we 'train to reign' we need to understand that reason and how it plays a significant role in our lives as Christians.

The Reason of Christ

I worked with a ministry for many years known as Ratio Christi. That's Latin for 'the reason of Christ.' I liked the name and the purpose of the ministry. We met with students on college campuses to help them understand 'reasons' for believing in Jesus Christ. The reason we could discuss 'the reason of Christ' was because Christ came to earth from Heaven with a reason. That reason is presented in the early chapters of Genesis when God spoke harshly to the serpent (Satan) –

And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel. Genesis 3:15

John the Apostle said the same thing in his first church letter –

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 1 John 3:8

That's why the Holy Spirit took Jesus into the wilderness after the Lord's baptism – to face the devil (e.g. Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus won that battle and every other battle with the devil. Even when the devil entered into one of Jesus' apostles and led Judas Iscariot to betray the Lord to his earthly enemies, Jesus was victorious. His death and resurrection are at the very core of the Gospel of Christ and the Christian faith (e.g. 1 Corinthians 15:1-8)

I started working with Christian and non-Christian college students 50+ years ago. My, how things have changed. Christian students in the early to mid 70s had similar views about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, Satan, the Bible, etc. However, I began to see a theological shift in the late 70s, on into the 80s and 90s, and then accelerating in the 2000s. The need for apologetics within Christian churches became more necessary because of a 'falling away' among those who identified as 'Christian. They were forgetting or didn't know what the Bible taught about essentials of Christian beliefs. When I say 'essentials, I mean those things that the prophets, Jesus, and His apostles identified as essential beliefs for disciples of Christ.

Here is part of a research statement concerning Christian beliefs about the devil from 2009. [Barna](#) surveyed 1,871 self-described Christians about their beliefs concerning ‘spiritual beings’ –

Four out of ten Christians (40%) strongly agreed that Satan “is not a living being but is a symbol of evil.” An additional two out of ten Christians (19%) said they “agree somewhat” with that perspective. A minority of Christians indicated that they believe Satan is real by disagreeing with the statement: one-quarter (26%) disagreed strongly and about one-tenth (9%) disagreed somewhat. The remaining 8% were not sure what they believe about the existence of Satan.

Many of the surveyed ‘Christians’ were also wrong about Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit –

Although a core teaching of the Christian faith is the divinity and perfection of Jesus Christ, tens of millions of Christians do not accept that teaching. More than one-fifth (22%) strongly agreed that Jesus Christ sinned when He lived on earth, with an additional 17% agreeing somewhat. Holding the opposing view were 9% who disagreed somewhat and 46% who disagreed strongly. Six percent did not have an opinion on this matter.

Much like their perceptions of Satan, most Christians do not believe that the Holy Spirit is a living force, either. Overall, 38% strongly agreed and 20% agreed somewhat that the Holy Spirit is “a symbol of God’s power or presence but is not a living entity.” Just one-third of Christians disagreed that the Holy Spirit is not a living force (9% disagreed somewhat, 25% disagreed strongly) while 9% were not sure.

I joined Ratio Christi the next year for the purpose of reaching college students on campus. It was evident that if students who identified as Christians were so wrong about faith essentials, views on college campuses would be even worse – which they were.

Keep in mind that Barna's survey was done in 2009 – 17 years ago. Do you think things have gotten better or worse since that time? If you said 'worse,' you are correct. Driving the 'great theological decline' (apostasy) in the last 20+ years has been a spiritually toxic mix of pastors, Bible teachers, seminar professors, denominational leaders, authors, song writers, and musicians (e.g. Emergent Church, Emerging Church, Progressive Christianity, New Age church, False church, etc). I call that the devil's 'full-court press' to draw people of all ages (especially the young) away from the truth of God's Word.

None of this will come as a surprise to anyone who actually reads their Bible –

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron. 1 Timothy 4:1-2

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. 2 Timothy 3:1-7

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. 2

Peter 2:1-3

The Battles of Christ

Jesus Christ is a Fighter on a scale we cannot fathom. We saw Him stand before Joshua as the ‘Commander of the Lord’s army’ in Joshua 5. Joshua was about to lead the armies of Israel into battle to their God-given places in the ‘promised land.’ Joshua looked up and saw a ‘Man’ standing ‘opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand.’ Jesus Christ defeated the devil through His death on the Cross and in His resurrection from the dead. Christ will take up His mighty sword again in the future as He returns to earth again to defeat the devil and his forces –

Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean,

followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, 'Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.' And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which

proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

Revelation 19:11-21

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while ... Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and

the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Revelation 20:1-3, 7-10

When we become 'disciples' of Jesus Christ, we are joining the 'battles' of Christ. We are 'soldiers' in Christ's army. That's why the Apostle Paul told Christians to 'Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil' (Ephesians 6:11). That's why Paul told Timothy to 'be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.' (2 Timothy 2:1-3)

So, we understand Christ's 'reason' for coming from Heaven to earth, and we understand the spiritual 'battles' He and we are fighting. As Paul told Timothy, we must be 'strong' in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. We must put on the 'whole armor' of God – 'For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Ephesians 6:12).

Our Part

Real Christians (those who actually believe in the ‘essentials’ as presented in Scripture) have an important part to play in both the ‘Reason’ of Christ and the ‘Battles’ of Christ. If we didn’t, then God’s Word wouldn’t tell us we do.

God is sharing this [epic journey through time and space](#) with us. He created us to ‘subdue and have dominion’ with Him in this world (Genesis 1:28). God has chosen us to ‘rule and reign’ with Him. God has ‘raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus’ (Ephesians 2:6-7). Paul wrote that in Christ ‘we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will’ (Ephesians 1:11).

When Christians look at all they have ‘in Christ,’ they (we) should understand that our part in all God is doing is important for now and the future. ‘In the ages to come’ God will show the ‘exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.’ Is it so much to ask that we agree with God about the essentials of being disciplined followers of Christ? Is it too much to ask that we obey God’s Word? Is it too much to ask that we thank and praise God for His great ‘gift’ of salvation? No, that is not too much to ask. In fact, it’s the least we can do.

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’
Revelation 1:5-8

Chapter Forty-Seven

You would expect someone's 'message' to be in line with their 'purpose.' Right? Well, that's exactly what you find in the Gospels concerning the Message of Jesus of Nazareth. His Message always lined up with His Purpose. That's helpful to any student of the Bible, any Christian, to see that.

Jesus came to 'destroy the works of the devil' (1 John 3:8). The Apostle John, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote – ' For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.' That seems clear and definitive. Since that was the Lord's purpose in leaving Heaven and coming to earth 'in appearance as a man' (Philippians 2:8), we would expect His Message to support that Purpose – and it does.

The Lord's Message

One of the things I remember while researching the Gospels as an atheist was that Jesus of Nazareth was consistent in His words and deeds. He seemed to me to be the kind of person who was on a mission and nothing was going to deter Him from that mission. In the years since becoming a Christian almost 55 years ago I learned that my initial thoughts about Jesus are supported by logic and reasoning. Jesus Christ was on a Mission and His Message remained true to His Purpose.

We know what Jesus said because of four Gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John), along with Acts and Revelation. However, the Gospels are the primary source of the Lord's Message leading up to His death on the Cross and in the days following His resurrection from the grave. Keep in mind that Jesus is the King of the Universe. Whether accepted or rejected, the words of Jesus are the Words of God.

I think it's important that we remember that God's people have been rejecting His Words and Actions for thousands of years –

Then the Lord said to Moses: 'How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? Numbers 14:11

And the Lord said to Samuel, 'Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.' 1 Samuel 8:7

We should not be surprised that when the Eternal Son of God came to earth in appearance as a man that His people would reject Him. The prophet Isaiah said that's what would happen when He came –

He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Isaiah 53:3

The religious leaders of Israel did reject the Teachings of Jesus and He called them on it –

He answered and said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.’ He said to them, ‘All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘If a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban’—’ (that is, a gift to God), then you

no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.’ Mark 7:6-13

Jesus knew that His strong Message to the leaders of Israel would lead to their killing Him. While knowing that might stop some people from speaking so strongly, it didn’t deter Jesus because He had come to earth with the Purpose of dying. That was a vital part of His destroying the works of the devil –

And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. Mark 8:31

Messaging Through Parables

Jesus taught the people following Him, including the religious leaders who were always trying to find ways to charge and arrest Him for something He said, a series of parable (stories). Though many people didn't understand the deep truths behind the parables, the religious leaders knew that Jesus was often addressing His words at them. Here's one example –

Then He began to speak to them in parables: 'A man planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a place for the wine vat and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that he might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vinedressers. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent them another servant, and at him they threw stones, wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully treated. And again he sent another, and him they killed;

and many others, beating some and killing some. Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But those vinedressers said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard. 'Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others. Have you not even read this Scripture: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes'?' And they sought to lay hands on Him, but feared the multitude, for they knew He had spoken the parable against them. So they left Him and went away. Mark 12:1-12

As you follow the parables and the fallout that came from the religious leaders who Jesus was targeting, you'll see that Jesus didn't change His Message. His Message always supported His Purpose.

Training Disciples to Reign

As we've seen in previous part of this series, Jesus was also training His disciples in how to 'reign' as they would continue His Work after He returned to Heaven. Jesus would often take his closest disciples (apostles) aside to train them for their service. The apostles knew that Jesus was the rightful King of Israel and would one day reign over Israel and the world. That sometimes led them to jockey for special positions in the coming Kingdom. Jesus' Message to them was consistent with His Purpose. These situations also became 'teachable moments' for the disciples as they learned what it would mean to 'reign' with Christ –

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. And He said to her, 'What do you wish?' She said to Him, 'Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom.' But Jesus answered and said, 'You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' They said to Him, 'We are able.' So He said to them, 'You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.' And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but

to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'

Matthew 20:20-28

If you are interested in learning more about how to 'train to reign,' I recommend you read the Gospels carefully and look at the consistency of Jesus' Messaging – to the crowds, to the religious leaders, and to His apostles. An important aspect of 'reigning' with Christ is the consistency of our message. The unfortunate fact that many preachers and teachers in churches and denominations have 'changed' the Gospel message (Christ's message) should tell anyone who cares about truth that much of what we hear today is ['false preaching and teaching.'](#)

Chapter Forty-Eight

As a journalist I pay attention to all the words a person says – but I focus on the first words and last words because they often identify ‘purpose and perspective.’

First Words

When Jesus of Nazareth started His earthly ministry after facing the devil in the wilderness, the Gospels record these words –

From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’

Matthew 4:17

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.’ Mark 1:15

Luke's Gospel account says that when Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee – 'news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.' One of the synagogues Jesus taught in was where He had been brought up in Nazareth. What did He say and do?

And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.' Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.' So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which

proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, 'Is this not Joseph's son?' Luke 4:16-22

The people who knew Jesus as a boy and young man were taken by surprise by what the Lord said. They saw Him as just a man because of their familiarity with Him. Jesus made a point to them that 'no prophet is accepted in His own country.' He then reminded them that God had worked through Gentiles in the past when His own people (the Jews) would not believe. Example – 'And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian' (Luke 4:27).

This caused 'all those in the synagogue' to be 'filled with wrath.' They 'rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.'

Another good place to study the early days of the Lord's teaching ministry is Matthew chapters 5 – 7. Known as the 'Sermon on the Mount,' Jesus demonstrated His authority and skill in handling God's Word correctly – unlike the Pharisees and Sadducees. In the vein of 'training to reign,' you could look at this lengthy Message as 'principles of the Kingdom.' Notice how Jesus began with 'blessings' in chapter 5 and ended with 'warnings' in chapter 7. One of the last things Jesus said in the Sermon sums it up well –

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. 'But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.' Matthew 7:24-27

It's no wonder that the people were 'astonished at His teaching' because 'He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes' (Matthew 23:28-29). As you read through His sermons and parables, you'll see how His words impacted the lives of people who supported Him and people who opposed Him. All of His words are important to someone wanting to 'train to reign.'

Final Words

As you read through the Gospel accounts you will find how Jesus developed His Message and how it eventually led to His arrest, mock trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. What I'd like to do now is focus on the 'final Words' of Jesus.

Jesus met privately with His closest disciples (the apostles) on the night before He was arrested and crucified. You'll find details in Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and John chapters 14 – 17. All of the Gospel accounts are important to read, but I want you to pay special attention to John 14 – 16. It is the most extensive of all of the accounts and includes what I believe are the Lord's prescription for how we should 'train to reign.'

Here's a short outline you can use for your study. I'm repeating this from the New King James Version of the New Testament –

- The Way, the Truth, and the Life
- The Father Revealed
- The Answered Prayer
- Jesus Promises Another Helper
- Indwelling of the Father and the Son
- The Gift of His Peace
- The True Vine
- Love and Joy Perfected
- The World's Hatred
- The Coming Rejection
- Jesus Warns and Comforts His Disciples
- The Work of the Holy Spirit
- Sorrow Will Turn to Joy
- Jesus Christ Has Overcome the World

- Jesus Prays for Himself
- Jesus Prays for His Disciples
- Jesus Prays for All Believers

What do you think of when you hear the word ‘reign?’ I think many of us see what the Lord’s disciples saw. They would sit on thrones next to Jesus as He and they ruled Israel and the world. There is a day when the Lord’s apostles will rule and reign with Him, but did that day come while the apostles were alive on the earth? No, in fact most were martyred. None of them reigned in this lifetime. That’s why Jesus told them what to expect before He went to the Cross –

“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept

My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. John 15:18-21

These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. John 16:1-4

After Jesus died on the Cross and rose from the dead, He spoke with His disciples again. Notice what He did and said, and consider how His Words impact the disciples' training to reign –

- Meeting two disciples on the road to Emmaus – ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Luke 24:25-27
- Meeting His disciples in Jerusalem – ‘Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have. When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, ‘Have you any food here?’ So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and

ate in their presence. Then He said to them, 'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.' And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.' Luke 24:38-49

- And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all

things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Matthew 28:18-20

- So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Feed My lambs.' He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Tend My sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?/ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed My sheep.' John 21:15-17
- The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the

things pertaining to the kingdom of God. And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, "you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.' Acts 1:1-8

After spending forty days with His disciples, Jesus ascended from earth back to Heaven. He had glorified His Father and finished the Work He was sent to do (John 17:4). Jesus would later call Saul of Tarsus to become His apostle to the Gentiles and reveal many secrets to him. Jesus would also later visit the Apostle John and reveal more secrets to him about the Tribulation, Millennial Reign, Great White Throne Judgment, and the New Jerusalem. All of these events, recorded for us in the New Testament, are for our use in learning how to 'train to reign.'

Chapter Forty-Nine

‘But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ Acts 1:8

Jesus spoke those words to His followers just prior to being ‘taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.’ To understand the importance of what Jesus said, we need to go back about six weeks before His Ascension.

Jesus and the Holy Spirit

On the night before Jesus died on the Cross, He told His apostles that He was going to leave them but would send the Holy Spirit to them as ‘another Helper’ – ‘the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.’ (John 14:15-17)

Jesus told the apostles that the Holy Spirit would –

- ‘teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.’ (John 14:26)
- ‘But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.’ John 15:26-27
- ‘He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and

you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.’ John 16:8-11

- ‘when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.’ John 16:13-15

After Jesus rose from the dead He met with His disciples and commissioned them for their ministry –

So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’ John 20:21-22

As Jesus prepared to return to His Throne in Heaven, He commanded His followers not to depart Jerusalem but ‘wait for the Promise of the Father.’ He said that John baptized with water, but He would baptize them with the Holy Spirit ‘not many days from now.’ That led the apostles to ask Jesus if He would ‘at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ Jesus replied – ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ (Acts 1)

The Apostles and the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit did 'come upon' the disciples about a week after the Lord's Ascension –

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2:1-4

The Apostle Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, preached a powerful message on the streets of Jerusalem about Jesus Christ – beginning with quotes from the prophet Joel –

And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy.

Acts 2:17-18

Peter began by saying, ‘But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.’ What the Jews in Jerusalem were witnessing on that Pentecost was the beginning of what Joel had prophesied centuries earlier. Peter went on to say that the Jews had killed the Messiah, but that God had raise Jesus from the dead. Their actions would have repercussions, thus the need for immediate repentance that would lead to their receiving the ‘gift of the Holy Spirit’ –

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.’ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. Acts 2:36-39

The 'Acts' of the Holy Spirit

Many people call the Book of Acts the 'Acts of the Apostles.' I understand why they think that, but I prefer to think of Acts as the 'Acts of the Holy Spirit.' You will find the Holy Spirit mentioned more times in the Book of Acts than any other Writing in Scripture (about 70 times). You'll find references to the actions of the Spirit in these chapters (sometimes multiple times in chapters) –

- Acts 1
- Acts 2
- Acts 4
- Acts 5
- Acts 6
- Acts 7
- Acts 8
- Acts 9
- Acts 10

- Acts 11
- Acts 13
- Acts 15
- Acts 16
- Acts 18
- Acts 19
- Acts 20
- Acts 21
- Acts 28

The Spirit of God did exactly what Jesus said He would. The Spirit taught the apostles ‘all things’ and brought to their remembrance what Jesus had said to them. The Spirit consistently ‘testified about Jesus.’ The Holy Spirit convicted the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. The Spirit guided the apostles ‘into all truth.’ The Holy Spirit did not speak on His own authority, ‘but whatever He hears He will speak.’ The Spirit told the apostles ‘things to come.’ The Spirit ‘glorified Christ.’ The Holy Spirit took of what belonged to Christ and ‘declared it’ to the apostles.

The Holy Spirit's 'Inspiration'

The Holy Spirit guided and directed the apostles in their ministries. That's quite evident in the Book of Acts. The Holy Spirit also 'inspired' (moved) the apostles as they taught, prophesied, and wrote –

'... knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:20-21

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

This means that the Spirit of God directed the writing of the apostolic letters, Gospel accounts, and Book of Acts. That's important for us to remember and consider. God guided the minds of the apostles to record spiritual truths for all who will read and believe.

Chapter Fifty

The Holy Spirit often inspired the apostles to speak of or write about Jesus Christ as ‘King’ and His ‘Kingdom.’ The Spirit also inspired the apostles to write that Christ’s disciples were ‘joint heirs’ with Christ and would ‘reign’ with Him as ‘kings and priests.’

However .. look around you. What do you see in your community? Your region? Your country? The world? Does it look like Christians are ruling and reigning with Christ as kings and priests? No, it doesn’t appear that way at all. In fact, Christians are finding themselves on the receiving end of hatred and persecution across the world – just as Jesus said would happen. So, how can the Spirit say we are ‘joint heirs’ and will reign as kings and priests when the world wants to destroy us?

The Call to Suffer

Christians are not above their Master. Jesus came from Heaven to earth to ‘suffer’ and so will we –

A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household! Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. Matthew 10:24 – 26

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. 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. Romans 8:16-18

It's important that Christians understand this principle. We will suffer with Christ and we will be glorified with Christ. When Jesus began His earthly ministry of 'suffering,' He met face-to-face with the devil showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and said – 'All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me' (Matthew 4:8-9). Jesus did not tell the devil that the kingdoms of the world were not his to give. Instead, Jesus replied – 'Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve' (Matthew 4:10).

The fact is that the devil is the 'god of this age' who has blinded the minds of those who are perishing (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). The God of Heaven gave this world to the devil for a short time, with certain limitations in what he can do (similar to what we read in the Book of Job). The Apostle Paul also referred to this as the 'present evil age' (Galatians 1:4). Jesus suffered and died to give Himself for our sins 'that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.'

Paul left Titus on Crete to ‘set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city’ (Titus 1:5). What did Paul want Titus to tell the Christians on Crete?

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

Titus 2:11-13

We live during a time of great spiritual suffering. It’s been that way for thousands of years. The people of God have been suffering since the devil deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). Jesus was as ‘Man of Sorrows’ who was ‘despised and rejected by men.’ He was ‘acquainted with grief’ (Isaiah 53:3). Christians for the last two thousand years are also people of sorrows, despised and rejected by men. We are also acquainted with grief. We are hated and

persecuted because the world hated and persecuted our Lord (John 15:18-20; 17:14). We should not expect to be treated differently than our Master.

So, how should we think about these sufferings?

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.

Romans 8:18-25

We are waiting for day when we will be saved from the sufferings of this world. So, as God's people living in this present age, what does He want us to do? How can we 'train to reign' in our current condition?

The Call to Subdue

‘fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over...’

Genesis 1:28

It's been awhile since I've mentioned the importance of 'subduing,' so let me remind us of this important truth. The Hebrew word translated 'subdue' is **קָבַשׁ** (kabash). It means to 'bring into bondage, bring into subjection.' Why did God mention 'subduing' the earth before having 'dominion' (rule, reign) over it? Because God knew His people would need to do that. How did God know that? Because God declared 'the end from the beginning' (Isaiah 46:10). God knew from Eternity what would happen in the Garden. He knows what's happening in your life right now and what will happen. He knows better than you do what you need to fight the spiritual battles you face now and will face in the future.

That's why the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles to write about how to 'subdue' our spiritual enemies –

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. 2 Corinthians 10:3-6

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Ephesians 6:11-13

But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.' Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. James 4:6-8

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 5:8-11

According to discussions I've had with Christians through the years, along with extensive national polling, it's sadly apparent that most people who identify as Christians don't understand what I just explained above. They don't understand suffering. They don't understand the origins or purposes of evil. Thus, they are not involved in spiritual warfare. They are living a cultural religiosity rather than the reality of the battles raging around us in the spiritual realms.

Given that fact, what hope do Christians have? What did the Holy Spirit inspire the apostles to teach that helps us understand what will one day save us from this evil age?

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. Philippians 3:20-21

As I quoted earlier from Paul's letter to Titus, we are 'looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.' What we're doing now is learning to 'subdue,' which is vital to 'having dominion.'

Chapter Fifty-One

Our ‘everlasting’ hope is always Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit made that abundantly clear in the Scriptures He inspired the apostles to write. What we are NOT doing is ‘living our best life now’ – no matter what some preachers may tell you. We struggle and suffer in this life, just like Jesus did – just like the apostles did – just like Christians have done for the last two thousand years. For anyone to think differently is ignoring the plain language of Scripture.

The Holy Spirit will not lie to us. He guides us into the truth – all of it – the good, the bad, and the hard to face. When Jesus said His followers would be hated for His sake, that was the truth. When the Lord said His disciples would be persecuted, that was the truth. The ‘seeker friendly’ preaching of today is an abomination to the truth. The ‘prosperity preaching’ of today is an abomination to the truth. Don’t believe it because all of it is a BIG LIE.

Look to God's Word, inspired by God, to find truth. Don't listen to the liars who call themselves 'gospel preachers.' They don't know the true Gospel of Christ. They are deceivers and liars. They do not preach or teach the same message that Jesus and His apostles taught. As Jesus said –

'Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. John 8:43-45

Many of today's preachers and teachers are children of their father the devil. Don't fall for their lies. Learn the truth and stand on it. You may think you are alone in the battle, but you are never alone because God's Spirit is always with you. The Holy Spirit lives in the real children of God. He does not live in the children of the devil – no matter what they call themselves.

We are currently in a mode of 'subduing.' We are fighting the good fight. We are engaged in spiritual warfare. However, that's just the first part of our lives as God's people. We are also 'kings and priests' to God and Father because Jesus Christ 'loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.' It is to Him that we can say – 'to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.' (Revelation 1:5-6)

On Earth As It Is In Heaven

Here is part of a prayer Jesus taught His disciples –

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:9-10

The ‘Kingdom’ of God is coming to the earth because the King of Heaven is returning to rule and reign. God’s ‘will’ will be done on earth in the same way it is in Heaven. That’s Christ’s promise to us.

Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’ Revelation 1:7-8

Jesus Christ is coming back to earth, but not as a baby. He will return as the Conquering King. That's why all the tribes of the earth will 'mourn' because of Him. The Lord will return to earth to 'strike the nations.' Jesus will 'rule them with a rod of iron.' He will tread 'the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God' (Revelation 19:15). That is the truth that the Holy Spirit teaches us in His Word. Jesus will return in a blaze of GLORY that will shine across the earth so that everyone will see Him and those who come with Him.

Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness

and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Revelation 19:11-16

Question – what will Christians do while Jesus is striking the nations and treading the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of God? We find the answer in Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians, a letter inspired by the Holy Spirit –

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

Many people speak of this as the ‘rapture’ of the saints. The Greek word for ‘caught up together’ is ἁρπάζω (harpázō – seize by force; snatch up, suddenly and decisively; catch up; caught away). Notice that once we are raised (if already passed away) or snatched up if still alive, we will ‘always be with the Lord.’ Based on other Scriptures in the New Testament, I believe we will go where Jesus goes. When He’s in Heaven, we’re in Heaven with Him. When He’s on earth, we’re on earth with Him. Christians will serve Jesus and rule and reign with Him.

Luke wrote that Jesus will ‘reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end’ (Luke 1:33). Angels told the Lord’s disciples that – ‘This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven’ (Acts 1:11). Jesus ascended into the sky from Mount Olivet and He will return to the same place before making His way into Jerusalem to take His rightful place on the Throne of David – and we will be with Him. Why? Because we will ‘reign’ with Him.

Our Reign with Christ

Paul wrote the Corinthian Christians that they would one day ‘judge the world’ and would ‘judge angels’ (1 Corinthians 6:2-3). What right will Christians have to judge anyone? We will have that right because the Lord gives us that right. Part of reigning with Christ is participating in His judgment and rule of this world.

Before our heads begin to swell, let’s remember that our ‘righteousness’ comes from Christ – not from ourselves (see the Book of Romans). Whatever ‘right’ we have to reign with Christ is because of God’s grace and goodness toward us. We are saved by grace ‘through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast’ (Ephesians 2:8-9). Should you get the urge to boast a bit, don’t. As Paul wrote the Galatians – ‘But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world’ (Galatians 6:14). No boasting allowed, unless we are boasting in what Jesus Christ did for us.

Remember – you received what you didn't deserve and didn't receive what you did deserve. So, no boasting except in Christ and His accomplishments.

Based on the knowledge that Christians will accompany the Lord Jesus wherever He goes, and that we will judge nations and angels with Him, look at these Scriptures and see your future self there –

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. Matthew 25:31-32

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived

and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book

was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:4-15

Once the Lord's work (and ours) is done on the earth, God will do away with the first heaven and first earth. He will create 'a new heaven and a new earth' (Revelation 21:1). God will reveal a new city, the New Jerusalem, 'coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' (Revelation 21:2). The 'tabernacle of God' will be with men, and 'He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people' (Revelation 21:3). God will 'wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away' (Revelation 21:4). What will become of us? 'And they shall reign forever and ever' (Revelation 22:5).

The benefit of all our training to reign with Christ is to serve Him in this life and the next life. We will judge nations. We will judge angels. We will serve Him based on our training throughout the Millennium. We will reign with Him forever and ever. That is why we train – to serve and glorify.

As Jesus said before He went to the Cross – ‘I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do’ (John 17:4). May that be our desire as well.

Chapter Fifty-Two

I started this series one year ago by asking several basic questions about life as a human being –

- Why do we exist?
- Why are we here on planet Earth?
- What's my purpose in life?
- What does the future hold for me?
- What will happen to me after I die?
- Why is there evil in the world?
- Why did God create the devil?

My hope is that I've answered these questions to your satisfaction in the previous 51 chapters. You'll find a link to all of the chapters at the end of this article. What I'd like to do in this last chapter of 'Train to Reign' is look again at the basics of our training during these years on earth. Based on what we read in Scripture, God's people need to be reminded – often.

The Seed

God promised the human race that He would send 'the Seed of the woman' to destroy the seed of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). As we follow God's plan through the generations we learn that the 'Seed' would come through the Jewish tribe of Judah

Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people. Binding his donkey to the vine, And his donkey's colt to the choice vine, He washed his garments in wine, And his clothes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, And his teeth whiter than milk. Genesis 49:8-12

But one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.' Revelation 5:5

Jesus Christ is that Royal Lion. He has the Name that is above all other names in the universe –

... and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1:19-23

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-11

Jesus is also the Root and Branch that came from Jesse – the father of King David of the tribe of Judah –

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. His delight is in the fear of the Lord, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist. Isaiah 11:1-5

Jesus Christ is the Promised Seed, Promised Root and Branch of Jesse, and Promised King of Israel – the Son of David who will reign over Israel forever and ever –

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

Jesus Christ is the Eternal Son of God. He is ‘above all things’ and ‘holds all things together’ –

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all

things He may have the preeminence. Colossians
1:15-18

The Five Training Basics

I chose FIVE training basics for this series. Most all of the training skills we will need to ‘train to reign’ are found in these five –

1. Believe in the Only True God (Monotheism)
2. Fear God and Obey Him
3. Worship God and Serve Him
4. Listen to God and Trust Him
5. Love God and Devote Your Life to Him

Believe

You may remember in some of the early chapters of this series that God's people struggled with believing that God is the Only True God. Paganism (idol worship) was a primary belief of the ancient world and impacted God's people as well as the rest of the human race.

When God gave His Law to Moses, belief in God alone topped the list –

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 'You shall have no other gods before Me.' 'You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.' Exodus 20:2-5

The other nations of the world were bowing to carved images of false gods, but God commanded Israel not to do that. Israel was supposed to be different than all the other nations.

Unfortunately, Israel disobeyed for centuries and paid terribly for their disobedience. It's also unfortunate that many Christians today are disobeying this training basic and turning their 'churches' and homes into places for pagan-style worship. They may not have a 'carved image' on the nightstand, but they are more committed to New Age thinking and practices than real Christian teaching. They have bought into 'doctrines of demons' over the teachings of Christ and His apostles.

The Galatians had a similar problem –

But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? Galatians 4:8-9

Why would Galatian Christians want to return to the very things that once held them in spiritual bondage? I could ask the same question of a majority of Christians in churches across our country today. Why practice those things now that kept you from knowing the love and mercy of God in the past? Why?

Believing in God is far more than intellectual assent. As James wrote – ‘You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!’ Real belief in God is a deep and abiding commitment to the God of Heaven. To believe is to obey.

Obey

Israel disobeyed God for generations and centuries. The Apostle Peter called the religious leaders on their disobedience when they faced the Sanhedrin and the potential of more imprisonment and even death for their belief in the risen Christ –

But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him. Acts 5:29-32

God gives the Holy Spirit to those who ‘obey’ Him. How do we obey God? We believe and ‘do’ what He says. God’s offer is not hard to understand, though it does seem hard for many to do.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household. Acts 16:31

But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For ‘whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ Romans 10:8-13

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:8-10

Continued obedience to God is expected within the teaching of the Bible, but what about those Christians who do not obey?

But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

2 Thessalonians 3:13-15

We have a responsibility to admonish and guide our fellow Christians toward a life of obedience to God and His Word.

Worship and Serve

Belief in God and obedience to Him should lead to a lifestyle of ‘worship and service.’ Jesus said this to the Samaritan woman at the well –

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.’ John 4:23-24

The Greek word translated ‘worship’ is προσκυνέω (*proskunéō*) and means ‘do reverence to, do obeisance to.’ This carried the idea of falling to the ground (either on one knee or prostrate) and kissing the ground before a superior. It is an act of ‘adoration.’ Belief in and obedience to God will lead to a worshipful adoration of our Creator.

During the time that the devil ‘tested’ Jesus in the wilderness, Jesus replied – ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve’ (Matthew 4:10). Worship of God should also lead to ‘service.’ To say that we love God and worship Him, yet do not serve Him, is a contradiction of terms and intent. Service naturally follows worship.

Listen and Trust

One of my favorite Bible verses is Proverbs 3:5-10 –

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

The wisdom from King Solomon for us today is that we should listen to God and not to others. We should not ‘lean’ on our own understanding of things, but trust in the Lord ‘with all your heart.’ We should ‘acknowledge God’ knowing that He will direct our paths.

Question – how do you know what to trust if you haven’t been listening? How do you acknowledge something you haven’t heard?

Listening to God means ‘hearing’ what He says. How do we know what God says? By reading what He says –

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds. Hebrews 1:1-2

Notice that God ‘spoke’ in time past to the ‘fathers’ by the ‘prophets. In these ‘last days’ God has ‘spoken to us by His Son.’ We ‘trust’ God by ‘listening’ to what He has said through the prophets and through His Son, Jesus Christ. We know from what Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into ‘all truth’ and that they would record that truth for us to hear.

When you read the Bible, you are ‘listening’ to God. When you are praying, you are ‘speaking’ to God. When you pray Scripture, you are listening and responding. That’s how God will ‘direct our paths.’

Love and Devotion

Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. Mark 12:29-31

To love someone with 'all' your heart, soul, mind, and strength is certainly a great love. It is also a great devotion. To love and devote yourself to God with every part of yourself means there is no place for selfish love. There is no place for loving anything that would distract or remove you from the full devotional love of God.

This sounds humanly impossible given our tendencies toward selfish behavior, so how do we do it? We learn through imitation –

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. Ephesians 5:1-2

God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is our example to imitate. We walk ‘in love’ (live our lives in love) by imitating Jesus Christ who loved us and gave Himself for us. Will that be a challenging thing to do as long as we live in this body of flesh? Yes, but that doesn’t mean we should not strive toward being like Christ –

For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:10-11

Subdue and Reign

An important part of ‘subduing’ as we ‘train to reign’ is to learn the lessons of ‘reckoning’ ourselves to be dead to sin, ‘but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ The Greek word translated ‘reckon’ is λογίζομαι (*logízomai*). It means ‘to consider’ based upon logical and reasonable thinking. It comes from the root word for ‘logic’ and carries the idea of using reason to reach a logical conclusion.

To ‘reckon’ ourselves dead to sin is a reasonable and logical conclusion to reach based on what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. We have no reason to consider ourselves alive to sin given that Jesus defeated sin and death through His crucifixion and resurrection. A Christian who thinks differently than that is illogical and unreasonable in their conclusion.

Free eBooks

My hope and prayer is that this year-long (52-part) series has been helpful as you seek God's will for your life. The eBooks that have come from this series are available free of charge, so please download and share with others as God leads. Some of your family and friends may prefer shorter volumes rather than this complete eBook.

You can download the [first 13 chapters of this series here](#).

You can download [chapters 14 – 24 of this series here](#).

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