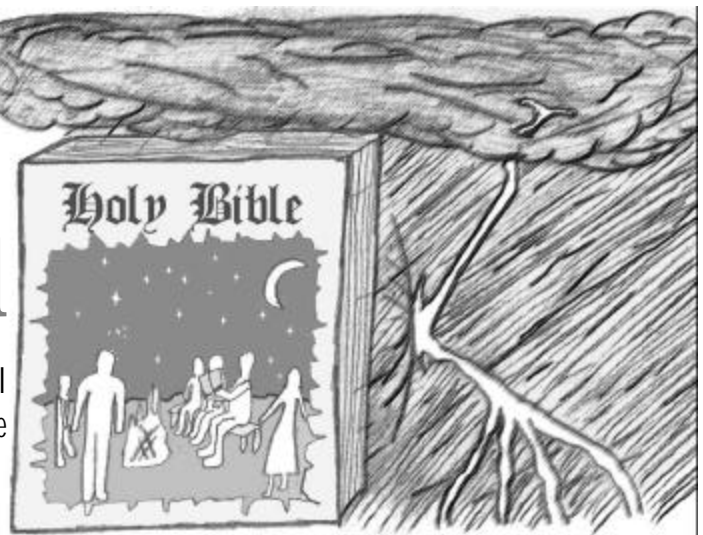


Shelter in the Word

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. You are my refuge and shield: I have put my hope in your Word.

—Psalm 91:1, 119:114



Vol. 1, No. 4

Helping you become self-sufficient in the Word—for a lasting relationship with the Almighty

Sept/Oct 1998

Hollywood Holiness

by Pam Dewey

Although you would likely find that a large proportion of the American population have never read the Bible book of *Exodus*, you would also likely find that an equally large proportion know much of the story that is told in that book. How can that be? Because the story has been memorialized by Hollywood in one of the most famous movies in motion picture history, *The Ten Commandments*. Starring Charlton Heston as Moses and Yul Brynner as the Egyptian Pharaoh, the movie made millions when it played in theaters in 1956, and



has since been replayed many times on television. Even folks who are totally uninterested in religion, and who may believe the miracles portrayed in the film are just fiction, find the movie entertaining and exciting.

In one way, it is good that such a film creates interest in Biblical stories and characters. In another way, it is bad. Since most producers of “Bible films” are not all that faithful to the “original script” from the Bible, those who take the Bible seriously end up with many misconceptions about what the Bible says.

As an example, consider the story of Moses’ life as portrayed in *The Ten Commandments*. The opening credits of the movie acknowledge that the screenwriters made use of fictional material as well as the Bible, but almost nobody remembers that. **Some** of the movie does follow the Bible quite closely, particularly in the depiction of his infancy. But there is a gross distortion of scriptural reality when it comes to many of the details of the rest of his life, and the lives of those around him.

Since the Bible account of his life up to the time of the “Exodus” is so sparing in detail (it takes only eight Bible pages to tell the whole story from the birth

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of Moses to his first appearance before Pharaoh to demand “Let my people go!”), the movie script writers had to “invent” enough details to fill out the plot. Unfortunately, most movie-goers had never read that part of the Bible, so they had no way of separating fact from fiction. Did Moses **really** save his own birth mother, Jochebed, from being crushed by a huge stone? Was Joshua prominent in the Biblical story before his part in the Exodus itself? Was there really a flirtation between Nefertiti and Moses, with Rameses II Moses’ rival for her affection? The answer to all of these questions is: “No.” At least, not based on any information from the Bible—which contains the only reliable historical information we have about the events portrayed in the movie.

In addition to the “facts” which get distorted when such material is brought to the movie screen, many producers have traditionally developed what one might refer to as a “Hollywood Holiness” concept. That is, they have certain methods they use to portray what they feel **must** be a necessity when dealing with Biblical topics: certain Biblical heroes must “look” holy.

How is this achieved? In *The Ten Commandments*, Charlton Heston undergoes an unusual transformation once he has seen the burning bush and encountered God. Right up to this point in the movie, he has looked the same as he did in Egypt—quite young and virile. Suddenly, after this encounter, subtle changes in makeup “age” him, and his demeanor becomes radically different. As one commentator put it, “He comes back acting and looking like a zombie.” Although the real Moses no doubt was greatly affected by his experiences, there is no “description” in the Bible that give a clue just **how** he looked and acted. This demeanor is part of what some Hollywood producers think “holiness” must look like.

According to the scriptures, Moses fled from

Egypt, and then spent a number of years in the land of Midian. There he served as a shepherd for a priest of Midian named Jethro, and married one of his daughters. The book of Exodus does not clearly spell out **how many** years Moses was away from Egypt. But Exodus 7:7 notes that Moses was **80 years old** when he came back to demand the release of the Israelites! Yet in the movie, Moses returns to Egypt to find everyone **else** looking the same as when he left. Nefertiti is still the same voluptuous young woman, Rameses and Joshua are still youthful, muscular “hunks”! Only Moses looks like he has aged.

There is nothing in the Bible that indicates that any of these “special effects” accurately portray what Moses actually looked like. What made Moses “holy” is that he was “set apart” (that’s the meaning of the word “holy”) for the service of God. And that he served God faithfully. Holiness isn’t something that shows up as an expression on someone’s face. It is something **within**. And it is exemplified by **actions and words** in relation to God and to fellow man—not by the tilt of one’s head or gaze of one’s eyes.

This Hollywood Holiness concept is even more prominent in movies based on the life of Jesus. Whether Jeffrey Hunter in 1961’s *King of Kings* or Ted Neely in 1973’s *Jesus Christ Superstar*, most fellows chosen to play Jesus throughout the years in movies have had a certain “look”. This, despite the fact that we have absolutely **no** descriptions from the Bible or secular history on what Jesus looked like! Typically, the “Jesus” of films has been either significantly taller or shorter than most of his disciples; of a fairly slender build while many of his disciples are quite muscular; light-colored, shoulder-length hair while most if not all of his disciples have short hair; fair skin and piercing eyes... usually blue, while his disciples commonly have darker skin,

Shelter in the Word is designed to help people become self-sufficient in their Bible study, so that they may be able to serve the Almighty Creator, and receive salvation through His Son. *Shelter* is not affiliated with any denomination, and teaches that eternal life is available to **individuals** who live by the Bible, regardless of their belonging to a church organization.

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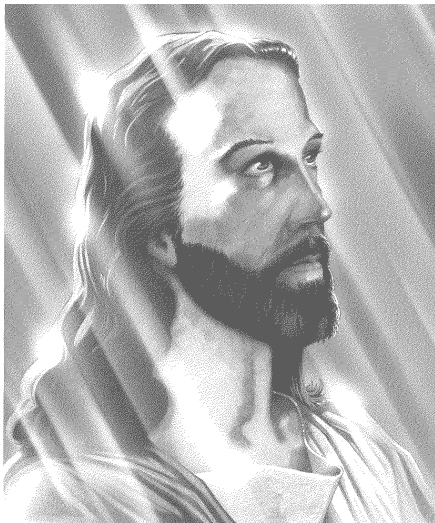
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darker hair and darker eyes. He usually wears white robes while everyone else in the scene is wearing dark robes. And his demeanor is frequently what could best be described as “ethereal.”



Ethereal gaze of typical Hollywood Jesus, not based upon any biblical description

The “Biblical epic” movie *King of Kings* is a good parallel to *The Ten Commandments* in its approach to scriptural accuracy and portrayal of “holiness” of its main character. From the very beginning of the story, there are **significant** departures from the Biblical details. There is the “addition” of material to “fill in the blanks” in the Biblical version of the story—for instance, many private discussions among the various Roman authorities such as Pilate and Herod, which have no basis in the Bible or historical records. This is understandable as “creative license” to carry the story along.

But there is also significant distortion of details which **are** in the scripture. Regarding the incident in which Jesus comes to where John the Baptist is baptizing in the Jordan River, and presents himself to be baptized, the movie has absolutely **no** dialogue between the two. The discussion between the two of them which is part of the Biblical narrative is totally missing. There is merely much “gazing” at one another—with Jeffrey Hunter’s piercing light blue eyes exemplifying the “ethereal” look which the producer obviously feels is necessary to portray the “holiness” of Jesus. Yet later, totally outside the Biblical narrative, the movie shows John the Baptist visiting Mary, the mother of Jesus. He asks **her** why Jesus came to be baptized by him, and protests to **her** that Jesus is sinless and not in need of baptism.

Later, John is seen in the streets of Jerusalem, shouting condemnation of the Roman occupation of Judea—almost as if he is considered a “revolutionary”. Yet the words coming out of his mouth are some of the same ones which, in the Bible itself, he directs to the Jewish **religious** leaders of the day! John told Herod that he was sinning by having his brother’s wife (Mark 6:18), but there is no indication that John was a “rabble-rouser” against Rome. It is totally unclear why the producers felt such distortions of the plot-line of the Bible were necessary!

In another incident, the case of the woman caught in adultery described in John 8, the movie totally distorts many of the aspects of this also. In the Bible, the Pharisees bring the woman to Jesus, obviously to trip him up with questions about the situation. And Jesus calmly dialogues with them, suggesting that the one among them without sin should cast the first stone. Sensing they have lost the “game”, they slink away. But in the movie, the woman is being chased through the streets by a violent mob bent on stoning her, and only “accidentally” runs into Jesus. There are no questions from any Pharisees, only a suggestion by Jesus that one of the crowd cast the first stone. Later, also totally outside the Biblical narrative, this **same** woman comes to the home of Mary also, seeking Jesus. And there she is identified as Mary Magdalene! Again, it is not at all clear why the producers felt it necessary to alter the Biblical account so drastically.

It is obvious throughout the movie that the producers intend for Hunter to look significantly “different” at all times from those about him. It seems to be that they think, “Otherwise, how would the audience know **he** is supposed to be the ‘holy one’ in the movie?” As described above, most of the disciples have dark, short hair, dark eyes, swarthy skin, stocky builds, dark robes. Hunter has light auburn shoulder-length hair, those piercing bright blue eyes, light skin, a slender build, a bright white robe in most scenes. While many of his disciples are quite “plain” looking, Hunter has strikingly handsome, classic “good looks”.

But all of this is totally unbiblical! There is nothing in the scriptures which indicate that Jesus looked somehow significantly different from the average Jewish male of His day. Several times, he escaped those who were angry with him by simply passing into a crowd (Luke 4:30; John 8:59; 10:39). In order to do this, he had to be about the same height and skin color as the others around him, and had to be dressed similarly—otherwise, he would be easy to follow. He also had to wear his hair in the same “style” most other men

wore (which historical records indicate was generally quite short at the time—not the shoulder-length locks usually chosen for “Jesus” figures).

It is highly **unlikely** that He would have chosen the bright white robes of the average “Jesus movie”—travelling the dusty roads of Palestine would not have made it very easy to keep anything very white! In fact, if He **did** somehow differ so distinctly from others around Him as portrayed in such movies, there would have been no need for Judas to betray Him with a kiss his final night before His death (Matt 26:47-49). Judas could have merely told the authorities to look for the fellow in the bright white robe with the ethereal look—and the halo!

Just as in the reality of the holiness of Moses, the holiness of Jesus would not necessarily have been somehow evident all the time in His facial expression—He had the same variety of facial expressions as any other human. He smiled, laughed, cried, frowned. The true holiness of Jesus was in His inner nature, the fact that He was the Son of God in the flesh, set apart as the Savior of Mankind. And it also, like the holiness of Moses, was exemplified by what He **said and did**, not by some ethereal gaze of steely blue eyes.

No, there is often little or no connection between “Hollywood’s” standard portrayal of “Holiness” and the Bible’s. Although we may enjoy portrayals of Biblical events in movies and television, we need to be sure that we realize that what we see on the screen may not always line up with what is on the pages of our Bible. The Bible isn’t just a source of entertaining stories. It is the communication between our Creator and us, His Creation. It is the source of understanding of the meaning of life. It outlines the Plan of God to redeem us from our sinful lives and renew us in the image of His Son. It contains the guidance we need to live full lives now, and prepare to live eternally in fellowship with our Father and our Savior. We can’t allow the distortions of the entertainment industry to garble that information and mislead us about what is true—and **holy**.

If you are striving to be more righteous—more holy in your life, or if you are looking for more friends that are this way, you need to make sure you have a biblical concept of holiness, not “Hollywood holiness”. When new movies are advertised a common phrase in the ads has been, “You’ve read the book—now see the movie!” In the case of movies with a Biblical theme, we would encourage the reverse:

“You’ve seen the movie, now read The Book!”



Look In Your Heart

(author unknown)

A soldier was finally coming home after having fought in the Vietnam War. He called his parents from San Francisco. “Mom and Dad, I’m coming home, but I’ve a favor to ask. I have a friend I’d like to bring home with me.” “Sure,” they replied, “we’d love to

“There’s something you should know,” the son continued, “He was hurt pretty badly in the fighting. He stepped on a land mine and lost an arm and a leg. He has nowhere else to go, and I want him to come live with us.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, son. Maybe we can help him find somewhere to live.” “No, Mom and Dad, I want him to live with us.” “Son,” said the father, “You don’t know what you’re asking. Someone with such a handicap would be a terrible burden on us. We have our own lives to live, and we can’t let something like this interfere with our lives. I think you should just come home and forget about this guy. He’ll find a way to live

At that point, the son hung up the phone. The parents heard nothing more from him until a few days later when they received a call from the San Francisco police. Their son had died after falling from a building, they were told. The police believed it was suicide. The grief-stricken parents flew to San Francisco and were taken to the city morgue to identify the body of their son. They recognized him, but to their horror they also discovered something they didn’t know, their son had only one arm and one leg.

The parents in this story are like many of us. We find it easy to love those who are good-looking or fun to have around, but we don’t like people who inconvenience us or make us feel uncomfortable—especially if they are “outsiders”—not important to us.

We would rather stay away from people who aren’t as healthy, beautiful, or smart as we are. Thankfully, there’s someone who won’t treat us that way. Someone who loves us and welcomes us into the forever family, regardless of how messed up we are.

Tonight, before you tuck yourself in for the night, you might pray that God will give you the strength you need to accept people as they are, and to help us all be more understanding of those who are different from us!!!

What Is True Spirituality?

By Richard Wiedenheft

Scene 1: Fred is washing his car; Wes is praying. Who is the more spiritual?

Scene 2: Fred is playing golf; Wes is reading his Bible. Who is engaged in the more spiritual activity?

Scene 3: Fred is reading National Geographic; Wes is singing hymns. Who is the more spiritually-minded?

To some, being spiritual means praying and studying the Bible more. To some it means going to church more, or saying, "Praise the Lord" and "Thank you, Jesus" more. To others it means being in compliance with all of God's laws, shunning physical pleasures and possessions, devoting oneself to religious activities.

A Lesson from Corinth

The church at Corinth was noted for spiritual gifts and experiences. The Believers there were zealous about participating in public worship. Paul wrote of them, "When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation" (I Cor 14:26b). They spoke in tongues, interpreted tongues, prophesied, discerned spirits, healed people, and did other miracles. But were they spiritual?

Paul told them straight out, "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly" (I Cor 3:1-3a). Among the Christians at Corinth there were envyings, strife, divisions, sexual immorality, lawsuits, meetings

that did more harm than good—their supernatural gifts notwithstanding!

Many Christians today believe that the truly spiritual are those who have a very vocal and emotional form of worship; those who speak in tongues; or pray passionate prayers; or heal the sick. The experience of the Corinthians should warn us that such evidence, by itself, is no guarantee of true spirituality. Indeed, Christians who place a strong emphasis on supernatural experiences as a measure of spirituality, may find that they live from one experience to the next. In between, they may feel empty and lonely—like a drug addict between fixes. Supernatural experiences may be gifts from God, but they are not to be equated with true spirituality.

Jesus warned, "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matt 7:22). No, miracles and supernatural experiences do not necessarily indicate true spirituality.

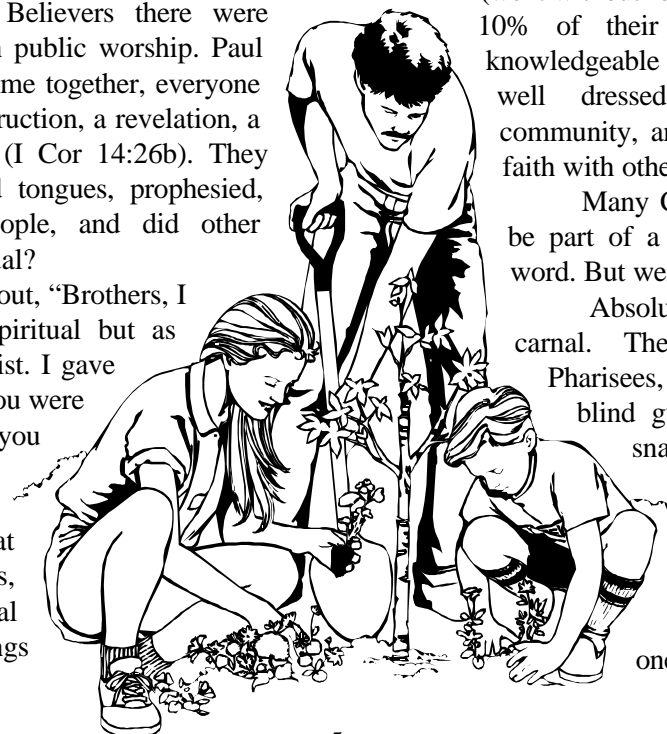
A Lesson from Judea

They were a devoutly religious group of people, very careful to live in harmony with the laws of God. They attended worship services regularly, prayed faithfully, fasted (went without food) frequently and tithed (gave 10% of their income). They were very knowledgeable of the Scriptures. They were well dressed, well respected in the community, and very zealous to share their faith with others.

Many Christians today would love to be part of a group so dedicated to God's word. But were these people spiritual?

Absolutely not! They were very carnal. They were the Scribes and Pharisees, whom Jesus called hypocrites, blind guides, whited sepulchres, and snakes! They were fastidious about technical obedience, about obedience that could be seen by others; but they were not at all spiritual.

It is possible to dedicate oneself to studying the Bible,



cataloguing all the laws of God from both the Old and New Testament, striving to be in compliance with **all** of them and yet to miss the whole point of what the Bible teaches. No, strict obedience to Biblical laws is not to be equated with true spirituality.

Spiritual vs. Physical Activities

Many Christians tend to think of activities like prayer, Bible study, fasting and going to church as spiritual; they view cooking supper, watching TV, shopping, and playing games as physical or carnal.

The fact is, however, that praying, studying and church going can be fleshly, carnal activities. A person can pray for “show” or because he is supposed to; his prayers can be full of vain repetitions or self-righteous praise (Matt 6:5-7; Luke 18:10). A person can study the Bible just because it is the accepted thing to do among his circle of friends; or he can do it in order to debate doctrines, or to do better at Bible trivia games. (2Tim 2:14; Titus 3:9).

Consider going to church as an example. How many people sleep late before church, rush around to get ready, gripe at their mates or children because they aren’t ready on time, struggle to pay attention to the sermon; talk about all the people on the way home and have “roast preacher” for lunch? Contrast this with the person who takes a box of doughnuts to the widow lady down the street, reads a story to a young child who doesn’t have a father, or shares the Gospel with a business associate. He is undoubtedly more spiritual than many, many people who go to church regularly.

So-called religious activities, while they have their place, do not necessarily make one spiritual. In fact, one can do them all and not even be a true Christian.

Miraculous Transfer

The first requirement for true spirituality is to be translated from the kingdom of darkness to the eternal, spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians: “For [God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:13-14). To be truly spiritual, one must first be a Christian; he must have the spirit of God dwelling within him. “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the spirit of God dwells in you... For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” (Rom 8:9,14). Without God living in you, it is impossible to be truly spiritual,

no matter how many laws you obey, no matter how much religious activity you engage in.

The greatest spiritual act of all is for a sinner to turn to his Redeemer in repentance—to look to the Son of God and believe on Him. As Jesus promised, “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40).

But believing on the Son of God, being translated into the kingdom of Jesus Christ is only the beginning. As is quite evident from the example of the Corinthians, one can be a Christian and still be quite carnal.

Loving God

The first of the two great commandments is to love God with all one’s heart, soul and mind. True spirituality begins with a love for the God who has redeemed us from darkness and given us the promise of eternal life.

The psalmist compared his longing for God with a thirsty deer panting for a stream of water (Pslm 42:1,2). A young man in love just can’t get enough of his sweetheart; he yearns to be with her, to talk to her, to learn all about her, to find out what pleases her. In like manner, a truly spiritual person yearns for fellowship with his heavenly Father. He yearns to talk to his Father in prayer, he loves to come before His throne in heaven, praising, thanking, petitioning the One who has given him life. He longs to learn more about his Father by reading the Word of God. But he reads not to discover technical truth; he reads to learn more about the very character and nature of the God he loves—so he can become more like Him.

Just as human lovers don’t all express their love in precisely the same way, so those who love God won’t express it exactly as others. Some will do it openly and verbally; others will do it more privately. Our challenge is not to evaluate the way others express or don’t express their love from their heavenly Father; our challenge is to make sure that we deeply love Him.

Living Out Godly Character

Jesus said, “All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another” (John 13:35). To be spiritually minded means to love others just as God has loved us. To deeply care about others as individuals—to want what is best for them in the eternal frame of things and to do our best to help them get it.

It is relatively easy to obey a “list of rules” such as many churches give their members. This can even be accomplished by those who are not spiritual. A much

greater challenge is to evidence the character of God as enumerated by the fruit of the spirit listed in Galatians 5:22: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Every day brings new opportunities to practice these. And one who is truly spiritual will be doing just that—with his family, his friends, coworkers, fellow brethren, even his enemies. The character of God will shine through him or her in a thousand different ways as he or she interacts with others. The love of God will flow through him to all with whom he comes in contact.

Obviously, we all fall far short in showing the love of God in our day-to-day activities—and that's one reason, I believe, that we tend to emphasize and hold up other things as measures of spirituality. Because we are so inadequate in showing forth the character and nature of God in our daily lives, we emphasize technical obedience to legal requirements, or religious activities, or supernatural experiences, or dedication to a church group. In these we can attain some measurable, observable degree of success.

To be spiritually minded involves the way we think and act—24 hours a day. It involves having the very character of God written in our hearts. It means that God's nature is shining through in our lives—whether we're washing the car, working on the job, reading a book, playing with children, or going to church services (1Jn 3:24; 5:3; Rom 7:14).

Being spiritually minded does not imply being off on some ethereal trip. It does not mean living on a continual mental/emotional high or **feeling** "spiritual". It doesn't mean rejecting all the physical things of life! For we **are** physical—God made us that way. He gave us physical bodies, which require physical care. He put us in a physical world with other physical beings—in hope—in hope that through His power we would learn spiritual values and principles, **His** values and principles.

Those who try to run away from the physical aspects of life (renouncing property, marriage, recreation, socializing, etc.) may be turning their backs on the very means that God has given us to learn true spirituality. For true spirituality means applying Godly, spiritual principles in our physical lives. It means learning to cope with and handle all the physical problems of life—as Jesus would. It means dealing with every-day situations according to the will of God.

God is love. True spirituality means sharing love with physical people—day by day. It means bending physical ears to listen to other people. It means using physical hands to help others handle physical burdens

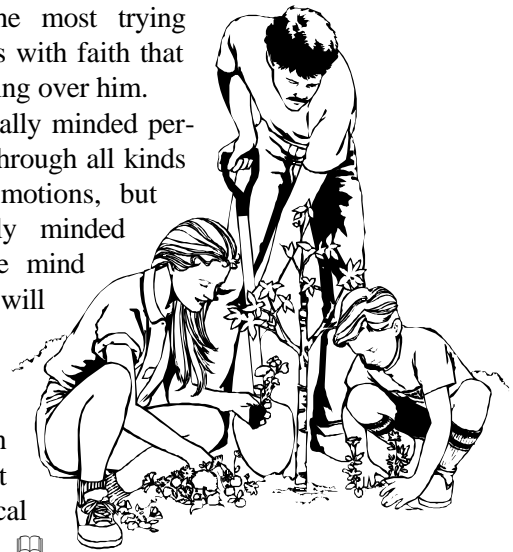
or feed physical mouths with physical food. It means being patient in aggravating situations—being kind to others even though they may not be kind to us.

The truly spiritual Christian is not necessarily the one who is zealous in "church work", but the one who is patient with her husband and kind to her neighbors. It's not necessarily the one who studies the Bible for hours on end, but the one who controls his emotions and prays for and lovingly helps even those who dislike him. It's not the one who prays eloquent prayers, but the one who is at peace with himself, his friends, his co-workers and his neighbors.

Prayer, study, fasting, attending church services are no measure of spirituality. They are important tools that can and should help us to become more spiritual. They may be likened to a carpenter's tools. But the value of his work is not found in how effectively he can use these tools nor in how much time he spends using them. Rather it is found in the structures he builds with them. He will receive no praise if he brags: "I swung my hammer 3,458 times today and missed the nail only 5 times." But if he has a beautiful cabinet to show, he has been truly effective! What counts is the end product, not the tools that are used to produce it. So a Christian gets no credit for using the tools of spiritual growth. What counts is the end product—an intimate, personal relationship with God and love toward one's neighbor. What counts is an individual filled with love, joy, peace, compassion—all the fruit of God's Spirit.

The truly spiritual person is the one who, having been purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ, reflects the character of God in everything he does—in his work, in his home, with his neighbors, with his friends—even with his enemies. He is the one who can face even the most trying circumstances with faith that God is watching over him.

A carnally minded person may go through all kinds of religious motions, but the spiritually minded will have the mind of God—and will be applying His spiritual principles in every aspect of his physical life.



Simple Living

by Tommy Willis

Simple living will aid you in learning to live a full life. You can learn to enjoy the magnificence of every day, experiencing the present moment more fully.

Nineteenth century author Henry David Thoreau watched the society in his day, and saw the unhappy lot that most were in by their endless pursuit of materialism. He said, “men labor under an illusion”. And that illusion has grown worse since Thoreau’s day.

The endless pursuit of wealth—to get the better car, the newest gadget or the bigger house. The list is endless. And it forever keeps most in the rat race, so busy obtaining possessions they are not free to experience the beauty of the present moment.

Travel light, reduce your baggage. Clear the decks for action! You will be better able to follow the lead of God’s Spirit, and the direction He wants you to go.

Possessions can choke the Word. In His “parable of the sower”, Jesus declares: “The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful” (Mat. 13:22).

As Americans, we think we are free because we have more freedoms than other nations. But the leash we are on is made of dollars. Possessions can control us, but not so easily if we travel light. You cannot serve God and mammon (“wealth and riches”).

Some learn to break free from these bonds. They learn to function as an individual in an institutionalized society. It gives them a better view. Their perceptions are not colored by the organizational pattern of thinking that is drilled into us from childhood on. But there are many “golden calves” some of us still bow down to. And God says get rid of them, one by one, so we can walk with Him.

When I have shared these principles of simple living with others, many times people think I’m talking about an austere life. But these principles lead you to a fuller life! It has been a blessing for me to learn these principles, for they have aided me to seek out God more fully. They will help you be more free from distraction so that you can better concentrate on God.

Do we really need that better car, or the newest microwave oven, bigger TV, electric knife? And the list is endless. Cannot our lives be richer by doing with less? Materialism is one of the worst “complicators” in most peoples lives, and it can be rejected. The complexity of

your life can be reduced by doing so. The way to go about it is to cut back in a way that fits your individual make-up. What works for one person may not work for another. Simplify your life in a way that’s comfortable for you. You need not always follow the outline of another.

This is such an important element to learn about life, because there are options that most people don’t realize are there. We don’t take the time to examine and see what our true needs are. This is the reason so many fail to come to know themselves.


We get out of school, get a job, and then get on the treadmill of the “work and spend” cycle, which keeps us endlessly seeking more. But we could learn to be content with a lot less, and step out of the rat race and into a fuller life.

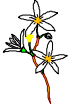
We praise those who are of independent spirit, but we are a nation of sheep with our consumer behavior. In the book *Overworked Americans* the author writes, “Americans are caught in a squirrel cage. They work harder every year but don’t feel better off. The pressure to work long hours comes from all directions. Work becomes a measure of self worth, working long hours becomes a virtue and going home a weakness.”

You don’t have to follow the herd into this maddening pace. If you truly desire to simplify your life there are other options. Our bulimia for consumption eats away at our time. No wonder so many Christians are so distracted from the prayer life necessary to walk with God. We are caught up like a bunch of swarming bees, with the rush of the world’s ways. We are not aware of the passage of time and how fleeting it all is. Moses asked God to make him aware of how fleeting it all is (Ps 90:12) that he would gain a heart of wisdom.

Caught up in the rush of endlessly seeking more, we lack the wind for the long distance race of reflection. Think my friends, think! Let God lead you into a simple life. Take the time for reflection, and find out what your true needs are. Through your prayer life let Him direct you into a life that’s freer from distraction, that you may be able to be led into the full life that He wants for you.

I am not advocating retirement from work, for work is good for us. But what I am trying to share is retirement from the world’s ways.

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world the world passes away, and the lust thereof, but he that does the will of God lives forever.” (1 John 2:15,17). 



I asked God to spare me pain.

God said: "No. Suffering draws you apart from worldly cares and brings you closer to Me."

I asked God to make my spirit grow.

God said: "No. You must grow on your own, but I will prune you to make you fruitful."

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life.

God said: "No. I will give you life so that you may enjoy all things."

I asked God to help me LOVE others, as much as He loves me.

God said: "Ahhhh..... finally you have the idea!"



It's About Time

Biblical Chronology Made Easy!

Abraham

Because the first chapter of Genesis goes right back to “the beginning” of recorded history, people sometimes get the erroneous impression that the Bible attempts to offer “the history of the Earth”. If that were so, it fails miserably! In the chapters of Genesis, whole periods of hundreds of years are passed over in a few sentences—and at times, totally ignored. And yet later in the same book, whole chapters are devoted to the events of just one day. Some Old Testament individuals are mentioned only once, and even then, only in passing. Yet others are named over and over again—not only in the Old Testament, but numerous times in the New Testament also.

This is because the Bible isn’t intended to be a comprehensive history of the existence of Mankind on the earth. It is rather in particular a chronicle of the relationship of one man’s family with the Creator of the Universe. And it is the record of that Creator’s intention to bless all of Mankind through the descendants of that man. People are introduced in the early chapters of Genesis not primarily for the details of their own history, but as preludes to the history of the family of that one man—his ancestors, and the ancestors of those who would inter-react some day with his descendants.

That one man is Abraham. The early chapters in Genesis establish his lineage from Adam. After Abraham himself is introduced, the later chapters in Genesis follow his children, his grandchildren, and their descendants for a period of about 500 years, leading up to the time of Moses.

The nation of Israel, which is the main focus of the rest of the Old Testament, is made up of direct descendants

of Abraham through his grandson Jacob (whose name was changed by God later in his life to the name “Israel”). Many blessings and promises were made to the people of that nation, not because of their own standing before God, but because they inherited a promise that God made to their forefather Abraham. Later, the “Jews” are introduced, who are the descendants of Judah, one of the sons of Israel. Jesus Himself was born a Jew, and thus was a descendant of Abraham.

But what of those who are not one of the physical descendants of Abraham? Why should they care about his story and the story of his family? In the New Testament, we are told “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed [descendants], and heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:29).

This applies to those who are not descended by **blood** from Abraham, but are rather “spiritual” descendants because they believe in Christ. Thus the story of Abraham is relevant to Christians and Jews alike.

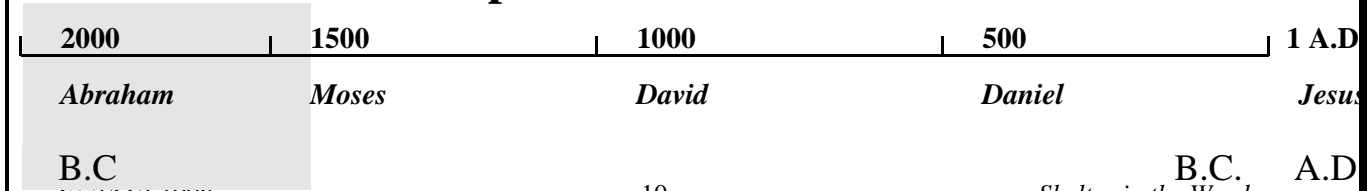
Therefore, we start the main section of our timeline of Biblical history with the life of Abraham, who lived in approximately 2000 B.C. That is, about 2,000 years before the time of Christ.

Before the time of Abraham, the scriptures are somewhat vague on when certain events happened. Although there is some dispute among scholars, *Halley’s Bible Handbook* gives an **approximate** date for the creation of Adam of about 4,000 B.C. The Flood of Noah’s time may have happened about 1,500 years later, in about 2500 B.C. Thus, the time of Abraham is **approximately** 500 years after the Flood.

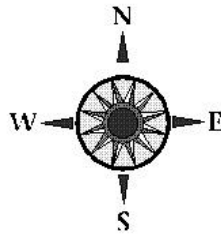
Once you have committed to memory that Abraham’s lifetime centers generally around the time period of 2000 B.C., you can pinpoint the general timeframe of a number of Biblical events and characters. Abraham’s son by his wife Sarah was Isaac. Isaac’s son by his wife Rebekah was Jacob. You can read about the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in chapters 11 through 50 of Genesis. Thus any Bible stories which include these characters can be positioned shortly after 2000 A.D., long before Moses—who is the next person we will be discussing on our timeline, and who lived **around** the time of 1500 B.C.

—PSD

Simplified Bible Time Line



Navigating the Bible



New Testament Overview

by Norman S. Edwards and Pam Dewey

Almost any letter you receive in the mail will have a date at the top of the page. If not, the envelope in which it came will probably have a “post mark” date. Almost any book, today, will contain the date that it was published. It may even have a preface that gives the date that the author actually finished the work.

But **none** of the books that make up the New Testament contain the date they were written. With the possible exception of the book of Revelation, it seems that all of the New Testament writers were simply trying to honestly tell a story to their readers—not write a document that would be read through all history. Some of the books speak of events that can be matched up to historical Roman records, and we can know the general order of the books by their content.

In a very general way, the New Testament books are ordered by the events that they describe:

Category	Books of Bible	Description
Gospels (“Gospel” means “good news”)	Matthew, Mark, Luke, John	Story of Jesus’ teachings, life, death & resurrection
Acts of the apostles	Acts	Continues after Gospels, story of the early believers
Letters (or epistles) of the apostle Paul	Romans, 1&2Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2Thessalonians, 1&2Timothy, Titus, Philemon	Mostly letters sent to congregations. The last 4 were sent to individuals (for which each book is named).
Letter to the Hebrews	Hebrews	Letter, probably by Paul, to Hebrew believers
General letters (or epistles)	1Peter, 2Peter, 1John, 2John, 3John, Jude	Letters sent by Peter, John & Jude
Revelation	Revelation	Revelation of Christ

		to the apostle John
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The “books” of the New Testament are not really “books” in the sense we use the word today. They are instead short “documents” bound into a collection. Some of these documents are biographies; some are letters.

The Gospels and Acts are more like histories and were probably written **after** the various letters, even though the events they covered occurred **before** the letters. Scholars have been able to **estimate** an approximate date for **some** of the books and letters based on hints within the text that can be synchronized with known dates from secular history. This estimation is sometimes sure within a few years, but in other instances can only pin down a broad period of as much as forty years.

One positively dated event of the first century is the conquering of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. In the fighting leading up to this event, hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed. Most of the Jews and Christians were scattered far from Jerusalem. This date marked the end of the Temple, the Levitical priesthood, animal sacrifices, and many of the Old Testament rituals. None of the books of the New Testament directly mention this event. Therefore, it is likely that most of the New Testament books were written before 70 A.D. Revelation, however, does not mention a functioning church in the nation of Israel at all, so it may have been written well after the fall of Jerusalem.

Even with the many uncertainties, we can make a **general** statement of the time period of the New Testament. It was all written after the death of Jesus, and, according to most conservative Biblical scholars, was all completed before the end of the first century (100 A.D.). The exact years of Jesus’ birth and death are in some dispute. Most scholars put his death somewhere between 28 and 33 A.D. Thus, the writing of the New Testament cannot span more than a period of 70 years.

“Witnesses” for Jesus

Jesus left no documents written by His own hand preserved for others to study. He instead left “living” documents—His apostles. (The word “apostle” means “one sent”.) He had lived with them and taught them personally for three and a half years. Before His death, He promised to send them the Holy Spirit:

John 14:26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

And after His resurrection, He commissioned them as “witnesses” to take the story of His life, teach-

ings, death and resurrection to the world. After the coming of the Holy Spirit, recounted in Acts 2, those apostles did as He had commanded, and began spreading the “Gospel” (which means “Good News”) far and wide. In addition to the apostles, who were constant companions of Jesus, there were another 120 men and women who had been with Him much of the time during his ministry. These 120 were also recipients of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

As the apostles took their “testimony” to the public, many believed them, and became part of this “new way of life”. The apostles taught these things to other trustworthy men and women, and these too spread the message.

A short time later, a man named “Saul”, who was a devout Jew and one who despised these “new” teachings about Jesus, became involved in severely persecuting those who accepted the “Gospel of Jesus”. He even had some of them put to death. But then he had an amazing, supernatural encounter with the very Jesus whose followers he was persecuting. You can read of this encounter in Acts 9. As a result, Saul’s name was changed by Jesus to “Paul”. He was taught by the resurrected Jesus, and also was commissioned to be a “witness” to the world of the risen Jesus.

Spreading the Word

At this point in time, the only “Scriptures”, or “holy, inspired writings”, used were the books of the Old Testament. The apostles and their followers taught both from the truths in those books, and from the oral teachings handed down by the apostles from Jesus Himself. Wherever they went, when a group of people in one area believed their message and wanted to become a part of this “Way”, they gathered together in what came to be called *ekklesias* in Greek—groups of “called-out ones.” The word *ekklesia* is translated in most English Bibles as “church”. Thus the word “church” doesn’t mean a building for religious meetings, nor even an official, incorporated organization of men with a “constitution and by-laws” recognized by secular governments. It means simply the assembly of people in an area which gather in the name of Jesus to worship.

Within two decades of the resurrection of Jesus, there were numerous such assemblies of believers in countries all around the Mediterranean Sea. The apostles and other teachers who were responsible for bringing the Gospel to these groups occasionally wrote letters (called “epistles” in the King James Bible) to these assemblies, or to leaders of such assemblies. Such letters would give encouragement, offer advice, might give

admonishment for problems the group was having, would clear up misunderstandings about doctrinal matters and would refresh their memories about some of the things they had been taught. These letters were highly valued by the recipients, who often made copies of them to share with other nearby assemblies. And eventually these copies were gathered together in collections. From the earliest times it was recognized that such writings of Peter, Paul and other teachers were inspired by God through the Holy Spirit, and represented the same kind of Truth that was contained in the other Scriptures.

All of the documents of the New Testament **after** the book of Acts were originally letters of this kind. The book of Revelation is a bit different, in that most of the content is description of an elaborate prophetic vision given by Christ to the Apostle John. But it is addressed by John in the beginning as a letter to seven assemblies, in the province of “Asia”. Within the prophecy, Christ gave John specific messages to send to each of those assemblies in Asia.

Life & Times of Jesus—and Beyond

The first four books of the New Testament are entirely different from these “epistles”. They are, instead, four biographies of the life of Jesus. Most Biblical scholars agree that there were likely a number of documents in the early years after the resurrection of Jesus that collected His “sayings” to share with believers. As the years passed after the death of Christ, more and more false teachers rose up and began to misrepresent the teachings of Christ. Eventually, the four authors of these “Gospels” (stories of the Good News) individually decided to write down accounts of His life, including details of events and teachings.


Matthew and John were both apostles of Jesus, and thus likely included both their own specific memories of the events they cover, as well as perhaps relying on stories they heard or read from other apostles and disciples of Jesus. Luke was a companion of the Apostle Paul, Mark was probably written by the “John Mark” who is described as a companion of Peter. Each of these men would not have had personal recollections of the life of Jesus, but worked closely with those who were eyewitnesses, and also could have read and heard the accounts of others. And from earliest times it has also been agreed by Christian believers that these authors were inspired by God through the Holy Spirit to give an accurate account of the life of Jesus.

Much of Matthew, Mark, and Luke contain duplicate information—the exact same events are covered by two or three of the writers. Sometimes different de-

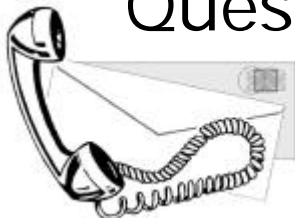
tails are brought out by different writers. Some major stories appear only in one of these three Gospels. The Gospel of John contains some overlapping information with the other Gospels, but most of it is different. John, being close to Jesus, writes about many private conversations and prayers of Jesus that the other writers did not include. To study and compare the four Gospels, there are books called Gospel “harmonies” which show how the Gospels fit together. Most Bible bookstores would have A. T. Robertson’s *A Harmony of the Gospels*. Even to someone who casually reads the four gospels through, it appears very clear that they support each other as four independent yet non-conflicting “witnesses” of the life of Christ.

The remaining book of the New Testament, the book of Acts, is an historical account of the events that

occurred after the resurrection of Jesus. It particularly describes the spread of the Gospel of Jesus in the years from His resurrection to the imprisonment of the Apostle Paul in Rome about 63 A.D. This book is believed by most Biblical scholars to have been written by the same author as the Gospel of Luke.

With this background, reading the New Testament should be easier. You can read it all the way through for an in-depth study, or concentrate on a specific area of interest. If you want to get a quick grasp of the Mission of Jesus and His apostles, read the Gospels of Matthew and John, the Book of Acts, the Letters of Peter and James, and Paul’s letters to the Romans and Corinthians. The letters of John, and the book of Revelation make a great ending. 

Questions & Comments *from Our Readers*



October 7, 1998

Please take my name off your mailing list for the following reasons!

Although you have some good and uplifting articles in the *Shelter in the Word* you have evidently taken it upon your selves to turn it into a ‘do as I say’ news letter. You have decided to turn this literature into a political editorial by trying to direct people on which way they should vote. I will have none of that.

Although President Clinton is not the ideal president that I would wish to be a leader of the world (if it were up to me) he evidently was placed there (or allowed to be placed there) by God Almighty Himself. It is God Who sets up and takes down our rulers not the Church or members of the Church.

Yes, as far as I am concerned President Clinton (**my** president and **yours**) deserves to be flogged in the public square, but that is not up to me. Who would we replace him with? Another hypocritical, lying, two-faced Republican who only recently jumped in with the religious right? No there is not one who is good enough to actually be President of this great nation, not Mr. Clinton or any other human being. God has seen fit to have him there and that is good enough for me.

When is the last time you prayed for this President, or does he not even deserve our prayers because he is a liberal (what ever that means) and is not perceived as “one of us”? This is what we are supposed to be doing, not planning on ousting anyone who God Himself has set in office. Would you rather have Ronald Reagan back? You remember him, the one who ran the country on the say-so of an astrologer?

The New Testament was written during the times of the most evil despicable leaders the world has ever seen and there is not one of the apostles telling the Church to work towards ousting one of them or even railing against them.

Do you think God does not know what type of man Bill Clinton is? Do you think that God did not know what type of man Nero was?

The President **is** held to a higher standard than the rest of the country, but here is a carnal man who has not been given God’s Holy Spirit, what do you expect from a carnal man? I am sickened by what he has done, but **not** surprised. We who are in the Body of Christ are held to a much higher standard than our President, what is our excuse for our last sin? I say get down on your knees and pray for this President and the country.

Yours truly a brother in Jesus Christ,

—Bill Evans, Florida

Bill: Thank you for sharing your reasons with us, although I disagree with them. The purpose of our article was **not** to claim that Bill Clinton was a worse sinner than others, but to say he is not biblically qualified as a leader, and to lament that most Americans, according to the polls, do not care. Just as the Bible calls many historical kings “evil” and admonishes people not to follow in their ways, so I must stand up and say to my children, countrymen and fellow-believers that our President is evil and we must not follow in his ways. This is **not** a matter of passing judgment without facts; Clinton has admitted to massive amounts of lying and sexual sin. If Bill Clinton were a teacher in our children’s school, or a juror at my trial, I would seek to have him removed.

The article said nothing about voting, political parties, or other candidates. Clinton is unfit because he is evil, not because he is a Democrat.

—Norman Edwards



A Closer Look



Common Misconceptions About Bible Topics ***Biblical Art?***

By Pam Dewey

The article “Hollywood Holiness” earlier in this issue emphasizes the distortion in most motion pictures of the concept of how to recognize true Biblical “holiness.” But is this only a modern phenomenon? It is hard for modern Americans—used to the incredibly life-like images in movies in our time—to imagine that our ancestors were equally impressed with motionless images on canvases and walls. But the “media” of the past—paintings, sculpture, mosaics and the like—were every bit as influential in affecting the perception of the common man regarding Bible events and characters as are movies today.

In the earliest years after the beginnings of the Christian faith, there was considerable debate whether anything from the Bible should be represented in art works. Some felt that such depiction of any kind might lead to idolatry—worshipping an object rather than the One True, Invisible God. Others felt that perhaps paintings and other “flat” representations might be acceptable, but that statues such as the pagans used in worship would be wrong. Eventually, in most areas of the Western Christian world, the opinion of Pope Gregory the Great, who lived at the end of the sixth century, prevailed. He declared that “Painting can do for the illiterate what writing does for those who read.” Thus it was considered valuable to adorn the places of worship with numerous paintings, sculptures and mosaics depicting all sorts of religious subjects. Since the average person of the time—and for many centuries after—could not read, this was a very significant decision. Here are the words written by the late medieval French poet Francois Villon on behalf of his mother...

I am a woman, poor and old,

Quite ignorant, I cannot read,
They showed me by my village church
A painted Paradise with harps
And Hell where the damned souls are boiled,
One gives me joy, the other frightens me...

Even for those who could read, the Bible itself was not available for many centuries in the common language of the various countries where Christianity had spread. In fact, it was considered a crime in some countries to translate the Bible into such languages clear down to the 1500s! So the only ones who commonly read the Scriptures were monks and priests of the Roman Catholic Church, who read them in Latin. All knowledge about what was taught in the Bible was thus filtered by Church leaders in sermons to the masses.

What perception did the common people thus get of the facts of the Bible and about true Biblical holiness? Much the same as is portrayed in our modern movies! Painters frequently garbled or distorted Biblical facts. Scenes supposedly from the land of Israel from the time of Moses or of Jesus would show people dressed rather in the costumes of Medieval Europe! The family of Jesus would be portrayed as living in buildings that reflected the European architecture of the time of the painter, rather than the simple structures likely prevalent in Palestine in the first century. “Books” such as we have now—bound sheets of paper between hard covers—were not commonly available until after the time of Christ. The Scriptures would be kept in the form of scrolls, and the common person would not have copies in their own home—most copies would be in synagogues. Yet European paintings from the Medieval period would portray Mary, the mother of Jesus, sitting in her bedroom reading a book which was obviously modeled after a Roman Catholic “prayer book.”

As was noted in a previous issue of *Shelter in the Word*, the subject of “Angels” was particularly distorted in religious artwork. Although the Bible clearly notes that angels sent by God as messengers to individuals always appear simply in the form of men (no wings, no halos, no elaborate costumes mentioned), religious paintings almost always portray them as

having halos and elegant wings. Sometimes their wings are like those of a huge white dove. But Medieval paintings, such as the ones shown here of the “Annunciation to Mary”, frequently portray extremely unusual, elaborately colored wings unlike any bird. In addition, such angels frequently are portrayed as having “female” appearance and elaborate costumes which are obviously patterned after the dress of nobility from the time period of the painter.



Although some art works attempted a realistic portrayal of Biblical scenes, it has been much more common down through history for artists to use highly “stylized” forms to represent Biblical individuals and events. Although this might seem acceptable from an “aesthetic” point of view, we need to remember that the common man during much of the history of art had only these art works from which to draw much of his concept of the Bible. The ignorant masses quite likely had no idea that the stilted, formal positions of the “saints” in paintings, the “halos” around their heads, the strange gestures they made with their hands, and other such “artistic devices”, were not



eality”!

The Bible does **not** indicate that there is a special, small “subset” of the Church that are so exceptionally holy and righteous that they have the exclusive title “saint”. The Bible uses the Greek word *hagios* (translated into English as “saint”) to identify **all** true believers. Paul wrote:

Rom 1: 7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints...

Unfortunately, the early Roman Catholic church did not accept this Biblical definition, and instead created an elaborate hierarchy of individuals recognized by the church after their deaths as being “worthy” of the title “saint.” The average church member was thus in awe of the reputation of such individuals, and assumed they were almost “supernatural” rather than human in their lifetime—and held a special place in the afterlife. The common belief was—and still is in many religious communities—that such “saints” are in heaven, “interceding” with God the Father or Christ on behalf of individuals on earth.

Thus artists who portrayed such individuals developed a number of stylistic elements to indicate just **how** different such “saints” were from the average person. When showing Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the infant Jesus (in portraits usually referred to as “Madonna [‘my Lady’] and Child”) both often have extremely gloomy expressions. Perhaps these are just attempts by the painters to represent “other-worldly” expressions, but they certainly separate Mary and Jesus from common humanity. Surely someone painting just the “average” mother and child as a portrait would want to depict them cheerful and vibrant—rather than with the frequently sickly and gloomy look of so many ancient paintings of “Mary and Jesus”!

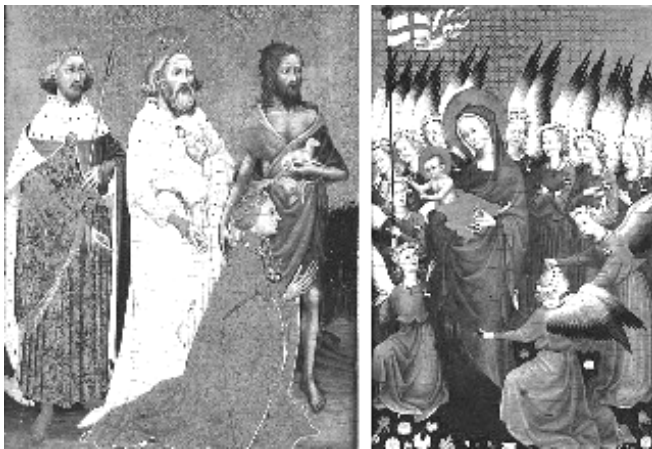


Jesus, Mary, the Apostles, and other saints in paintings usually have unusual body positions and hold their hands in what are likely “religious” gestures as defined by the Church of the time of the painter. The only incident in the Bible in which it is indicated someone had a “glow” around their head is that of Moses when he returned from being in the presence of God. But it was common from the earliest era of Christian

art to depict Jesus, Mary, the Apostles, angels, and “saints” with what came to be called “halos” around their heads. Some depictions of these were just a “glow”, but the most common for many centuries were what looked like large golden disks behind the head. When the individual was looking straight forward, perhaps these could be imagined to just be a stylized “glow”. But statues from the time show individuals bending over—and the “halo” is a three-dimensional object attached to their head much like a “mortarboard” on a high school graduate! This is perhaps the source of the metallic “hoop” that is often attached by an upright pipe to the back of the sort of fanciful “angel” that people put on the top of Christmas trees.

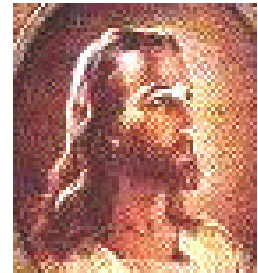
Yet none of this has any basis in scripture. If you lived in Jerusalem in 30 AD and Jesus and his apostles walked by you on the street, you would not find yourself staring at them because they all had glowing “halos” attached to their heads, or even an eerie “glow” around their heads! They would have looked just like everyone else on the street.

If you met Mary carrying her infant Jesus in the marketplace, you would not have recognized them as being anyone “special” just by the way they looked. And the infant certainly would not have lifted his hand in some sort of “blessing” on you—as is portrayed in the accompanying picture! This particular picture, of the king Richard II being “blessed” by the “Christ Child” is particularly ridiculous since it portrays Jesus as being permanently an infant!




Unfortunately, this sort of painting has been quite typical. Yet it is one thing to depict Jesus as an infant in a “historical” scene such as at His birth in Bethlehem. It is quite another to imply that individuals centuries or millennia later should relate to Him as an infant in His mother’s arms! This is a gross distortion of the reality that He is now King of Kings and Lord of Lords, actively “Head of the Church”, and is at the right hand of the Father in heaven, interceding for the **real** saints.

Are these sort of artistic distortions in painting just a thing of the past? No—note the painting of the “head of Jesus” shown here. It is probably familiar to most of our readers, as it is perhaps the most common, popular “painting of Jesus” available in the twentieth century. It is featured in almost unlimited forms that may be purchased in gift shops—plaques, key-chains, refrigerator magnets, collectible plates, statues, calendars, coffee cups, posters. To many people, when you say “Jesus”, **this** is the vision that pops into their head. But where did it come from? There were no cameras in the first century to capture His portrait. History has never claimed that any artist painted Him while He lived on earth. There are not even any written descriptions of His appearance that is accepted as authentic. Here is a description of this picture from an anonymous author on an Internet web-site:



Warner E. Sallman was an illustrator for religious magazines. In 1924 he needed a picture for a deadline the next day, but was coming up blank. Finally, he went to bed—then suddenly awoke with “a picture of the Christ in my mind’s eye just as if it were on my drawing board”. He quickly sketched a portrait of Jesus with long brown hair, blue eyes, a neatly trimmed beard, and a beatific look—which has now become the common image of Christ around the world. Since 1940, more than 500 million copies of Sallman’s “Head of Christ” have been sold. It has been reproduced billions of times on calendars, lamps, posters, etc.

As is evident from this, Sallman made **no** attempt at considering what little bit we might be able to consider about what Jesus would have looked like. For one thing, Jesus was born as a Jew in Palestine. He would have looked much like any other Jew of His time. Brown hair and blue eyes are not typical of Middle Eastern peoples! There is no Biblical reason, either, for assuming that He had long hair, or a “neatly trimmed beard”. Although either is possible, historical records indicate short hair was the fashion of the time. And the custom of the Jews was **not** to trim their beards closely.

All of these pictures supposedly of Jesus, Mary, and saints—are inventions of artists. They gave a false view of what “holiness” really is to peoples in the past. And they continue to do so today. “Holy” individuals are not “weird” individuals. They are not known by how “otherworldly” they look. Holiness is not evident by facial expression, or gestures, by halos. It is evident in the **words** and **actions** of those who are “set apart” by God for a special purpose. 

What Does It Mean to Be “Saved by Grace”?

by Toli Bohonik

For years, Bible preachers and teachers have debated the relationship between “grace” and “works” as they relate to salvation. Are we saved from eternal condemnation **only** by God’s grace, or are there things that we must do—are there “works” involved? Opinions have been written by famous theologians such as Martin Luther and Billy Graham, and by relative unknowns—such as *Shelter in the Word* writers.

But the opinions of any particular theologian do not matter as much as what the Scriptures say. So what do the Scriptures say?

We will study quotes from the Apostle Paul and from the Apostle James. In reality, the answer to whether salvation is by “grace” or by “works” lies in both of their writings.

The answer lies in the simple word “faith”.

The scriptures clearly teach that we are saved by grace. We are not saved by our good works. If we were saved by our works we could boast that we somehow earned our salvation. But our salvation is a gift of God, a gift of grace. It comes solely **“by grace through faith”**.

Eph 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith— and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—

9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

10 For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Is Paul saying that we don’t have to do good works? That we don’t have to keep the law of God? No he is not. He is saying that salvation is a gift that God gives us out of His goodness, mercy and kindness. Salvation is a gift of grace. Yet Paul says salvation is given to us as a result of our faith. He says we are saved through faith. The key to understanding salvation by grace is the phrase “... saved through faith”.

We are saved “through faith”. It is our faith that allows the grace of God to be applied to us.

But does that mean all we have to do is believe, that we don’t have to keep the law of God nor do we have to do

good works? Some Christian denominations mistakenly teach that all we need to do is believe and God will do everything for us once we accept Jesus as our savior. They teach we do not have to resist temptation. They teach we do not have to overcome sin.

But their misunderstanding comes from not understanding faith. We have to look to the Apostle James to understand God’s definition of faith. James gives a detailed definition of faith in James 2:8-19. James begins a discussion of the “royal law” in verse 8 and defines it as loving your neighbor as yourself. James clearly teaches that we are to keep the “royal law”. We are not to be respecters of persons, we are not to kill, we are not to commit adultery. He tells us that we are not to “become a transgressor of the law”.

James 2:8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right.

9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

11 For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

It is interesting to note that even after we are converted, after we are justified by the blood of Christ, we can sin. Here James defines sin using the example of two of the ten commandments, i.e. adultery and murder. We will be judged by how we live our lives. If we “sin” we shall be “judged by the law of liberty” and we shall be punished for our sins.



James 2:12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

We will all be judged by the Lord based on how we live our lives. We are saved, but we will be judged based on the “law of liberty” (vs 12). James exhorts us to show mercy, if we expect to receive mercy in the time of judgement. Going on in James 2:14-16, James now defines faith. Remember Paul said that we are “...saved through faith”? Well, this is the kind of faith that will bring salvation!

James 2:14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?

15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.

16 If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

True faith does not stand alone. It is joined by good works. James specifically says we are not to commit adultery, we are not to murder, and we are to give a needy brother or sister clothing and food. These are examples of the kind of good “works” our Lord requires of us. James is referring to the law of God, the “royal law” of God! Living faith is demonstrated by the desire to be obedient to the “law of liberty”—to see the righteous deeds of the Father done in us.

James 2:17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

18 But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith

without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

James is saying we can believe in God, but unless we have good works all of our belief is of no value. Our faith is dead. The demons, evil fallen angels, believe but **they do not have good works**. If we believe and do not show good works we are no better than the fallen spirits. Demons have belief, but it is completely dead.

James 2:20 You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

21 Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

Even though we are saved by grace and our good works can never save us, our faith is proven by our good works.

Paul and James agree beautifully. Paul tells us that we are saved “by grace through faith” and James defines faith for us. James tells us that “faith, if it hath not works, is dead being alone”.

So we are saved by grace, and we are saved through faith, and good works are the proof of our faith. We do not have to fear “not doing enough good works to be saved”, because it is Christ that does the work in us. If we have no good works, the Scriptures say that our faith is dead, and we need to ask Christ to strengthen our faith. We can be confident that He will hear our prayer:

Phil 1:6 ...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.



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Our Savior never argued or tried to force someone to believe in Him. We should not do that either. But if *Shelter in the Word* has helped you, you can share it with others who might be interested in it or helped by it. One of these methods might work for you.

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