

Catching the Vision

In the first newsletter in this series, *Catching the Vision*, we looked at the Creator of the vision and gained some insights into what the Bible teaches us about God. We learned about the significant role the Bible, or the scriptures as it is referred to in the Bible itself, plays in revealing God to man. God inspired it, caused it to be written, preserved it and saw to it that its message was taken to the very ends of the earth.

In one particular passage God reveals a great deal about himself in the following words, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin." Exodus 34:6,7. This is only one of the

countless revelations God has given us about himself in the scriptures that reveal his nature and invite us to get to know him in a real and personal way.

By reading and studying the scripture we not only get to know what God's vision for creation was from the beginning, but we also learn what he wants for us, his creation; what he wants us to do and to be. We learn in both the Old and the New Testaments the importance of love, the love God has for his creation and the love we should have for him.

In looking at this question of love, we run headlong very quickly into the question of the nature of man which too often runs counter to the nature and will of God. Why is that so? What is it about the nature of man that

makes him want to lean toward wickedness, rebellion and sin? Is this the way God created him from the beginning? Is this in any way a fulfillment of the wonderful vision God has for us, a vision that we want to capture and embrace and be part of?

In this newsletter we are going to look at Man - The Subject of the Vision. What does the Bible teach about man: his nature, his mortality and sin? This is a somewhat involved question but when studied carefully will present logical answers to the significant number of questions posed by some of the concepts concerning the afterlife and the spiritual world that are existant in popular theology. This examination will show the extent to which these concepts are ill-

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Catching the Vision (continued)

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conceived, un-examined ideas or outright false teachings not supported by the Bible at all.

Does man have an immortal soul that is bound for an eternal reward or punishment? This reward is often pictured as a place of eternal bliss where one strums on harps for thousands of years. Or on the other side, a place of eternal punishment and torment where a soul is punished for thirty million years for the sins he committed during thirty years of life on this earth. Does this sound like the God of the Bible?

Another question often raised is whether man is caused to sin by an outside supernatural force opposing God's will and desire for man to act in accord with his commands or does man's desire to sin stem from within his own heart.

Since the focus of the vision is a God ruled kingdom here on this earth, established when the Lord Jesus Christ returns, then it will be good to examine from the scripture what sort of person will become part of this kingdom to come. When Christ returns there will be billions of people on the face of the earth. This population will age and die although the scripture tells us people will live longer. They will require resources and the source of those resources will not be significantly different from what exists today.

The work of the kingdom will be teaching, preaching and rulership in a society still overcome by the strength and sway of sin. That will only change gradually. That work of bringing about the change will fall to those who are accepted at God's righteous judgment, whether alive at Christ's

coming or raised from the dead when the the last trumpet is sounded. This will be the work of the glorified saints. This will be the work of those who have caught the vision and have recognized that to escape the wages of an eternal death that is the result of sin, they have turned to the Lord Jesus Christ, confessed and repented of their sin, been baptized and live to please the Lord Jesus and their heavenly Father.

It is our prayer that the following articles on the nature of man will be enlightening and enhance your relationship and understanding of the creator of the universe who gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes on him might not perish but have eternal life.

* * * * *

"O LORD, what is man that you care for him...?"

O LORD, what is man that you care for him, the son of man that you think of him?

Man is like a breath; his days are like a fleeting shadow. Psalm 144:3-4 (NIV)

In the previous newsletter we considered what the Bible teaches about God. From the very first verse we are introduced to the Creator of the Universe and throughout the Bible we learn about him. He is the one and only God, all-powerful, all knowing, all wise, full of compassion, mercy and love, the source of all. We need to read the Bible continually to learn more about him:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,"

declares the LORD.

"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 (NIV)

It is through reading the Word of God that we learn about God. We cannot depend on our own thoughts and ideas to know God. God speaks to us through the prophet Isaiah and tells us to consider the difference between the earth and the heavens. The earth is finite, definable, and in a cycle

of life and death. The heavens are infinite--without end as is the God who dwells there. This will give us some concept of how different our thinking is from God's.

The Bible, however, is not just about God. It is also about human beings. Sometimes it's hard to read the Bible because it holds up a mirror so we can see ourselves as we are. The Bible speaks truth even when we do not want to see it or believe it. We may not like the image that we see. David did not want to hear the words of Nathan the Prophet when he said to him "You are the

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“O LORD, what is man that you care for him...?” (Continued)

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man.” (2 Samuel 12) Peter was in anguish when Jesus looked at him after he had denied him. He went out and wept bitterly. (Matthew 26:69-75) The people on the Day of Pentecost were cut to the heart when Peter told them, not one but twice, that they had killed the Holy One of God, (Acts 2). One of the main themes of the Bible is to reveal to us our own human nature, what is in our hearts and our absolute need for repentance and change. It’s not something we like to think about or dwell on but it is so necessary. Only through true recognition of the need for repentance, change, and humility will anyone be able to know the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth.

What does the Bible teach us about ourselves?

1) We were created in God’s image to give him glory, to be his children and then given the work of caring for and subduing the earth:

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 1:26-27 (NKJV)

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. Genesis 2:7 (NKJV)

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. Genesis 2:15 (NIV)

2) As with the other living beings, man was made of the dust of the earth. It is God’s life force that brings life to all living beings:

When you hide your face, they are terrified;
when you take away their

breath, they die and return to the dust.

When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.

May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works — Psalm 104:29-31 (NIV)

Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Ecclesiastes 3:19-21 (NIV)

3) When put to the test, man and women chose their own desires over their love for and trust in God. The consequence of that choice brought them death. In the Garden where God placed the first man and woman, there were many trees. They were given the commandment that they could eat of every tree, including the tree of life, but they must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This was a test for them, which, of course as we all know,

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"O LORD, what is man that you care for him...?" (Continued)

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they failed. With that disobedience came consequences—deadly consequences. They were put out of the Garden and no longer were able to eat from the tree of life:

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'

"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it

all the days of your life.

It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground,

since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." Genesis 3:17-19 (NIV)

And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. Genesis 3:22-24 (NIV)

Genesis chapter 3 tells us the full consequence of Adam and Eve's choice. Not only were they sent out of God's garden, all of God's creation on earth was subjected to the cycle of life and death. Instead of blessings there would be difficulties during life and then would come death. By the grace

of God, the Bible does not stop with Genesis 3. God is not finished with his creation. His purpose will stand. The earth will be filled with his glory and the curse will be taken away. The process of change and blessing is told in the rest of the Bible.

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. Romans 8:18-21

"The thoughts of our hearts..."

The pattern of temptation, disobedience, and finally death is repeated over and over. According to the Bible, temptation comes from a deceitful, distrustful, disobedient heart—our heart. Sometimes it's called "the flesh":

The letter to the believers in the 1st Century written by James is very clear about the source of temptation:

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire,

he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. James 1:13-15 (NIV)

It was the heart of mankind that was the source of such great violence at the time of Noah that God decided to destroy everyone but Noah and his family:

The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. Genesis 6:5-6 (NIV)

Thousand of years later at the time of Jeremiah the Prophet the indictment against the human heart is the same:

"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?

I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings. Jeremiah 17:9-10 (NKJV)

In the New Testament Jesus is very clear that it is the heart that
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"The thoughts of our hearts..." (Continued)

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is the source of trouble:

"Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'" Matthew 15:16-20 (NIV)

Paul the Apostle is in agreement although he uses the words "sinful nature" instead of heart:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

From Genesis through the rest of the Bible it is not a pretty picture. The heart is full of everything that is against the character and purpose of God. It is naturally full of self instead of full of God. The

flesh, that is the human heart, produces immorality, idolatry, etc. No wonder the end result or consequence of the works of the flesh is death. God has given us a choice to obey or not, to live or not but those who continue to disobey will not continue to live.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23 (NIV)

The lesson of the consequence of faithlessness and disobedience is repeated over and over again in the Bible history:

Only faithful, obedient Noah and his family are saved from the destruction of a violent and disobedient generation.

Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed because of wickedness—only Lot and his children are rescued.

After God saved Israel from slavery in Egypt, the generation over 20 died in the wilderness because of rebellion, idolatry, and faithlessness--they were afraid and wanted to return to slavery in Egypt. Only Joshua and Caleb of that generation survived and entered the promised land because of their trust and faithfulness.

Over and over again in the history of Israel God sends prophets to warn of

coming destruction and captivity because of the Israelites' idolatry, wickedness, and lack of faith.

Finally, a nation that should have known better killed the Son of God because of jealousy, anger and hatred. They had been given a covenant of life, promises of future blessings, and the law and oracles from God. But all these things did not stop the evilness of the human heart.

The end result of choosing our own desires instead of choosing to love God is death. It is separation from God--the source of all life and love. As the Bible history reiterates, God does destroy the wicked and rebellious, but he gives hope to those who choose to know him, to trust him, to love him, and to be his people. His purpose for his creation will stand. His words will not return to him void:

"...remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ." Ephesians 2:12-13 (NIV)

Jim McCotter "All Scripture is God-breathed and He doesn't waste His breath"

Abraham Lincoln "I believe the BIBLE is the best gift God has ever given to man. All the good of the Savior of the world is communicated to us through the Book. But for it, we could not know right from wrong.

"Create in me a pure heart, O God."

We all remember the testimony of the gospel records that the religious leaders, the Pharisees, priests and lawyers, were Jesus' foremost enemies. Jesus knew the source of their hatred...he put his finger right on the problem and to point it out he quoted from the prophet Isaiah:

"Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."

Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand. What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean.'" ... "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' For out of the heart come evil thoughts..." Mat-

thew 15:6-20 (NIV)

Jesus knew that in order to conquer sin he had to get to the source of the sin--the heart of the matter so to speak. This was nothing new. He learned this from the Old Testament. In fact the prophecies concerning the final restoration of Israel contain the promise of a new heart for the people:

I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart. (Jeremiah 24:6-7)

I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul. (Jeremiah 32:39-41)

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the

LORD. **"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.** I will be their God, and they will be my people. Jeremiah 31:31

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. **I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit** in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Ezekiel 36:25-27 (NIV)

Notice from these verses that it is God who will give a new heart to his people and he will move them by his power to serve and love him. David realized this in his prayer of repentance in Psalm 51:

Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your

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"Create in me a pure heart, O God." (Continued)

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salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
Psalm 51:9-12 (NIV)

When we join David in this prayer that God will create in us a new heart and a willing spirit, how will God bring that about? To help answer this question, take some time to read and meditate on these thoughts:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and **learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart**, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30

One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. Acts 16:14

No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God. Romans 2:29

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." When the people heard this, **they were cut to the heart** and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Acts 2:36-37

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you... Ephesians 1:17-23

I pray that out of his glorious riches **he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.** And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3:15-21

Woodrow Wilson "I am sorry for men who do not read the BIBLE every day. I wonder why they deprive themselves of the strength and pleasure"

John Ruskin "Whatever merit there is in anything that I have written is simply due to the fact that when I was a child my mother daily read me a part of the BIBLE and daily made me learn a part of it by heart"

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Daily Bible Readings for January, February and March

Read the Entire Bible in One Year

Day	JANUARY		FEBRUARY		MARCH	
	Old Test	New Test/Psa	Old Test	New Test/Psa	Old Test	New Test/Psa
1	Gen 1,2	Matt 1	Exo 11,12	Matt 28	Lev 23, 24	Acts 24
2	Gen 3,4	Matt 2	Exo 13,14	Psalms 9, 10	Lev 25, 26	Acts 25
3	Gen 5,6	Matt 3	Exo 15,16	Psalms 11,12	Lev 27, Provb 7	Acts 26
4	Gen 7,8	Matt 4	Exo 17,18	Acts 1	Provb 8-10	Acts 27
5	Gen 9,10	Matt 5	Exo 19,20	Acts 2	Num 1,2	Acts 28
6	Gen 11,12	Matt 6	Exo 21,22	Acts 3	Num 3,4	Psalms 19,20
7	Gen 13,14	Matt 7	Exo 23,24	Acts 4	Num 5,6	Romans 1
8	Gen 15, 16	Psalms 1,2	Exo 25,26	Acts 5	Num 7,8	Romans 2
9	Gen 17,18	Matt 8	Exo 27,28	Acts 6	Num 9,10	Romans 3
10	Gen 19,20	Matt 9	Exo 29,30	Acts 7	Num 11,12	Romans 4
11	Gen 21, 22	Matt 10	Exo 31,32	Psalms 13, 14	Num 13,14	Romans 5
12	Gen 23,24	Matt 11	Exo 33,34	Acts 8	Num 15,16	Romans 6
13	Gen 25,26	Matt 12	Exo 35,36	Acts 9	Num 17,18	Romans 7
14	Gen 27,28	Matt 13	Exo 37,38	Acts 10	Num 19,20	Romans 8
15	Gen 29,30	Psalms 3,4	Exo 39,40	Acts 11,12	Num 21,22	Romans 9
16	Gen 31,32	Matt 14	Provb 3,4	Acts 13	Num 23,24	Romans 10
17	Gen 33,34	Matt 15	Provb 5,6	Psalms 15,16	Num 25,26	Romans 11
18	Gen 35,36	Matt 16	Lev 1,2	Acts 14	Num 27,28	Romans 12
19	Gen 37,38	Matt 17	Lev 3,4	Acts 15	Num 29,30	Romans 13
20	Gen 39,40	Matt 18	Lev 5,6	Acts 16	Num 31,32	Romans 14
21	Gen 41, 42	Matt 19	Lev 7,8	Acts 17	Num 33,34	Romans 15,16
22	Gen 43, 44	Psalms 5,6	Lev 9,10	Acts 18	Num 35,36	Psalms 21,22
23	Gen 45, 46	Matt 20	Lev 11,12	Psalms 17,18	Provb 11,12	Psalms 23-25
24	Gen 47, 48	Matt 21	Lev 13,14	Acts 19	Provb 13,14	Psalms 26-28
25	Gen 49, 50	Matt 22	Lev 15,16	Acts 20	Provb 15,16	Psalms 29,30
26	Provb 1,2	Matt 23	Lev 17,18	Acts 21	Deut 1,2	Mark 1
27	Exo 1,2	Matt 24	Lev 19,20	Acts 22	Deut 3,4	Mark 2
28	Exo 3,4	Matt 25	Lev 21,22	Acts 23	Deut 5,6	Mark 3
29	Exo 5,6	Psalms 7, 8			Deut 7,8	Mark 4
30	Exo 7, 8	Matt 26			Deut 9,10	Psalms 31,32
31	Exo 9,10	Matt 27			Deut 11,12	Mark 5

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